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Karl D. Braunschweig
Wayne State University, trace@utk.edu

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DISCIPLINING KNOWLEDGE IN MUSIC THEORY: ABSTRACTION AND THE RECOVERY OF DIALECTICS

KARL D. BRAUNSCHWEIG

The tone-repetition to which contrapuntal doctrine responds with a prohibition . . . is therefore, by contrast, a phenomenon of free composition. In free composition there certainly is sufficient reason to emphasize the harmonic or rhythmic significance of a pitch through repetition, or to react to the requirements of a polysyllabic word, whether it be in actual vocal music or—only by association—also in instrumental music. Especially in the latter case, the performer must try to lend the words and syllables latent in the tonal repetition a personal rhetorical expression of their own by means of a kind of *declamation* of the repeated tones. For nothing is so trite as tonal repetitions in absolute music reproduced mechanically . . . without revealing any trace of the secret of the latent words.¹
[Figure 1 (next page) illustrates some examples from instrumental music.]


Schenker's insightful imperative to recognize and reveal such hidden meanings serves well his distinction between strict counterpoint and free composition regarding tone repetition, which is the context of his assertion. But his words also speak to an inherent aspect of tonal theory in general, of the larger discipline of (Western) music theory as it has been practiced during the past four hundred years: they reveal a deeper disciplinary tendency towards theoretical abstraction which frequently obscures the original contexts and purposes for specific practices. As we will see, far more than words and other remaining traces of vocal gestures have been forgotten; the tendency extends widely, through many aspects of counterpoint, harmony, and form. Schenker's example above (as well as the ones to follow) resembles a "dormant" metaphor, in which the metaphor is still in circulation but its original meaning (i.e., its analogy

¹ Heinrich Schenker, *Counterpoint*, vol. 1 [1910], ed. John Rothgeb, trans. John Rothgeb and Jürgen Thym (New York: Schirmer, 1987), 42–43.

FIGURE 1. Instances of tone repetition (from Schenker, *Counterpoint I*, 43–44)

(a)


Haydn, Theme and Variations in F Minor



cresc.

(b)

Beethoven, String Quartet Op. 130, I
Violin II



between domains) has been forgotten.² One of the most vivid dormant metaphors in music is, of course, chromaticism, which originally (in Greek music theory) attributed a quality of *color* to certain tones,³ and which has since acquired numerous abstract, affective, and technical meanings to the point that the original attribution has been largely buried. In the following pages, we will begin to observe how aspects of counterpoint, harmony, and form have been theoretically sifted, separated, abstracted, and in some cases simply forgotten, thereby charting new paths in compositional practice and speculative or analytic theory. While these changes occasionally correspond to a larger paradigm shift in musical style and aesthetics, they more frequently operate at smaller levels, and have played a more persistent role in abstracting various musical parameters and consequently contributing to a historically emerging sense of disciplinary autonomy.

In this essay, I will explore several important moments in the history of theory when the process of abstraction reshaped aspects of tonal theory in profound ways. These moments of

² Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 405–410. In Perelman's view, understanding a metaphor as "dormant" is crucial to recognizing its conceptual potential to be re-awakened—which is possible because it "is integrated by language into a cultural tradition" (405).

³ Thomas J. Mathiesen, "Greek Music Theory," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory* [hereafter *CHWMT*], ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123.

abstraction prioritize one musical feature over others, and often involve a discursive process of dissociation to solidify the legitimacy of the abstraction and resolve lingering contradictions. After reflecting on several disciplinary consequences of this process of theoretical abstraction, I will then propose three theoretical perspectives that can recognize changing musical concepts and at the same time recover some of the latent meanings buried in tonal music. These perspectives have received some attention in recent music analysis; here I wish to call attention to their deeper disciplinary role in compensating theoretical abstraction and circumscribing our theoretical field.

Before proceeding, I should clarify that the latencies I am recovering are not exclusively historical but also can occur within a particular theoretical moment, when an important aspect or feature becomes obscured or overlooked because it fails to match a theoretical model or paradigm, or because it relates to another musical domain (e.g., meter, form, or timbre). In Schenker's above examples, for instance, there would appear to be a strong connection of the note repetition to metric placement in that the repeated notes lead quite clearly to downbeats, such that a thorough analysis would acknowledge both the latent word rhythms and the role of metric placement.

THEORETICAL ABSTRACTION: RULES FOR COMPOSITION AND EXPLANATIONS OF PRACTICE

The tradition of strict counterpoint makes a particularly illuminating example of the disciplinary tendency towards theoretical abstraction (and thus a good place to begin), because such abstractions have provided the foundation of a highly influential pedagogical tradition. Dahlhaus has examined this tradition in numerous essays, and has drawn to our attention the curious theoretical gap that exists between vocal and instrumental music, and how that gap has shaped theory

and practice. He observed in particular that the discipline of counterpoint (as a collection of rules and exercises) extracted voice leading rules from text-based melodic writing in compositional practice, and in so doing abstracted counterpoint from its basis in imitation (with text repetition) and aspects of voice.⁴ (I will explore this assertion in more detail below.) The reasons for this *theoretical* shift away from an explicitly vocal practice are somewhat complex, but they stem from a deeper, simpler pattern of theoretical abstraction.

One crucial moment occurred in the early eighteenth century with Fux, who perhaps more than anyone consolidated voice-leading rules and replaced model composition with more abstract cantus firmus exercises. As Ian Bent observes, “whereas the rules of Cochlaeus, Zarlino, and Aaron deal with surface situations, Fux’s four rules operate abstractly, at a high level of generality . . . [they] cover an infinitely wider range of situations.”⁵ Simplifying voice relationships in this way—generalizing for all potential situations—would seem to count as one of the most basic and important disciplinary formalizations in music theory.⁶ (To appreciate the extent of this abstraction, compare this simplification of voice leading rules with the exhaustive enumeration of permissible interval successions typical in seventeenth-century treatises, e.g., in Bernhard’s *Tractatus*, chapters 5–11; similar interval tables appear in Zarlino’s *Istitutioni Harmoniche* and other treatises of the period.)

⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Erster Teil: Grundzüge einer Systematik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 83–84.

⁵ Ian Bent, “Steps to Parnassus: Contrapuntal Theory in 1725: Precursors and Successors,” in *CHWMT*, 560.

⁶ This process of abstraction of voice-leading rules in part represents an effort to render the procedures of motion more independent from interval positioning in the modes, which opens up a theoretical domain Dahlhaus refers to as “construction technique.” He explains: “a distinction must be made between the rules of counterpoint, which are exclusively concerned with abstract musical construction, without regard to the difference between minor, major, and augmented [sixths], or between perfect [fourths] and tritones, and the directions for a harmonic . . . arrangement of the composition [e.g., location of mi-fa].” Voice leading rules are therefore independent of position within a mode (e.g., whether an interval includes the final), as well as being applicable within any of the standard modes. (Carl Dahlhaus, *et al.*, “Harmony,” *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online* <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50818>>, accessed 24 June 2012.)

FIGURE 2. Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, first-species example (Fux/Mann, 29)**FIGURE 3.** Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, fifth-species example (Fux/Mann, 66)

Together with the highly systematic pedagogical approach Fux created, the familiar layout illustrated in Figure 2 became the standard for generations. Its degree of abstraction is obvious enough if we compare it to any excerpt of Palestrina's music, which Fux's method purports to create. While it is true that Fux's example is a mere exercise, the thoroughness of his abstraction is remarkable: there is no text; the origin of the cantus firmus is hidden; the rhythm is simplified into one of five species; the intervals are classified by modal degrees (overlooking major/minor half-step distinctions), and the interval progressions generalized into three types of motion (direct, contrary, oblique). Simply put: the emerging theory of voice leading required a process of abstraction in order for its rules to be generalized.⁷

Further evidence appears in the section on fugue, during which Fux never once mentions words or word rhythms. Even when the opportunity arises—as it does when Aloysius identifies a rhythmic problem in one of Joseph's fifth-species exercises (marked "N.B." in Figure 3)—he

⁷ Dahlhaus insightfully observes how the disciplinary implementation of strict counterpoint emphasizes voice-leading motions at the expense of the awareness of interval progression, which had a central role in early counterpoint and which provides an important thread of continuity with the tonal concept of harmonic progression; he even describes interval progression as "functional," in a broad sense of the term (Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil: Deutschland* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989], 132–134).

completely misses the opportunity to mention word rhythms and the proper setting of the text. Instead, Fux offers rhythmic guidelines for fifth species that are purely musical. This may seem appropriate when it comes to negotiating forbidden tritones and other voice-leading matters, but to teach the rhythmic aspect of the Palestrina style without even mentioning word rhythms reveals the degree to which contrapuntal theory was shaped by the theoretical tendency towards abstraction and the autonomy of musical rules from specific contexts. Fux's example thus offers an interesting comparison to Schenker's given in Figure 1: abstraction is revealed in each, but with the latter in an effort to recover some of the latent content sacrificed in the abstraction process.

This process of abstraction extends considerably into the history of theory: even the much earlier basic distinction between *classes* of intervals rather than specific intervals (e.g., an imperfect consonance leading to perfect consonance at a cadence, rather than a major sixth to a perfect octave)⁸ represents this tendency towards abstraction in compositional theory. One could argue that this distinction between types of intervals in early polyphony was responsible for setting in motion the underlying theoretical tendency towards abstraction we witness later in specific disciplines of tonal theory.

To claim generalized voice-leading principles that apply to both vocal and instrumental music is therefore to face a compound problem: first, instrumental music was originally rooted in many vocal practices; second and moreover, those vocal practices were abstracted into an idealized theory of counterpoint.⁹ Dahlhaus argues that strict counterpoint maintained a

⁸ David Cohen, "The Imperfect Seeks its Perfection: Harmonic Progression, Directed Motion, and Aristotelian Physics," *Music Theory Spectrum* 23/2 (2001): 139–169.

⁹ Cohen observes this idealizing tendency of theory in early music and its role in disciplining practice; see "Metaphysics, Ideology, Discipline: Consonance, Dissonance, and the Foundations of Western Polyphony," *Theoria* 7 (1993): 1–85.

distinction between permissible and non-permissible melodic intervals, based upon singability (*Sangbarkeit*), that was largely abstracted from actual vocal practice.¹⁰ (Schoenberg continued this abstraction in his “law of the shortest way” as voice-leading rule for practical harmony.)¹¹ Dahlhaus also claims that the *practice* of composing melodic lines emerged in part from imitation of a particular texted segment in various voices of the texture, which clearly affected its rhythmic composition, its melodic direction, its malleability into units of a certain size, and so forth; but the *strict method* of counterpoint overlooked these practices in favor of an abstracted model of combining voices against a cantus firmus of fixed length, and of fixed contour appropriate to that length. (For example, the length, contour, and character of Fux’s examples change considerably when he begins to discuss imitation and fugue, even though he remains in a two-voice texture and observes most of the same rules.)¹² Furthermore, counterpoint as a basis for composition in general (as a basic competency for all genres) abstracts into its method the treatment of all voices as equivalent and to an extent interchangeable. This abstraction acquires a certain tension with emerging instrumental practice, as for example even with Bach, who frequently writes different contrapuntal material for the distinct instrumental roles of a given texture (especially in the cantatas and similar works). In Dahlhaus’s words, “the abstractness—or its appearance—is a result of historical blurring,” and that the abstraction is a fiction that does not hold up to historical evidence.¹³ In particular, it forfeits the *historical* (out of what context a

¹⁰ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Erster Teil*, 83–88.

¹¹ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Erster Teil*, 86; see also Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony* [1911], trans. Roy Carter (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 39.

¹² Alfred Mann, *The Study of Fugue* (New York: Norton, 1965), 78–138.

¹³ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Erster Teil*, 84. Regarding the idea of the abstraction being a fiction: Dahlhaus asserts that the abstract concept of Bach’s counterpoint is in many instances actually untrue, as for example when the typical definition of polyphony (in which the parts are theoretically interchangeable) is applied to works composed according to what he calls “continuo counterpoint” (as in many of the cantatas), in which each instrument/voice plays a very specific (often idiomatic) role in the counterpoint.

principle emerged) and the *idiomatic* (on which voices/instruments and on which textures a method is based).

The tradition of strict counterpoint continued this process of abstraction in two subsequent directions: one traced the emergence of “voice-leading principles” from Renaissance polyphony through strict counterpoint to Schenker’s landmark definitions; the other followed the abstraction of melody and line from the motions of contrapuntal parts. I should clarify again that while abstractions can occur in a chronological domain, they just as likely will appear in an epistemological one, that is, in the representation of objects and concepts according to idealized or generalized categories. Thus, while the following reads like a historical narrative of abstraction, the process in fact may not always be chronological. (E.g., the abstraction of interval classes from specific intervals—perfect, imperfect, and dissonant—occurred early in the history of theory, and established an important precedent for other types of abstractions more than it served as the first link in a chronological chain of abstractions.)

The first direction followed the emergence of “voice-leading principles,” the abstraction of voice leading from interval composition, and from vocal polyphony. Whereas Fux sought to establish his method on timeless principles, Albrechtsberger openly updated strict counterpoint in order to reconcile these basic principles with the changing style of eighteenth-century instrumental music.¹⁴ For example, instead of the modes, he used only major and minor keys (specifically C major and e minor); he used the terms *chorale* and *cantus firmus* interchangeably; he included a few figured-bass numbers (mostly $\frac{6}{5}$) in his triple-meter versions of second and

¹⁴ Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, *J. G. Albrechtsberger’s sämtliche Schriften über Generalbaß, Harmonie-Lehre, und Tonsetzkunst; zum Selbstunterrichte*, vol. 2, ed. Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried (Vienna: Tobias Haslinger, 1825–26).

third species, which frequently resembled eighteenth-century instrumental textures; beginning with four-voice counterpoint, he changed from a half-note to a quarter-note beat value for the meter of the species examples, in line with instrumental practice; and finally, he included a section entitled “Freyen Satz” in which he accepted into practice certain dissonant intervals (following contemporaneous recognition of the seventh chord as an essential chord type), skips to/from dissonant tones, chromaticism, $\frac{6}{4}$ chords, and additional thoroughbass figures to suggest an implied harmonic texture. In effect, his adaptations furthered the abstractions initiated by Fux by generalizing voice-leading principles for contrapuntal and thoroughbass practice, the latter incorporating a much freer treatment of dissonance than the former. The extended abstractions became necessary in order to preserve the validity of voice-leading principles in a new era. One detail of interesting consequence is that the unique configuration of the Phrygian cadence was suddenly lost as a standard part of counterpoint instruction; in a new major/minor key context, it must be added, as an appendage. (Neither Albrechtsberger nor Schenker identify it explicitly.) A deeper consequence of this abstraction was the severing of a symbolic connection between sacred music and the theological ordering of the world, which justified strict rules and guidelines as degrees of remove from perfection (and purpose).

Just over a century later, Schenker followed this path to its logical conclusion, separating counterpoint from explicit contrapuntal genres, and emphatically distinguishing between species exercises and composition proper (the former being merely pedagogy). Counterpoint now applied more broadly as a foundation for “free composition,” and in the process became more abstract, a general theory of voice leading. An essential aspect of this separation was the formal recognition of contrapuntal principles at work in the textures and genres of free composition,

completely independent of fugue and other explicit instances of counterpoint.¹⁵

The second direction followed the abstraction of “melody” and “line” from contrapuntal parts, initiated in many respects in Bellermann’s idiosyncratic version of strict counterpoint. For Schenker, Bellermann represented a continuation of the strict counterpoint tradition (solidifying the lineage from Fux, Albrechtberger, and Cherubini, to himself). For Dahlhaus, on the other hand, Bellerman revealed a slight refashioning of counterpoint in a manner that placed the notion of “melody” at the center, and downplayed interval progression as its original basis.¹⁶ (This process would continue in the twentieth century with Kurth’s idealizing of melody in his writings on Bach’s counterpoint.) The contrapuntal ideal of writing “independent” parts outwardly minimizes the degree to which they are interdependent, and promotes a (false) sense of melodic autonomy. The emphasis on melody within the study of counterpoint also specifically risks forgetting interval progression as part of its original foundation: as inefficient as the earlier interval tables were (e.g., in Zarlino and Bernhard), they directed attention to actual intervals and their successions (rather than being a secondary effect of melodic motions). M6–P8 and m3–P5 are each contrary motions, but they have significantly different musical meanings. In either case, Bellerman emphatically separated these rules from contemporary practice: they became historical and represented a reactionary effort to revive the practice of a lost, golden age. As such, he

¹⁵ It should be noted that while Schenker does abstract his theory of voice leading from vocal practice, he does occasionally go out of his way to maintain the vocal origins of contrapuntal rules: “At the beginning of the period of contrapuntal music, it was the human voice—and indeed only the human voice—which taught the first discriminations between the true and correct, and the false and unnatural . . . because of its limited compass . . . and because of the necessary participation of the emotional faculty in the production of intervals, the human voice is able to reveal in the most dependable way the true magnitudes of the various reaches. For this reason, it is most perfectly qualified to serve as a guide and judge over all matters of voice leading, today as well as centuries ago” (Schenker, *Counterpoint*, vol. 1, 11).

¹⁶ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 137–138. Bellermann dwells considerably on the acceptable/non-acceptable categories of *melodic* intervals as his basis for promoting a purified concept of melody itself; to this end he offers a brief historical sketch of such definitions from Guido to Glarean (see Heinrich Bellermann, *Der Kontrapunkt* [1861] [Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2001], “Von der Melodie,” pp. 110–115). Schenker mentions this passage explicitly as “a very informative one” (Schenker, *Counterpoint*, vol. 1, 76).

understood them to represent eternal truths about how voices should move in relation to each other, and how melodic lines should follow certain universal guidelines; he also focused on acceptable melodic intervals as a basis for melody.¹⁷

Early twentieth-century manuals, such as the one by Walter Piston, took the next step in abstracting melodic line from its foundations and sketched a more autonomous compositional space. In Piston's writings, he began to separate counterpoint from interval progression and the role of consonance/dissonance, and promoted an abstract notion of "lines" and the rhythmic and melodic means of coordinating them, also including an entire chapter on motive structure. "The art of counterpoint is the art of combining melodic lines. . . . Implicit in the term contrapuntal . . . is the idea of disagreement. The interplay of agreement and disagreement between the various factors of the musical texture constitutes the contrapuntal element in music. . . . The study of counterpoint involves a study of these qualities of agreement and disagreement . . . of dependence and independence."¹⁸ No longer was counterpoint necessarily connected to consonance/dissonance or interval progression, carefully ordered into degrees of perfection; instead the interplay (abstracted) of lines (abstracted) had been generalized to the point of being nearly universal: "most music is to some degree contrapuntal."¹⁹ (As an example of two-part counterpoint, Piston offered the andante opening of the second movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.) Schenker had already generalized counterpoint for most tonal music, but he based it on voice-leading principles. For Piston, however, lines could be contrapuntal by rhythm and contour alone; they were no longer dependent upon traditional rules of counterpoint. This

¹⁷ Carl Dahlhaus and Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, "Counterpoint," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online* <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06690>>, accessed 24 June 2012.

¹⁸ Walter Piston, *Counterpoint* (New York: Norton, 1947), 9.

¹⁹ Piston, *Counterpoint*, 9.

pedagogical effort was obviously related to the rediscovery of counterpoint in the hands of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, as well as Stravinsky and Hindemith, although in different ways.²⁰ Krenek advocated a similar viewpoint in *Studies in Counterpoint* (1940). The pervasive impact of this abstraction of “melody” and “line” cannot be emphasized enough; it is a theoretical notion still with us today, firmly embedded in the theory curriculum throughout North America.

In response, we might be tempted to argue that these changes in the traditions of counterpoint are unproblematic, and perhaps even beneficial in advancing contrapuntal skill in musical composition. Dahlhaus points out, however, that strict counterpoint begins to lose its epistemological legitimacy once it becomes separated from its original foundation in ratios and the notion of sounding number (still retained in Fux), and that its reception history into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is marked by an ever increasing struggle for justification in the face of contemporary aesthetics and practices far removed from the original ones.²¹

Given the contrapuntal terrain just covered, one might argue that this tendency toward theoretical abstraction was pedagogically motivated, but a careful consideration of theories of harmony, both speculative and practical, quickly dispels this view. In the effort of learned musicians to find a cosmological or rational basis for music, the speculative tradition has always abstracted harmony from its compositional and performance contexts, variously into the realms of ideal numbers, proportions, dialectical idealism, tone psychology, and so forth. As the quest for epistemological foundations of music, it embodies an effort to be increasingly “scientific,”

²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno offers insightful observations on the role of counterpoint in the music of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg; see his essay on “The Function of Counterpoint in New Music,” in *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²¹ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 128–140.

FIGURE 4. Exercises by Bach and Richter, from Schenker, *Harmony*, 175–181

(a) Bach



(b) Richter



C: I V I IV V I

thus “a ‘theory’ in the strongest sense of the word.”²² Even in the musical discipline of practical harmony (e.g., figured-bass realization for accompaniment, improvisation, and composition) this abstraction is evident, as for example in Schenker’s critique of Richter’s approach to practical harmony, from 1902, in which he objects not to recognizing harmony as an abstraction, but to the use of that abstraction as a means for teaching.

As shown in Figure 4, Schenker juxtaposed Richter’s exercise with a practical figured-bass exercise appearing in Bach’s *Generalbassbüchlein*, and observed: “The two examples differ with regard to the character of the bass line: in the latter case [Richter], we are faced with scale-steps; in the former, with a true bass line. It is impossible that every note of a true bass line should be a scale-step and that the progression of the bass notes should be identical with the

²² Dahlhaus, et al., “Harmony,” *Grove Music Online*.

progression of the scale-steps.”²³ Schenker fully recognized that scale-steps are abstractions in free composition; he objected, however, to this abstraction being the starting point for practical harmony. Rather practical study should be immersion in the concrete details of counterpoint and thoroughbass, and the abstraction of the scale-step should be the gradual realization of prolongation and structural levels emerging from the close study of free composition.

Schenker’s juxtaposition provides a vivid point of departure for a closer examination of the process of abstraction in theories of tonal harmony, not only because his two examples serve as approximate bookends for the historical period in question, but because the one begins with thoroughbass, a system of harmonic practice just prior to one of the most pivotal theoretical abstractions in the history of musical thought. The following section of this essay outlines several distinct moments in the historical process of disciplinary abstraction, with particular attention to the discursive technique of dissociation and its theoretical consequences. Once again, I need to clarify that the primary aspect of abstraction is epistemological, not chronological. In the case of harmonic theory, the appearance of increasing abstraction over time has more to do with the notion of development and the narrative of progress so central to Enlightenment culture than with the theoretical predicament I am exploring here.

An underappreciated aspect of harmonic theory before Rameau was the inherent connection between chord types and scale-step function that was an essential part of the thoroughbass tradition, and therefore revealed in various forms in treatises of the period. The “rule of the octave”—a theory of course more practical than theoretical, a rule of thumb—was one of the most obvious instances of disciplining explicit associations of chord structure with specific chord

²³ Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony* [1906], ed. Oswald Jonas, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 181.

FIGURE 5. Campion's Rule of the Octave (from Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, 49)

positions in major and minor keys, direct connections between substance and function. Although the rule of the octave appeared in slightly different forms in various treatises throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (from the Italian *partimento* tradition to comparable thoroughbass methods in French- and German-speaking regions), it enjoyed a surprising degree of consistency, with the version by François Campion (1716), shown in Figure 5, being one of the most typical.²⁴

While it was intended primarily as a practical tool, its explicit associations of specific chord types with scale-degree positions was revealing of a deeper aspect of harmony. As Lester observes (of the major-key version): “There is a close agreement between the type of chord and the scale degree: a root-position triad appears only over [$\hat{1}$] and [$\hat{5}$]; a 6/4/3 chord appears over [$\hat{2}$] and over [$\hat{6}$] in major when descending; a 6/5/3 chord with a consonant fifth appears only over [$\hat{4}$] ascending; a 6/ \flat 5/3 appears only over the leading tone; and so forth. As a result, if the scale degree is known, then the chord type is known, and if the chord type is known, then the

²⁴ Thomas Christensen, “The *Règle de l’Octave* in Thorough-Bass Theory and Practice,” *Acta Musicologica* 64/2 (1992): 91–117; see also Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 46–51.

scale degree is known. Via these correspondences, the *règle* promoted recognition of the manner in which harmony expresses a key.”²⁵

Similar versions of the rule of the octave were part of the *partimenti* tradition (e.g., the rules of Fenaroli), which also conditioned specific associations between scale degrees and chord types.²⁶ These associations also corresponded in many instances to the rules guiding the realization of unfigured basses (discussed by writers such as Heinichen);²⁷ like the rule of the octave, these rules utilized recurring scale segments with specific chord types and scale-degree associations. While these practical rules fell short of a comprehensive theory (in the strong sense of the word) they clearly revealed firmly established connections between chord type and scale-degree position, connections which became even more apparent when severed and treated independently.

This separation began with Rameau, whose fundamental bass—“a purely imaginary line”²⁸—neatly integrated chord structure, dissonance resolution, and voice leading. As Dahlhaus explains, “[During the mid-to-late eighteenth-century] the bass . . . took the guise of an audible signal of the intended tonal functions, and not, or only occasionally, that of a part on whose individual progress the harmonic sequence depends.”²⁹

Figure 6 provides Rameau’s version of the rule of the octave; not only does it group together the three various right-hand positions (a small but explicit degree of abstraction itself),

²⁵ Joel Lester, *Compositional Theory in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 72.

²⁶ Giorgio Sanguinetti, “The Realization of Partimenti: An Introduction,” *Journal of Music Theory* 51/1 (2007): 51–83.

²⁷ See George Buelow, *Thorough-Bass Accompaniment According to Johann David Heinichen* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 219–236, which is a paraphrased translation of the unfigured bass section of Heinichen’s *Der General-Bass in der Composition* (1728).

²⁸ Dahlhaus, *et al.*, “Harmony,” *Grove Music Online*.

²⁹ Dahlhaus, *et al.*, “Harmony,” *Grove Music Online*.

FIGURE 6. Rameau, *Treatise on Harmony*, Book 4 (Rameau/Gossett, 396)

Basso continuo

Tonic note 2nd note Mediant 4th note Dominant 6th note LT*

Fundamental bass

Key of Do major

6th note 4th note

*Leading Tone

but it interprets the bass tones according to the fundamental and its simplified motions (another degree of abstraction). Rameau's simplified motions of the fundamental clearly began to prioritize certain degrees of the scale over others (tonic and dominant), and therefore hinged on privileged intervals of those fundamentals (fifth and third). It constituted a reworking of the rule of the octave according to a first major step of abstraction. Additionally, Rameau asserted a second path of abstraction (decisive for the history of harmonic theory) when he established the perfect cadence as the model for all harmonic progressions; this then opened the possibility for rethinking the rule of the octave with a new degree of abstraction. (Basically, this also separated

substance and function, in that regular descending-fifth motion must subsequently be distinguished from the functional cadence.)

This particular instance of abstraction also involves a “dissociation” of concepts, in the sense defined by Perelman as a characteristic rhetorical strategy that arises out of the rational need to account for a central theoretical incompatibility.³⁰ The example he offers, as the prototype of all conceptual dissociation, is the dissociation of appearance/reality; in spite of what “appears” to be true, the “reality” of a situation can be quite different. Perelman analyzes this as a juxtaposition of two terms: Term I is the apparent, “what is actual, immediate, and known directly,” while Term II “can be understood only by comparison with Term I” and serves primarily to eliminate an incompatibility within Term I. He argues that Term II has a unique status, because it is an idealized category: it “provides a criterion, a norm which allows us to distinguish those aspects of Term I which are of value from those which are not; it is not simply a datum, it is a construction which . . . establishes a rule that makes it possible to classify the multiple aspects of Term I in a hierarchy.”³¹

Perelman’s insightful reading of this rhetorical strategy, at work in classical and modern philosophy texts, demonstrates that the dissociation establishes a hierarchy of value, yet one in which “the standard it provides can only be potential.”³² As an example he cites Kant’s famous dissociation of reality into phenomena (Term I) and things-in-themselves (Term II), and points out that while the category of things-in-themselves offers a way out of phenomenal contradictions, these things can in fact never be known directly, they can never be verified. This is, in a sense, the Achilles heel of philosophical dissociation. Term II is constructed and is never known

³⁰ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 411–459.

³¹ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 416.

³² Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 417.

directly; as a conceptual category, it is completely dependent upon its parent term, from which certain qualities or attributes are dissociated. Perelman claims that it arises out of a desire to remove a theoretical incompatibility and results in a fundamental change in conceptual structure: “on the theoretical level, it leads to a solution that will also be valid for the future, because, by remodeling our conception of reality, it prevents the reappearance of the same incompatibility.”³³ He offers a collection of extensions of this basic dissociation, which in part constitute the discourse of metaphysics: means/end, accident/essence, language/thought, relative/absolute, letter/spirit. Perelman reveals how these dissociations are less given in nature than constructed in argumentation (rhetoric); they are theoretical constructions that we accept as natural because of the coherence and value the dissociation bestows on Term II. He gives numerous examples of a rhetorical argument reversing an established philosophical pair; e.g., interpretation/letter can be overturned as letter/spirit. The use of language can often reveal such dissociations, such as the use of adjectives “real” or “apparent,” the use of a definite article (“*the* solution”) or demonstrative article (“*this* world”) which clearly reveal the two terms of the dissociation.³⁴

Rameau’s abstraction of harmonic value in the form of the fundamental bass is a clear example of discursive dissociation. Following Perelman: Term II is the generative fundamental within the key, which Rameau dissociates from Term I, the explicit formation of the chord, which therefore requires mediation from outside (the listener intuiting additional information, e.g., scale, implied sevenths) for its role.³⁵ The contradiction averted is that between figured-bass

³³ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 413; further: “The operation, though *bringing about the disappearance of the [original] object*, is nonetheless carried out at a minimum cost, because the thing that is valued is given its rightful place in the thought, and the latter is given a coherence that is beyond the range of difficulties of the same order” (413, italics added).

³⁴ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 436–437.

³⁵ The role of the listening subject in this sense is explored thoroughly in Jairo Moreno, *Musical Representations, Subjects, and Objects: The Construction of Musical Thought in Zarlino, Descartes, Rameau, and Weber* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

interval rules and generalizations of the fundamental bass, such as the apparent discrepancy between the perfect fifth being a consonant interval but one requiring resolution when part of a $\frac{6}{5}$ chord (e.g., ii_5^6 at a cadence, the suspension cadence of counterpoint).

Subsequent harmonic theories begin to separate chord structure and dissonance from harmonic function. In *Stufentheorie* (e.g., Weber), Roman numerals designate tonal function independently of the interval progression of the fundamental bass. The primary difference between fundamental bass and *Stufen* theories of harmony becomes the role of dissonance resolution. For Rameau, dissonances bound chords together, in that the perfect cadence (as the model for harmonic progression) depended upon the resolution of the third and seventh of the dominant chord. For Weber, in contrast, chords, dissonances, and root progressions became independent, as is evident in his analyses. Consider the one of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, in which Weber labels a cadential 4–3 suspension with two scale steps (I and V), and a succession of $\frac{6}{3}$ chords with consecutive ones (I, ii, iii, IV, vi, V⁷).³⁶ Figure 7 shows Weber's basic explanation of scale-degree function: triads and seventh chords on each scale step in major and minor keys.³⁷

Striking here is the profound departure from the earlier “rule of the octave” guides. Even though Weber's lowest notes also follow the major scale, the earlier explicit connections between chord structure (intervals above the bass) and function have completely vanished. Structure and function are now completely separate attributes, and tonal function must be defined by other means (such as cadence), which is one of the sources of tonal ambiguity and multiple

³⁶ David W. Bernstein, “Nineteenth-Century Harmonic Theory: The Austro-German Legacy,” in *CHWMT*, 785. Rameau also labels the cadential six-four with two fundamental bass tones, but for different reasons: he does so because of dissonance resolution (explaining a the motion of a suspension according to the resolution of the dominant seventh), whereas Weber does it because of chord-tone membership. The difference on this single issue is emblematic of the differences between the two theories of harmony.

³⁷ For further commentary, see Brian Hyer, “Tonality,” in *CHWMT*, 735.

FIGURE 7. Weber, *Versuch einer geordneten Theorie der Tonsetzkunst*, vol. 1, §§147–149

C, C7; b, b7; e, e7; f, f7; G, G7; a, a7; °h, °h7.

a; °h, °h7; b, b7; C, C7; f, f7; °gis.

auf der auf der auf der auf der auf der auf der auf der
erst. St. zweiten, dritten, viert., fünft., sechst., siebent.

In C: C, C7; b, b7; e, e7; f, f7; G, G7; a, a7; °h, °h7.
In a: a ; °h, °h7; b, b7; C, C7; f, f7; °gis.

meaning (*Mehrdeutigkeit*) captured so vividly in his analysis of Mozart's C-minor quartet, K. 465.³⁸

Weber's further abstraction of tonal harmony is also an instance of dissociation: the chords in the score (Term I) were harmonically reduced to scale-step functions (Term II), the latter being completely dependent upon the former for their existence. Term II is the abstraction from Term I and represents the assertion of underlying value. But a careful consideration of Weber's harmonic theory also reveals another aspect of this dissociation. Because harmonic function was now fully independent of chord structure, the underlying sense of key had also become more abstract: it was less tied to a final, in the older sense of mode, which was defined by its intervallic relationships to the other degrees and by characteristic interval successions in the given mode, and more tied to a relational network of functional chords, which could modulate with agility from measure to measure as necessary. Key became a more abstract theoretical

³⁸ See translation in Ian Bent (ed.), *Music Analysis in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 1: Fugue, Form and Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 157–183; see also Moreno, *Musical Representations, Subjects, and Objects*.

construct, much like a gravitational field of harmonic energy, with the tonic becoming a magnetic pole.³⁹

Inherent to this process of abstraction is a forgetting of history, a replacement of older guidelines, connections, and principles with newer ones; and in one sense this marks a loss of specific potentials for musical meaning. With Weber's system of harmony, for example, the place-finding role of inversions provided vivid directions for the composer and listener, and offered a rich domain for compositional play. At the same time, abstraction opened up new possibilities, new domains to be explored by creative composition and to be mapped out freshly in theoretical writings. At the historical moment just described, a slightly more independent play of tonal functions offered many new harmonic and tonal possibilities, such as those explored by Beethoven (in his middle to late works) and Schubert, such as third relationships and the expanded use of mode mixture.

There is an additional, rhythmic aspect to this theoretical abstraction of harmony. The specifically rhythmic and metric role of the fundamental bass was clearly articulated by Kirnberger in his synthesis of Rameau's ideas with practical thoroughbass method,⁴⁰ and the fundamental bass also acquired in the classical style an important role clarifying phrase structure, defining phrase syntax. Dahlhaus makes an even stronger claim that harmony in the practice of the late eighteenth century is inseparable from periodicity, in part because of a relatively slow harmonic rhythm (compared to other style periods) and also because of the highly standardized

³⁹ See Christensen's fascinating interpretations of Rameau's changing scientific metaphors for harmony and modulation later in his theoretical writings (*Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, 169–208).

⁴⁰ Putnam Aldrich, "'Rhythmic Harmony' as Taught by Johann Philipp Kirnberger.," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music: A Tribute to Karl Geiringer on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. H. C. Robbins Landon in collaboration with Roger E. Chapman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 37–52.

FIGURE 8. Summary of Riemann's harmonic functions (from Bernstein, *CHWMT*)

Figure 8 is a musical score summarizing Riemann's harmonic functions, organized into two systems: C major and A minor. The score consists of eight staves, each representing a different category of harmonic function. The functions are represented by musical notation (chords) and Roman numerals.

Function Category	C major	A minor
Functions	S, T, D	°S, °T, °D
Parallel chords	Sp, Tp, Dp	°Sp, °Tp, °Dp
Leading-tone change chords	S ⁶ , T ⁷ , D ⁷	°S ⁶ , °T ⁷ , °D ⁷
Characteristic dissonances	S ⁶ , D ⁷	°S ⁶ , °D ⁷
Secondary dominants and Subdominants	S ⁶ , D ⁷	°S ⁶ , °D ⁷
Dissonant chords	T ⁷ , T ²⁽⁹⁾ , T ⁴	°T ⁷ , °T ²⁽⁹⁾ , °T ⁴
Omitted roots	p ⁷	°p ⁷

formal syntax that emerged around 1785 and became known as the Viennese classical style.⁴¹ These strong inherent connections between harmony and rhythm, meter, and period structure are vivid illustrations of aspects of harmony that are lost in the process of abstraction. On the one hand, chord function becomes much simpler to apprehend, and a new era of practical harmony begins, embodied in the use of Roman numerals; on the other hand, the abstraction brackets all of the attributes of a chord in its context except the scale degree of its “root.”

The explicit theory of harmonic function (i.e., Riemann's) further abstracted harmony (and further dissociated substance and function): it allowed chromatic substitutions and stepwise displacements to fulfill the same harmonic function. Figure 8 provides a summary of Riemann's various chord functions. While the basic three functions are certainly clear, the remaining variations demonstrate the degree of abstraction required conceptually to reduce the harmonic possibilities to such few categories. As Dahlhaus observes of Riemann's theory: “A harmony is

⁴¹ Dahlhaus, *et al.*, “Harmony,” *Grove Music Online*.

the essence of all chords having a like function and thus exists at a much more abstract level than dyads with their inversions and notes ‘foreign to the harmony.’”⁴²

Schenker’s idiosyncratic concept of harmony is also more abstract than a one-to-one chord/harmony mapping (as is well known), but according to different categories and concepts than Riemann (specifically *Stufen*, prolongation, and the notion of *Schichten* or layers). In Schenker’s view of tonal music, harmony is a play of abstract forces, whereas counterpoint involves the details of voice leading.

Further extensions of harmonic abstraction can only be sketched briefly, but clearly offer further evidence of this deep-seated theoretical tendency. In particular, the notion of modulation gradually became dissociated from mode, two concepts that were originally interrelated aspects of a single, indivisible concept.⁴³ This happened in several stages: first in the early eighteenth century, modulation increasingly pushed boundaries of mode (primary, secondary, and tertiary cadential degrees) and then was reconceived according to a circle of keys. Then, around 1800, composers chromatically expanded modulation, e.g., III[♯] (Beethoven’s First Symphony, i) or \flat VI (Op. 13, ii), such that cadential degrees required tones that were not included in the mode. Finally, key areas became increasingly dissociated from their original formal functions; e.g., sonata forms no longer automatically modulated to V (or to III in minor keys). The large-scale expression of mode became, in many ways, a tonal drama far removed from the earlier concept of mode.

Although it is beyond the scope of this argument, it is worth observing that this theoretical tendency is a fundamental part of post-tonal theory, in its various incarnations from “atonal”

⁴² Dahlhaus, *et al.*, “Harmony,” *Grove Music Online*.

⁴³ Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, 170–178.

to twelve-tone, particularly in the work of Forte and Babbitt. Just as tonal chords were abstracted from their contexts, so too were pitch-class sets abstracted from their specific utterances. For example, we quickly forget that we initially come to know (014) as the opening motive of Schoenberg's Op. 11/1. As such, post-tonal theory offers yet another good example of the dissociation of substance and function.⁴⁴

Abstraction has also been an integral part of the theory of musical form that has emerged since the time of Beethoven. Earlier accounts of the typical layout of common tonal genres (e.g., in Koch's *Versuch*, volume 3) focused primarily on the organization of the music into phrases (periods) and their connections. As is well known, A. B. Marx reinvented the notion of musical form according to a systematic ordering related to aspects of Hegel's philosophy of history and Goethe's morphology of organisms.⁴⁵ Dahlhaus pinpoints one of the important aspects of this fundamental change: Marx's form categories were defined less by motivic connections and the disposition of periods than by underlying character, and thus created the conditions under which a new, more abstract concept of theme could emerge.⁴⁶

Dahlhaus observes further how the metaphor of architecture was inseparable from this process of abstraction in providing a conceptual framework and a schematic way of representing these more abstract "themes" with letters, such that ABACA could represent the form of a five-part rondo.⁴⁷ Marx's example of a five-part rondo is likely the first instance of this practice of

⁴⁴ Michiel Schuijjer, *Analyzing Atonal Music: Pitch-Class Set Theory and Its Contexts* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), insightfully traces the inception of set theory in specific pieces, specific sets in specific melodic gestures, and then explores the disciplinary tendency (at least in North America) toward theoretical abstraction.

⁴⁵ Scott Burnham, "The Role of Sonata Form in A. B. Marx's Theory of Form," *Journal of Music Theory* 33/2 (1989): 247–271.

⁴⁶ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 222.

⁴⁷ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 222. That is, the conveying of certain musical features is eliminated by the substitution of A for Marx's HS (*Hauptsatz*), B for SS (*Seitensatz*) and G (*Gang*), and C for a second SS. For Marx, HS conveys a specific kind of theme, with an appropriate length and degree of cadential closure, as does SS and G; in contrast, A, B, and C are abstract place-holders.

FIGURE 9. A. B. Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalische Komposition*, vol. 3, 135

werden dann nochmals auf den Hauptsatz zurückkommen. Es sind gleichsam zwei in einandergeschobne Rondos erster oder zweiter Form, —

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{G} \\ \text{HS} - \text{SS} - \text{HS} \\ \text{HS} - \text{SS} - \text{HS}. \end{array}$$

die das Rondo dritter Form bilden. Nennen wir den Hauptsatz A, den ersten Seitensatz B, den zweiten C, so ist dies —

$\text{A} - \text{B} - \text{A} - \text{C} - \text{A}$

das Schema der neuen Form.

[There are, so to speak, two first or second rondo forms combined to create the third rondo form. We call the main Satz A, the first subsidiary Satz B, the second C, so that A–B–A–C–A is the schema of the new form.]

representing abstracted “themes” by letter. (See Figure 9.)

As observed by Dahlhaus and others, musical forms became more idealized than the merely generalized versions that appeared in Koch’s writings, in large part due to the influence of Goethe’s morphology of living organisms, which promoted idealized versions of organic structures and presupposed the existence of an ideal type of an entity independent of all empirical instances. Moreover, these “themes” were linked to the notion of “ideas” in music, and the presupposition of a purely musical realm of “reason” or “logic,” and thus to Hegel’s philosophy of history (suggestion that musical ideas are part of a teleological system). But Burnham is careful to point out the limitations of the Goethe and Hegel connections, and foregrounds a more pedagogical version of Hegel’s historical logic. In Marx’s “problem-history” interpretation of musical forms, each form in succession emerges in order to solve a formal/aesthetic problem arising in the previous one, creating a chain of formal problem-solving that culminates in sonata form, the focal point of instrumental music in the Beethoven tradition. Burnham argues that this series for Marx is as much pedagogical as historical, that the series represents the gradual discovery of certain inherent formal principles in the mind of the composition student attempting

to write increasingly larger instrumental forms. In any case, all three theoretical assumptions—historical logic, idealized organic structure, and pedagogical problem-solving—idealize musical events and forms to a highly abstracted level, one that has served as the dominant concept of musical form ever since, even in the twentieth century under the significant pressures of aesthetic nominalism. One of the many consequences of this formal abstraction is the conflation of the sonata and symphony into a single form type (sonata form), in spite of many empirical differences between them, as noted already by Koch in 1793, and more recently by Broyles.⁴⁸ (I will return to this point below.)

Dahlhaus goes even further and pronounces an abstract *Formenlehre* to be an illusion, a fiction.⁴⁹ Not only does he mention the above forces of abstraction, he also points out what has become tacitly obvious: that the theory of form that has dominated our musical thought since Marx is in reality a theory of piano music, which classifies symphonic and vocal music into types defined originally by piano genres. In one of the revealing ironies of form theory, Marx's concept of *Liedform* (including what we think of largely as the small binary and ternary forms) was defined not by the Lied at all but by short pieces for piano (from suite movements to character pieces). Along similar lines, Dahlhaus points out how the abstracted concept of musical form essentially flattens the particular features of genre and instrumentation of a given work in order to foreground the common (piano-defined) formal patterns.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Michael Broyles, "The Two Instrumental Styles of Classicism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36/2 (1983): 210–242

⁴⁹ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 222.

⁵⁰ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 222: "Die Formenlehre, die sich als allgemeine, abstrakte Theorie präsentierte . . . ist in Wahrheit eine Formenlehre der Klaviermusik" and "Der Gedanke einer abstrakten Formenlehre—jenseits der Gattungsdifferenzen—erweist sich als Phantom." Also, "Instrumentierung . . . muß als konstitutives Moment der Komposition gelten."

DISCIPLINARY CONSEQUENCES OF THEORETICAL ABSTRACTION

The preceding survey of abstraction in the history of theory has revealed three inter-related tendencies: theorists of tonal music have developed theoretical models, concepts, and categories that (1) strive for less dependence on (compositional) context, (2) strive for less dependence on history (e.g., historical changes of style), and (3) overlook significant features of substance in exchange for generalizations. What, then, are the larger consequences of this theoretical abstraction for tonal theory? What drives this theoretical predicament and what are its consequences for the discipline? To understand the full extent of this epistemological situation, we need to consider three distinct ways in which music theory masks part of itself, and to take a closer look at some of the more familiar objects and categories of tonal theory, such as melody, phrase, and form.

Essentially, the three particular manifestations of our theoretical predicament involve an overinvestment in one part of a dialectical pair at the risk of overlooking or forgetting aspects of the other part of the pair. We have seen already how this happens with the *theory–history* pair, with voice-leading rules proposed as timeless, abstracted and removed from their origins in texted counterpoint and singability. Perhaps as crucial is the tendency in music theory to create prototypes, schemes, or models and then apply them in analytical situations—clearly a powerful tool for making sense of a vast repertoire of music. The risk, however, is a certain degree of reification or, more precisely, of attributing a higher value to a model itself than the event in its context. In terms of a dialectical pair, this amounts to an imbalance in the *part–whole* pair (or event–context pair), as is evident in the notion of melody as a purposeful line presumed to be largely independent of other parts or other musical domains (e.g., harmony, meter). A third distinct aspect of our theoretical predicament is a tendency to look and hear through the musical

material itself, to grasp to what contrapuntal, harmonic, or formal model it corresponds. This causes us to move too quickly from the specific to the general; it marks an imbalance in the *abstract–concrete* pair, terms which convey the “material” aspect of music before it becomes theoretically abstracted into idealized models.

These three aspects of our predicament can be framed according to the theoretical objectives of each, in the sense of ordering a domain according to philosophical principles:

- (1) an imbalance in the *part–whole* pair results from seeking *singular* foundations for music theory,
- (2) an imbalance in the *theory–history* pair results from seeking *timeless* foundations for music theory, and
- (3) an imbalance in the *abstract–concrete* pair results from seeking *generalized* foundations for music theory.

The inherent problem resides not in these ideals (which are singular, timeless, and generalized principles) but in their un-dialectical pursuit, the overinvestment in models of melody, meter, phrase, and form that are *exclusively* singular, timeless, or generalized.⁵¹ A complete theory therefore must be able to address context, history, and material within its very structure (not simply as an *ad hoc* addition).⁵²

I should be clear that abstraction *per se* is not the cause of this predicament, but rather abstraction in the absence of concrete particulars. Indeed, abstraction has been (and continues to

⁵¹ Kenneth Burke considers these kinds of reductions to be conceptually related to metonymy, one of the “four master tropes” (Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* [New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945; reprinted Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969], 503–517). It amounts to taking only a part of a larger whole and using that part to stand for the whole, which happens in many ways in music theory, the most obvious being the practice of identifying a chord (whole) by its root tone (part) using Roman numerals, a practice so engrained as to seem second nature.

⁵² Throughout his writings, Dahlhaus calls for theory and analysis to follow a more dialectical method, including two particularly explicit instances: “Fragmente der Melodielehre,” in *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, *Zweiter Teil*, 61–69; and “Some Models of Unity in Musical Form,” *Journal of Music Theory* 19/1 (1975): 2–30.

be) an important means for creating space for new creative possibilities. In fact, Dahlhaus has argued that our modern reluctance to recognize general types (under the influence of aesthetic nominalism in the modern arts) has hampered our ability to speak meaningfully about form: extensive details in the absence of general types run the risk of being empty specifics.⁵³ But it becomes evident when considering the complete scope of tonal music that the imbalanced theorizing surveyed above leads to certain blind spots that must be acknowledged as part of theoretical discourse and that should lead us to consider some changes in how we theorize tonal material.

In a manner of speaking, Perelman's new approach to rhetoric (mentioned above) amounts to an insightful critique of philosophy, an unmasking of how the latter has over-invested its truths in one pole of many dialectical pairs, and has done so through the rhetorical device of dissociation. Perelman's critique of philosophy thus offers an appropriate parallel for critiquing tonal theory: in both cases (philosophy and music theory) rhetorical strategies of the discourse construct principles and categories that are supposed to be timeless in nature but are inevitably derived from a part within the whole, or from a specific moment in history, and thus involve a certain amount of epistemological slippage. Theory shares with philosophy a mode of theorizing that seeks timeless, singular, and generalized validity. For both, this points to the need for a more dialectical, historical approach, which Perelman achieves with his thoroughly rhetorical reading of philosophy and which Dahlhaus uses in his exhaustive assessment of historical music theory.

In no way is Perelman asserting that the philosophical tradition is invalid, but simply that its assertions are rhetorical in nature and that we need to understand them as such to accept their validity. In much the same way, by proposing aspects of theorizing that can recognize these

⁵³ Dahlhaus, "Some Models of Unity in Musical Form," 2–5.

dialectics, I am similarly suggesting a critique of tonal theory and its claims to validity, in order to recover forgotten aspects of musical meaning.

The three aspects of our theoretical predicament have direct disciplinary consequences. I will briefly sketch them here, and then propose some ways of recovering the dialectical balance of theoretical knowledge I outlined above.

First, a direct consequence of seeking singular foundations for various aspects of tonal theory is the inevitable separation of (sub)disciplines: isolating harmony, counterpoint, form, rhythm, orchestration, and so forth, in order to simplify the relationship between the theory and the material and to avoid potential contradictions between those respective modes of explanation. On the one hand, this leads to an advancement in the clarity and persuasiveness of the knowledge, but on the other hand it also results in the repression of interdependence. (Dahlhaus, for example, argues that this disciplinary separation was one of the primary reasons why a coherent and technical theory of melody never really materialized in tonal theory, in contrast to highly developed theories of harmony and practical theories of counterpoint.)⁵⁴ Increasing autonomy of theoretical models, concepts, and categories is thus tied to our expanding inability to recognize dialectical foundations, those theoretical moments when a compositional practice is shaped equally by two distinct forces (e.g., harmonic motion and contrapuntal voice leading). Schenker recognized certain instances of this tendency a century ago, and more recent accounts suggest that we continue to be disciplined by this tendency.⁵⁵

Second, the disciplinary consequence of seeking timeless principles is our tendency to overlook the important historical concepts or practices that continued to shape tonal music but

⁵⁴ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 61–69.

⁵⁵ Schenker, *Counterpoint*, vol. 1, author's preface; Dahlhaus notes this in "Harmony," *Grove Music Online*.

that are no longer a formal part of theoretical assessments. Christensen calls this a “presentist” attitude; it is opposed at the other extreme by a “historicist” one, and both are prone to their own blind spots. His call for theory to be guided by a healthy hermeneutic dialectic of both presentist and historicist tendencies has contributed substantial changes to the current practice of music theory in North America in this new century.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it remains the case that much history-of-theory research is separated from analysis and new theorizing, such that the dialectic often becomes a mere separation, with less hermeneutic dialogue than there could be.

Third, the consequence of seeking generalized or abstract foundations is a blindness to detail, to the unique significance of certain musical events. Abstraction has been caught up in the quest for aesthetic autonomy and ideals of classicism (inherited from antiquity), which recognized an inherent connection between an ideal (a universal idea) and its physical realization/embodiment in the world (its particular, individual form)—a connection that therefore expressed a timeless truth and value. In antiquity such abstractions were represented, for example, by the epic and tragedy, which were not just successful formulae for creating compelling theater, but embodied specific timeless truths about the world order. In classical architecture, the golden mean was upheld in a similar way (an ideal that has also had a significant impact on music). In the era of tonal music, musical ideal types were less related to superparticular ratios (as was the case in early music), but to larger formal models such as sonata form (in the hands of A. B. Marx), or the *Ursatz* (Schenker). The risk in guiding tonal theory by such theoretical ideals is that they can easily become absolutes and masquerade as timeless principles, separated from specific historical and tradition-specific practices. I would argue that this is one of the reasons

⁵⁶ Thomas Christensen, “Music Theory and Its Histories.,” in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, ed. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 9–40.

why tonal theory after 1750 increasingly abandoned rhetoric as an important guide in composing, performing, and understanding music: because rhetoric largely addressed the specific needs of the compositional moment and the audience rather than fulfilling an abstract aesthetic ideal. As theory strove to become more classical, more aesthetically autonomous, ideal types suggestive of classicism became far more consequential than rhetorical nuances. Along similar lines, the process of abstraction involves dissociation of substance and function (structure); the latter embodies ideal forms related to classical ideals, while the former becomes dwarfed in significance.⁵⁷ The notion of structure has become so entrenched in tonal theory that we rarely consider its origin as metaphor; it is precisely because of the investment of tonal theory in the value of classical ideals that structure (and the related metaphor of architecture for music, also derived from classical antiquity) has become one of its most fundamental concepts.

The preceding disciplinary tendencies are clearly not fatal, but they pose some problems that are worth engaging. While no change in theorizing can completely “solve” them—simply because they appear to be inherent aspects of theorizing—some slight changes could allow us to begin to recover aspects of musical meaning that we have lost under them. In the remainder of this essay, I will propose three theoretical perspectives that can facilitate this effort: *sedimentation* (the presence of the past), *trope* (changes of form and/or meaning within a given language), and *rhetoric* (attention to the presence of specific figures).

⁵⁷ Structure becomes part of the function category (Perelman’s Term II) because it extracts only the functional aspect of substance—only those features that create coherence—and discards the rest; function and structure are dependent, constructed categories that require theoretical support to sustain. Compare Daniel K. L. Chua’s comments on how absolute music requires the discourse of musicology to sustain it, in *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 1.

SEDIMENTATION

Under this term I envision a way of formally recognizing the continued presence of the past in the practices, concepts, and categories in current circulation, which collectively shape our assertions of musical meaning. My use of the term is nearly synonymous with Adorno's, but without the assumption that social conflict necessarily resides in the sedimented material. The word itself appears only occasionally in his writings, but it is one of the fundamental assumptions that informs his entire critical project. Primarily it means that, first, form is sedimented content; and second (and relatedly), the objective is sedimented subjectivity.⁵⁸ In other words, personal expression and social forces both shape the material substance of artworks, which then becomes form in the general sense of the objective material of a common, dynamic language. A critical reading of such form attends to these social and expressive features not in the manner of a biographical or psychoanalytic aesthetics, but as a dialectic between subject/object, content/form—the rich, meaningful interaction of techniques and aesthetics.

More specifically concerning *musical* technique, Adorno offers an insightful description of how the minor mode has been sedimented in the tonal language of music, a sedimented language that Mahler inherited and that forms the material condition of his unique use of this language:

The long neutralized minor, sedimented as a formal element in the syntax of Western music, only becomes a symbol of mourning when modally awakened by the contrasting major. Its nature is that of divergence; in isolation it no longer produced this effect. As a deviation, the minor defines itself equally as the not integrated, the unassimilated, the not

⁵⁸ “Every artwork, even if it presents itself as a work of perfect harmony, is in itself the nexus of a problem. As such it participates in history and thus oversteps its own uniqueness. In the problem nexus of each and every artwork, what is external to the monad, and that whereby it is constituted, is sedimented in it. It is in the dimension of history that the individual aesthetic object and its concept communicate. History is inherent to aesthetic theory” (Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], draft introduction, 358–359; see also 56–58 on the objectivization of the subjective).

yet established. In the contrast between the two modes in Mahler, the divergence between the particular and the general is inextricably congealed. Minor is the particular, major the general; the Other, the deviant, is, with truth, equated with suffering. In the major-minor relationship, therefore, the expressive content is precipitated in sensuous, musical form.⁵⁹

In a similar but slightly more general assessment, he suggests the extent to which sedimented practices (such as tonal syntax) shape the possibilities of musical meaning in Beethoven's compositions—that is, to a greater degree than techniques within the new work can produce.⁶⁰ Even more directly addressing musical technique, Dahlhaus applies this idea (though without using the term) in his assessment of Bach's unique contrapuntal technique, as the accumulation of four distinct, historical practices: monody, basso continuo texture, concertante style, and “functional” counterpoint (i.e., instruments playing unique roles within texture, rather than being generic, equal polyphonic voices).⁶¹ He also explains the difference between fundamental bass and function theory by suggesting historical sedimentation: they do not contradict as much as they represent two distinct historical layers that emerged from different objectives at different historical moments and have been integrated into a modern harmonic practice. He is also fond of pointing out how interval progressions in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century music form the voice-leading basis for the standard tonal cadences that became model progressions with Rameau.⁶²

That sedimentation has been an (implicit) part of tonal theory is evident in the common observation that the resolution of chordal sevenths resembles the earlier practice of resolving suspensions (which illustrates a specific instance in which the later practice of harmony was

⁵⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 26.

⁶⁰ “Meaning in music requires the prospective view, which cannot be generated by the piece itself but only by the accumulated musical idiom” (Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Edmund Jephcott [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], fragment 162).

⁶¹ Carl Dahlhaus and Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, “Counterpoint,” *Grove Music Online*.

⁶² Dahlhaus, *et al.*, “Harmony,” *Grove Music Online*.

FIGURE 10. Bach, French Suite No. 2 in C Minor (BWV 813): Minuet, mm. 1–4

founded upon an earlier rule of counterpoint). But sedimentation as I envision it is a far deeper concept, and one that reveals significant potential in enriching theory with history. Several examples must suffice for this brief sketch.

1. Vocal influences in instrumental music.

When we speak of melody we typically underestimate the degree to which melody itself (as a concept and not simply a concrete example) is dependent upon counterpoint. Consider the excerpt of Figure 10. What do we consider to be the melody? If we consider the rhythmic pacing and texture of mm. 1, 3, and 4, we would quite naturally conclude that the right hand plays the melody while the left hand plays a simple quarter-note accompaniment. How does our conclusion change if we include m. 2? Do we have a migrating melody, adhering to the common pattern of imitation between parts? Perhaps, but a more satisfying answer involves modifying our concept of melody itself to accommodate the melodic aspect of the left hand and its interaction with the faster motion in the right hand. In other words, the problem is not an analytic one but a theoretical one, a problem of definition: the pure, abstracted category of “melody” in the strong sense obscures its dependence on other parts (i.e., counterpoint), on rhythm, meter, and harmony (as well as the character of specific instrument), and on its history (i.e., with respect to genre and instrumental idioms). One can extend this problem to passages in Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, in which “motivic counterpoint” (*à la* Dahlhaus) is a significant feature; see,

FIGURE 11. Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*, “Erbarne dich”

(a) opening measures

Violino Solo.

Violino I. *piano sempre.*

Violino II. *piano sempre.*

Viola. *piano sempre.*

Alto.

Organo e Continuo. *pizzicato.*

(b) alto entrance

Er - bar - me dich,

pp

example, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, first movement, and String Quartet, Op. 131, fourth movement (variations).⁶³ The Classical repertoire gives clear evidence of the sedimentation of polyphonic relationships in the instrumental textures dominated by single line melodic gestures.

Moreover, another important feature of melody has likely been forgotten: the rhetorical, expressive use of intervals. While we might notice the two ascending, minor-sixth leaps in the right hand in the prior Bach minuet, we would likely overlook their rhetorical and expressive role in this passage because of the instrumental texture and dance genre. Yet we would be unlikely to miss the exact same intervals in a vocal aria, with the solo violin announcing the haunting melody the voice will sing after the opening ritornello (see Figure 11). These are expressive

⁶³ Dahlhaus similarly questions definitions of melody in *Ludwig Van Beethoven*, 152–56; he discusses motivic counterpoint in *Geschichte der Musiktheorie*, vol. 11, 238–41.

melodic intervals inherited from the traditions of sixteenth-century polyphony and seventeenth-century monody and theorized extensively by the *musica poetica* writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They constitute one of Dahlhaus's four essential historical "layers" of Bach's counterpoint (as noted above).⁶⁴ Interval was also originally tied very directly to the expression of a mode, as each mode was associated with a specific collection of characteristic intervals. Our concept of interval became increasingly more autonomous, abstracted from mode, scale, and interval species, to the point of occasionally being described as simply an objective measurement of pitch distance. In sum, our concepts of melody frequently neglect the extensive role of counterpoint in melodic motions, and our concepts of counterpoint also tend to forget important historical practices embedded in them.

2. *Period as phrase type (ideal type category).*

The "period" is another vivid illustration of our theoretical predicament, in which the disciplinary process of abstraction pushes us to forget its history, its sedimented meanings. While the term causes us to think immediately of antecedent/consequent complementation, the original meaning of a period was simply a complete, coherent musical statement. Elaborating a rhetorical model of composition (in which elaboration of a basic plan was accomplished in a manner similar to rhetorical composition), Koch simply defines a period as a complete musical statement concluding with a perfect cadence.⁶⁵ Dahlhaus refers to this as a prose-based concept of phrase in contrast to a verse-based one, as asserted a few years later by Reicha, in which the period

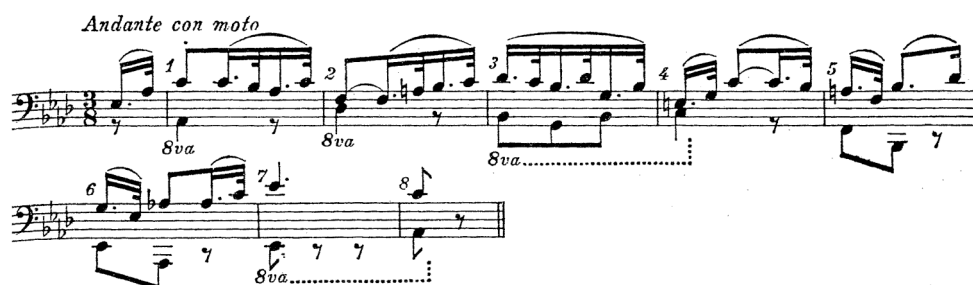
⁶⁴ Buelow includes several such melodic intervals in his summary of musical-rhetorical figures, including an ascending m6 in Bach's Cantata No. 155; "Rhetoric and Music," 267 in *New Grove*.

⁶⁵ Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Zweiter Teil*, 189–203, originally published as "Satz und Periode. Zur Theorie der musikalischen Syntax," in *Zeitschrift für Musiktheorie* 9/2 (1978): 16–26.

acquired a new meaning as a rhythmic unit (of two equal parts, such as 4+4 measures). In emphasizing the metric aspect of the phrase, the presence (or absence) of a cadence was far less significant. Marx then added the motivic parallelism we tend to prioritize today, coinciding with the metric aspect and a final conclusive cadence. These layers coexisted well because the new features generally did not contradict the older ones. On occasion, however, they did (Dahlhaus provides an interesting survey of such borderline cases); and it was for this reason that Marx distinguished these three aspects with different theoretical units (*Satz*, *Gang*, *Periode*).

Dahlhaus, like Marx, enumerates these in the manner of a systematic contradiction; I wish here to emphasize the historical process of sedimentation, in which the older configuration remains, and simply combines with more recent layers. Occasional contradictions are less the result of contrasting definitions appearing in treatises and more the natural friction of layers of sedimentation. The significance of this shift in theoretical perspective is the recovery of the larger compositional contexts within which these configurations were occurring, contexts that could exert profound influence over musical meaning: prose, verse, motive—three very distinct compositional paradigms.

In other words, when one encounters a phrase that exhibits conflicting criteria, the problem is not analytic but theoretical, a problem of definition—of a historically sedimented definition—that is masked by our disciplinary tendency to pursue timeless theoretical models and types. This becomes evident in passages such as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, second movement, mm. 1–8, which is as problematic as it is famous (see Figure 12a). Schoenberg identifies this as a period, largely because of the downbeat arrival on III in m. 4, which he regards as one of the harmonies capable of marking a half cadence. But it lacks the strong motivic correspondence between mm. 1–2 and 5–6 that is frequently one of the defining criteria

FIGURE 12. Beethoven, Fifth Symphony, ii, mm. 1–8(a) from Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, 45(b) from Leichentritt, *Musical Form*, 13

of the period in current analysis of tonal forms; and it also lacks a strong PAC (perfect authentic cadence), which not only brings phrase closure but (with the half cadence) heightens the parallelism of the two four-bar segments. Hugo Leichentritt also cites this passage, but describes it as something “other” than a period: an eight-bar melody “without periodic construction”⁶⁶ (see Figure 12b). He points out Beethoven’s skill at melodically grouping the bracketed segment in a manner far more musically sophisticated than his own recomposed and mechanical version, a change which brings more rhythmic emphasis to the downbeat of m. 4. But he is clear in stating that this is not a period as traditionally defined.

Schoenberg and Leichentritt, besides disagreeing with each other, would also be corrected by our current analytic practice, which would recognize the phrase expansion that results from several repeated segments that begin in m. 7 and continue until the definitive PAC

⁶⁶ Hugo Leichentritt, *Musical Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 12.

several measures later. As with his sentence examples, Schoenberg (and Leichentritt, too) cuts off the phrase after eight bars and obscures the complete phrase as a whole unit, if we define it by a strong, conclusive cadence. The problem, once again, is not an analytic one (and certainly not a compositional one!) but a theoretical one, in which the historical sedimentation in the concept of “period” is masked by our theoretical tendency to seek timeless principles (in this case combined also with singular ones), which renders the category unable to accommodate historical changes.

A similar situation exists with sonata form, whose layers include (but are not limited to): harmonic plan, formal design, motivic work, thematic contrast, lengthy development. These aspects emerged at different historical moments and became sedimented layers within the theory and practice of the prestigious form.

TROPE

By this term I mean the substitution of a new conceptual figure for an older one, which then begins to replace it. It is, in a sense, sedimentation with a change of meaning (i.e., a flash-point of change within a continuous tradition, not a paradigm shift or an epistemological break). By this process, a technique or musical figure becomes part of a more or less continuous tradition, one that undergoes normal shifts of meaning. This notion has appeared in music analysis in recent years, but typically in relation to specific works and their interpretation rather than to the theory of tonal music itself as a collection of concepts, techniques, and categories.⁶⁷ Again,

⁶⁷ Kevin Korsyn, “Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence,” *Music Analysis* 11 (1991): 3–72; Korsyn, *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Michael Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Robert Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University

FIGURE 13. Burmeister, *Musica Poetica* (Burmeister/Rivera, 179)



FIGURE 14. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 31/2, iii: mm. 1–5



several examples will constitute a brief sketch.

1. Repetition.

The musical meaning of repetition in sixteenth-century vocal polyphony was specifically tied to repetition of a significant segment of text; as such, it was a rhetorical figure of emphasis, and it was not, strictly speaking, required of an ordinary setting of a given text. Such figures appear widely in the repertoire and in treatises of the *musica poetica* tradition. In Burmeister's treatise, for example, he defines several figures of repetition, including what he terms *palillogia*, "the iteration of the same melodic phrase or passage at the same pitch level."⁶⁸ He offers two musical examples, including the one in Figure 13, from Orlando di Lasso's *Mirabile mysterium*. This kind of repetition is utterly different than repetition in instrumental music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which it typically serves a motivic or metric function. While the

Press, 1994). Our current awareness of tropes and their roles in shaping understanding has been influenced largely by the work of Hayden White, especially *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

⁶⁸ Joachim Burmeister, *Musica Poetica* [1606], trans Benito V. Rivera as *Musical Poetics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 179.

former is familiar, the latter is less so: there are many passages in which repetition simply serves to define a rhythmic pace that defines the basic terms of the metric hierarchy, as in Bach's well-known Prelude in C Major (*WTC I*) and the Beethoven example of Figure 14.

Using the trope (swerve of meaning) as a theoretical model for recognizing historical changes in musical practice, we can identify such a trope in the meaning of repetition: an earlier vocal practice (a musical figure of emphasis) is troped by a later instrumental practice (marking time and stating motive), such that a single technique experiences a change (a swerve) in musical meaning.⁶⁹

2. *Sentence (as trope of Fortspinnung phrase type).*

Defining "phrase" has also been a theoretical problem in the sense of our theoretical predicament sketched above. The practice of reduction—taking one aspect of a musical event as definitive of the entire event—is evident in Koch's method of identifying phrases based on their closing harmony (*Quintabsatz*, *Grundabsatz*), and on their degree of closure (*Einschnitt*, *Satz*, *Schlußsatz*); in both cases, he proceeds without considering the melodic contour or melodic path that constitutes the phrase. The "Satz" phrase type (usually translated as "sentence," following Schoenberg), widely used today in music analysis, offers a good example of our theoretical predicament as I am defining it. From its first appearance, in the writings of A. B. Marx, until its most recent role in the formal-functions approach of Ratz and Caplin, the "sentence" has had an eight-measure theoretical norm. Even Schoenberg, who was perhaps most influential in extend-

⁶⁹ Dahlhaus explains this as a difference between compositional paradigms, an earlier "Prosamelodik" followed by an instrumental "Korrespondenzmelodik" (Dahlhaus, "Melodie," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. [1994], 6: 49. These terms originate in Heinrich Bessler, *Das musikalische Hören der Neuzeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959).

FIGURE 15. Sentence phrase types in two Beethoven sonatas, from Schoenberg, *Fundamentals*, 63

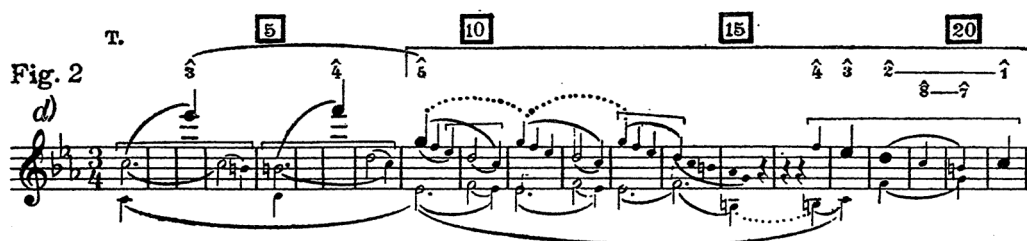
The figure displays musical notation for two examples of sentence phrase types. Part b) Op. 2/3-I shows measures 1 through 5. Measures 1-2 are labeled 'tonic form' and measures 3-5 are labeled 'dominant form'. Part c) Op. 10/1-I shows measures 6 through 16. Measures 6-8 are labeled 'condensed residues', measures 9-10 are labeled 'tonic form', measures 11-12 are labeled 'dominant form', and measures 13-16 are labeled 'residues in scale form'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'f' and 'f¹'.

ing the circulation of this term, and who applies it with flexibility beyond the eight-bar prototype, nevertheless still identifies it as a norm. Paradoxically, the majority of his own (allegro) examples exceed the prototype, to the extent that they begin to question the legitimacy of the norm itself.⁷⁰ The examples of Figure 15 are typical.

In Beethoven's Op. 2/3, first movement, Schoenberg simply omits the additional four bars of continuation, which reiterate much of mm. 5–8 but conclude with a PAC, giving the larger twelve-measure phrase (or thirteen, with the overlapping downbeat cadence) a much more

⁷⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 58–65: seventeen of his thirty-seven sentence examples exceed the eight-bar model. Even Schoenberg's classic example of the sentence, Beethoven's Op. 2/1, I, is from a certain perspective incomplete: it ends only with a half cadence (m. 8), and then continues as if an eight-bar consequent phrase follows, which then becomes transition and modulates to the secondary key of the exposition (a situation Marx identifies as uniquely appropriate to the mobile thematic configurations of sonata form; see Marx, *Musical Form in the Age of Beethoven*, 107–109.

FIGURE 16. Schenker, “Further Considerations of the Urlinie: I” (*The Masterwork in Music I*, 106): portion of sketch of Op. 10/1, i



definitive sense of closure and coherence. For Op. 10/1, first movement, Schoenberg shows enough of the phrase to illustrate his well-known concept of liquidation, but does not follow it through to its cadence, which arrives only in m. 21. Compare this with part of Schenker’s sketch of the same phrase (Figure 16), which emphasizes the melodic/tonal closure of the larger phrase rather than its sentence-like features. In both phrases, the sense of an eight-bar norm (or its compound) is nowhere apparent. While we could make exceptions for cases of expansion, Schoenberg’s own examples in *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* suggest that expansion itself is the norm, and that the eight-bar version is a theoretical simplification. (At one point he calls it a “practice form,” suggesting the pedagogical basis of his theoretical abstraction.) The eight-bar pattern is frequently part of a larger whole and calls into question the theoretical status of the narrowly defined type.

These observations raise significant questions about what kind of unit the sentence is, for it becomes clear that confining it to eight bars overlooks its own history. To answer these questions, we must expand our *concept* of the sentence itself—we must recognize its status as an abstraction, rediscover the figures that have been sedimented into its theoretical form, and recover the aesthetic importance of these original contexts. Primarily, this involves returning to the features of the *Fortspinnung* phrase type, as defined in 1915 by Wilhelm Fischer, and probing into the roles of its features within specific musical contexts. In fact, Webern (in *Path to*

the New Music) identified the “sentence” as a *Fortspinnung* phrase by using the exact passage that Fischer had used to define it several years earlier (Bach, English Suite No. 2, Sarabande, mm. 1–8). Taking the sentence as a trope of the earlier *Fortspinnung* phrase type therefore becomes a theoretical solution to acknowledging the intertwined history of these two phrase models. A new theoretical model, in other words, is one that contains both types, in the dynamic state of the trope (substitution) which traces shared features yet recognizes changes of meaning. A complete exposition of this new theoretical model exceeds the scope of this essay, but I can sketch its outline briefly. We can trace, for example, how repetition continues to be an essential feature of this phrase trope, but an earlier compositional objective of repetition (establishing levels of the metric hierarchy and frequently embodying dialogue) is troped by repetition more directly embodying the abstract play of motive. We can also trace how the role of cadential extension (related to the epilogue in the *Fortspinnung* phrase model) acquires a new meaning in the music of later composers, in the significant expansion of post-cadential passages, codettas, and codas. Interestingly, these are frequently excluded from sentence syntax. (See Figure 17; the material labeled *d* would fall outside of Schoenberg’s sentence phrase type, even though at that moment the left hand plays the opening motive in the key of the dominant, which clearly groups the entire passage together as a unified section.)

The sentence and period phrase types are therefore vivid illustrations of two aspects of the theoretical predicament I have been uncovering in the history of tonal theory: a rhythmic aspect of the sentence pattern was bundled with the motivic and harmonic profile and abstracted into a theoretical model, leaving out the important ways in which eight measures were simply not enough musical space for an adequate musical statement (if we take scores as the evidence of the composers’ viewpoint). In terms of the relationships between parts and whole, this amounts to

FIGURE 17. Bach, French Suite No. 6, Allemande (Fischer, “Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte,” 30)

taking a part and abstracting it as if it adequately represented an aspect of the whole. In contrast, the theoretical model of the period struggles to balance the different features of its normative type (cadence, length, motivic connections), as if they were complementary structural elements when in fact they are more like historical layers sedimented over time and coexisting with new defining features emerging from new compositional practices. In this case, the partial theorizing involves not parts for whole, but one historically specific feature over others. If we allow for the provisional independence of the historical layers of the period (defined above), then we begin to realize the extent to which partial theorizing along a historical plane has affected our abstracted phrase model.

A similar situation exists with our concept of form: around 1800, the older weaker concept of work was troped by a stronger one (the work concept, as elaborated insightfully by Dahlhaus and Goehr), which became heavily invested with aesthetic and cultural values. It is part of the transition from theories of melody (largely informed by rhetoric) to theories of form (increasingly dominated by the concept of structure and theoretical abstraction).

RHETORIC

Our awareness of the importance of rhetoric in understanding tonal music has been well established, previously by the *musica poética* tradition and more recently by its recovery and reinvention.⁷¹ As with sedimentation and trope, my vision of the role of rhetoric here applies less to specific works than to tonal theory as a collection of concepts, techniques, and categories. In particular, rhetoric has a crucial role to play in critiquing these theoretical assumptions, uncovering blind spots in some of our theoretical models. Again, several brief examples will illustrate; they all concern the theoretical blind spots of our standard phrase models, and reveal important rhetorical features of the music that have become marginalized, overlooked, or forgotten by our singular theoretical models. They represent an imbalance in the abstract/concrete dialectical pair, which a rhetorically informed theory can attempt to rebalance. I should be clear here that the phrase models do not deny the following features, they are simply theoretically indifferent to them, the figures are simply transparent. These examples thus signal significant gaps in tonal theory, due in part to the abstractions elaborated above, and also to the separation of technique and aesthetics. Phrase models are a revealing area because the phrase itself serves as a nexus where problems related to melody and form intersect, a theoretical site where models, definitions, and overall issues of genre frequently collide.

1. Opening gestures.

Regarding the excerpt of Figure 18, the sentence phrase model has no way of theoretically recognizing the striking motive of the opening two chords; we must supplement an analysis

⁷¹ George J. Buelow, Peter A. Hoyt, and Blake Wilson, "Rhetoric and Music," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online* <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43166>>, accessed 24 June 2012; Patrick McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," in *CHWMT*. See also Daniel Harrison, "Rhetoric and Fugue: An Analytical Application," *Music Theory Spectrum* 12/1 (1990): 1–42; and Karl Braunschweig, "Rhetorical Types of Phrase Expansion in the Music of J. S. Bach," *Intégral* 18/19 (2004/2005): 71–111.

FIGURE 18. Beethoven, Op. 59/2, i: opening measures



FIGURE 19. Beethoven, Op. 31/3, i: opening measures



of “sentence” phrase type with an observation about the opening chords, as an opening gesture, and as introducing a motive that returns at crucial moments within the overall form, and therefore is—strictly speaking—part of the phrase. (It is unsatisfactory to simply declare the initial measure as an introductory motive, separate from the basic phrase of the theme, because it is immediately apparent that Beethoven has woven them together: the ascending fifth E–B of m. 1 is composed-out in m. 3 in the initial statement of the “sentence” phrase type.) The sentence model also has no way of recognizing the special rhetorical character of the pregnant pauses between each of the two-bar thematic motives; this observation must be supplementary in nature, not part of the theoretical model. Similar points could be made of other opening gestures (e.g., Beethoven’s Op. 10/3, first movement), or of highly contrasting gestures (e.g., Beethoven’s Second Symphony, finale), or the thematic use of unison gestures.

Closely related to the problem of recognizing opening gestures is the issue of off-tonic beginnings, which Marx could only define as something other than a standard period (see Figure

19). Recognizing the rhetoric at work in this example could avoid retreating to an “other” category.

2. Interactions (genre conventions).

Another blind spot in our standard phrase models is a theoretical indifference to the vivid interaction of parts, in the various forms of dialogue, call–response, and other specific interactions between a primary melodic voice and a bass or countermelody. In the except of Figure 20, the segment pairing (4+4, 4+4) is obvious enough,⁷² but our phrase models have no formal way of recognizing the vivid call and response between instruments. Yet this is the only way to account for the true phrase syntax of this passage, and it is an essential embodiment of the aesthetic aspect of chamber music that is often described as conversation, dialogue, or learned discourse.

3. Important, poetic moments.

Our standard phrase models are also less qualified to recognize important moments of specific genres, or of highly charged moments of foreshadowing or implication. In the passage of Figure 21, the dissonant chord in m. 3 is clearly an important moment in the opening phrase, but it cannot be recognized as such by the normative phrase models, any more than can its implication (or foreshadowing) for its intensified and expanded return in the final section of the ternary form (m. 43*ff.*), which occurs at a point of climax with a significant phrase expansion.

⁷² William Caplin identifies mm. 1–28 as a small ternary in which (1) the final eight bars are hybrid phrase type (c.b.i.+consequent), and (2) there is a “retransition” (V of home key) added at the end of the “contrasting middle.” There is no mention of the call–response exchange of musical material, nor of the possible “redundancy” of the four-bar motive (if not accounting for the interaction of parts). See Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61–62, and 269 n. 28.

FIGURE 20. Beethoven, Quartet, Op. 18/2, iv: first section

Allegro molto quasi Presto.


The musical score for Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 18/2, iv: first section, is presented in three systems. The first system shows the initial measures with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system shows a crescendo (*cresc.*) leading to a forte (*f*) dynamic. The third system shows a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

FIGURE 21. Beethoven, Sonata Op. 14/1, ii: opening measures

Allegretto.

The musical score for Beethoven's Sonata Op. 14/1, ii: opening measures, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the initial measures with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system shows a forte (*sf*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The formal significance of many similar figures has been overlooked in twentieth-century theories of sonata form, which typically fail to distinguish between the conventions of the sonata and the symphony even though this important difference was explicitly addressed in earlier treatises. Koch, for example, identifies two essential differences between the phrase structure of the sonata and the symphony: briefly, that in the symphony “melodic sections tend to be more extended already with their first presentation than in other compositions,” and further that these sections tend to be joined “so that their phrase-endings are less perceptible,” overlapping a cadence with the beginning of the following phrase, or evading the cadence entirely until the end of the larger section.⁷³ Phrase extensions and overlapping or evaded cadences are all musical-rhetorical figures that are part of the unique features of a piece and its genre. Jens Peter Larsen and Michael Broyles add additional observations surrounding the notion of “character,” including the assertion that the polarity between “themes” in a keyboard sonata is more of a contrast between ritornello and episode in the symphony, suggesting the strong influence of the concerto on the latter but not the former.⁷⁴ These figures, too, are part of the musical rhetoric that is an inseparable part of the meaning of specific pieces and their genres. Rhetoric thus offers a way of recovering some of these finer distinctions between genres and works, which have not yet become part of our formal theories of sonata form.



My sketches of the three approaches have been necessarily brief, but have served to illustrate the potential they have to reconnect theoretical abstractions with historical, secondary, and

⁷³ Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition*, vols. 1–3 (Rudolstadt and Leipzig, 1782–93), trans. Nancy Baker, in Koch, *Introductory Essay on Composition: Sections 3 and 4: The Mechanical Rules of Melody* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 199.

⁷⁴ Jens Peter Larsen, “Sonata Form Problems,” in *Handel, Haydn, and the Viennese Classical Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 276.

idiomatic functions. As I argued earlier, abstraction itself is not a theoretical problem; rather, it is that abstracted theoretical models tend to imbalance dialectical pairs that cooperatively cover the wide variety of music and its meanings in a much more complete and empirically accurate way. Reconnecting theoretical knowledge with history and with secondary and idiomatic features becomes a way to recover a dialectical basis for musical knowledge itself. While it does entail potential changes in how we do analysis, it is primarily a (paradigm) shift in how we conceive of tonal theory itself, replacing a self-limiting reductive system with one which rediscovers important extensions of musical meaning in multiple dimensions, and is able to recognize history as an integral part of its principles and procedures.

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ABSTRACT

A critical rethinking of disciplinary tendencies in music theory reveals several important historical moments when the process of abstraction has reshaped aspects of tonal theory in profound ways, notably in the areas of counterpoint, harmony, and form. These moments of abstraction prioritize one musical feature over others, and frequently involve a discursive process of dissociation to solidify the legitimacy of the abstraction and resolve lingering logical contradictions. This often leads to a theoretical and historical distancing from the contexts in which certain practices emerged, and risks severing aesthetic connections between technique and meaning. The resulting imbalance in one or more of three dialectical pairs has additional disciplinary consequences, and invites renewed interest in three theoretical perspectives that can recognize changing musical concepts and at the same time recover some of the latent meanings buried in tonal music. These perspectives have received some attention in recent music analysis; in this article I wish to call attention to their deeper disciplinary role in compensating theoretical abstraction and dialectically mapping our theoretical field.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karl Braunschweig is Associate Professor of Music Theory and Area Coordinator for Theory, History, and Composition at Wayne State University. He specializes in new approaches to the history of theory, and in several unique intersections of history, theory, and aesthetics in tonal music. His articles and review-essays have appeared in *Music Theory Spectrum*, *Journal of Music Theory*, *Acta Musicologica*, *Theory and Practice*, and *Intégral*; he has served on the SMT Publication Awards Committee and currently serves on the editorial board of *Intégral*. He has twice been a fellow at the Mannes Institute for Advanced Studies in Music Theory: for history of theory (2002) and the aesthetics of music (2010).

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