Heinrich Schenker’s theoretical and analytical works claim to substantiate the unique artistic presence of the canonic work, and thus reject those musical disciplines such as psychoacoustics and systematic musicology which derive from the natural sciences. In this respect his writing reflects the counter-positivism endemic to the German academic discourse of the first decades of the twentieth century. The rhetoric of this stance, however, conceals a sophisticated program wherein Schenker situates his project in relation to these sciences, arguing his reading of the musical text as a synthesis of a descriptive psychology and an explanatory historiography (which itself embeds both paleographic and philological assumptions). This program is bound up with Schenker’s ideological agenda, various aspects of which (the closure of the canon, the filiation of his theory with eighteenth-century predecessors, the dismissal of other theorists and of modern music) are enabled by conceiving this synthesis as a representation of and substitution for the modern musical discourse. This book rereads Schenker’s project as an attempt to reconstruct music theory as a discipline against the background of the new empirical musical sciences of the later nineteenth century.
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SCHENKER’S ARGUMENT AND THE CLAIMS OF MUSIC THEORY

LESLIE DAVID BLASIUS
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FOREWORD BY IAN BENT

Theory and analysis are in one sense reciprocals: if analysis opens up a musical structure or style to inspection, inventorying its components, identifying its connective forces, providing a description adequate to some live experience, then theory generalizes from such data, predicting what the analyst will find in other cases within a given structural or stylistic orbit, devising systems by which other works — as yet unwritten — might be generated. Conversely, if theory intuits how musical systems operate, then analysis furnishes feedback to such imaginative intuitions, rendering them more insightful. In this sense, they are like two hemispheres that fit together to form a globe (or cerebrum!), functioning deductively as investigation and abstraction, inductively as hypothesis and verification, and in practice forming a chain of alternating activities.

Professionally, on the other hand, “theory” now denotes a whole subdiscipline of the general field of musicology. Analysis often appears to be a subordinate category within the larger activity of theory. After all, there is theory that does not require analysis. Theorists may engage in building systems or formulating strategies for use by composers; and these almost by definition have no use for analysis. Others may conduct experimental research into the sound-materials of music or the cognitive processes of the human mind, to which analysis may be wholly inappropriate. And on the other hand, historians habitually use analysis as a tool for understanding the classes of compositions — repertories, “outputs,” “periods,” works, versions, sketches, and so forth — that they study. Professionally, then, our ideal image of twin hemispheres is replaced by an intersection: an area that exists in common between two subdisciplines.

Seen from this viewpoint, analysis reciprocates in two directions: with certain kinds of theoretical enquiry, and with certain kinds of historical inquiry. In the former case, analysis has tended to be used in rather orthodox modes, in the latter in a more eclectic fashion; but that does not
mean that analysis in the service of theory is necessarily more exact, more “scientific,” than analysis in the service of history.

The above epistemological excursion is by no means irrelevant to the present series. Cambridge Studies in Music Theory and Analysis is intended to present the work of theorists and of analysts. It has been designed to include “pure” theory – that is, theoretical formulation with a minimum of analytical exemplification; “pure” analysis – that is, practical analysis with a minimum of theoretical underpinning; and writings that fall at points along the spectrum between the two extremes. In these capacities, it aims to illuminate music, as work and as process.

However, theory and analysis are not the exclusive preserves of the present day. As subjects in their own right, they are diachronic. The former is coeval with the very study of music itself, and extends far beyond the confines of Western culture; the latter, defined broadly, has several centuries of past practice. Moreover, they have been dynamic, not static fields throughout their histories. Consequently, studying earlier music through the eyes of its own contemporary theory helps us to escape (when we need to, not that we should make a dogma out of it) from the preconceptions of our own age. Studying earlier analyses does this too, and in a particularly sharply focused way; at the same time it gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate past analytical methods for present purposes, such as is happening currently, for example, with the long-despised methods of hermeneutic analysis of the late nineteenth century. The series thus includes editions and translations of major works of past theory, and also studies in the history of theory.

_Schenker’s Argument_ takes as its primary domain the three central "theoretical" texts of that theorist’s output: _Harmony_ (1906), _Counterpoint_ (1910, 1922), and _Free Composition_ (1935) — collectively titled his “New Musical Theories and Fantasies” — together with an earlier essay on C. P. E. Bach’s ornamentation (1904). Leslie Blasius sets himself the daunting task of placing these four works within their larger intellectual context — or, as he would put it, “situating” them within “the world of musical discourses.” In so doing, he reviews the growth of the science of psychology, and advances of the field of philology and economics, in the nineteenth century; also the rise of music criticism in the early nineteenth century, and of textual musicology and of performance practice as would-be sciences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Blasius offers a refreshing exploration of Schenker’s theory — or rather,
Foreword

of what made Schenker's theory what it came to be over the thirty years of its inception. He proceeds by a series of investigative moves that thrusts the reader ever deeper into the world of Schenker's thought. Sometimes he pursues false trails (knowingly, I hasten to add) and has to retrace his steps, sometimes he reaches a goal only to find that it provides a temporary or misleading answer, but oftentimes he is rewarded by brilliant insight. On this journey, which has an almost mythic quality to it, he discovers distinctions of which we were unaware, links that we did not suspect, and areas of argument that we never knew existed. The adventure yields numerous surprises and affords some moments of sheer revelation.

In the course of this journey, we come across many different Schenkers: Schenker the historian, Schenker the anti-historian, the editor, the pianist, the performer, the interpreter, the private teacher, the theorist, the ideologue, the canonist, the radical, the conservative . . . Each one we encounter with startling intimacy, as we see them in conjunction with contemporaries such as Edmund Husserl, Wilhelm Dilthey, Hugo Riemann, Guido Adler, and Hans von Bülow, with figures of the past such as Fux, Bach, and Rameau, and tellingly also with figures of the future such as Milton Babbitt, Allen Forte, and Joseph Kerman.

In this book, Blasius has been able to capitalize on the work done by Michel Foucault in constructing an "archeology" of the human sciences. Foucault's enterprise sought to penetrate beneath the world of individual scientists and thinkers, of singular discoveries and specific theories, to a deeper stratum (he called it a "space") at which disciplines that on the surface appear to function very differently can be seen to have profound similarities of behavior ("isomorphisms"), a stratum at which for a particular period the very laws of knowledge themselves operate, and accordingly at which between periods momentous changes take place that range across the face of human knowledge. Blasius's picture of Schenker's world, while in no way derivative, is seen against Foucault's portrayal of the mighty change that occurred between the Classical period and the nineteenth century.

This wonderfully intelligent and clear-thinking book, the thesis of which is presented as a single trajectory to which the footnotes provide an accompanying commentary of almost matching length, enables us for the first time to see the full range of Schenker's thought as a single endeavor.
PREFACE

Among all of the possible theories of music theory, I like to imagine that there is one which might stem from a sociology of the musical discourse (the body of writings in and about music as a whole) and its institutional manifestations. Music theory, within such a sociology, would be defined as a social construction or as a type group behavior rather than as an explanatory mode, and its characteristics explicated in terms of its relations with other group behaviors (such as historical musicology, composition, or musical criticism). Such an investigation might assemble an empirical apparatus of such things as questionnaires, field interviews, and the examination of publication records and hiring and tenure practices, analyze this data in terms of local systems of scales and correlations, and arrive at hypothetical structures of competition and accommodation. Among plausible local studies I can imagine one that attempts to correlate over a specific span of time composers’ claims to a theoretical justification for their practice with (let us say) theorists’ claims for access to an experiential rather than abstract truth. I can imagine another that examines the institutionalization of different discourses (such as the assignment of a pedagogical priority to music theory and a disciplinary superiority to historical musicology) and the social hierarchies implied by this institutionalization, or a third that reconstructs the ways in which music theory, historical musicology, and music criticism arrive at a division of the corpus of music and the dynamics which underlie this division.

While this hypothetical sociology, were it a reality, might tell us more than we would wish to know, its plausibility points up certain intuitive truths. Music theory (and I use this term loosely, subsuming analysis within theory), almost more than any other strand within the musical discourse, must argue its situation and validity to the world at large. The arguments it makes enable it to gain or retain status at the expense of other studies, to form or break alliances, to construct itself around coherent and unifying methodologies, to create internal hierarchies, and periodically to recenter
itself. Some of the strategies it uses to accomplish these tasks are obvious. Music theory (in its analytic practice) can at times lay claim to a vicarious creativity or concreteness denied historical musicology. It constructs specialized vocabularies with which those outside of the theoretical community must come to terms. (Often the success of a theory is indicated by the widespread adoption of its particular technical vocabulary.) It appeals frequently to outside (non-musical) authorities – information theory, psychology, semiotics, phenomenology, cognitive science, feminism, or the like – which stand beyond challenge.

Ultimately, however, the arguments put forward by music theory are uniquely epistemological, deriving from a continuing self-reflection on its own status as musical knowledge, on its grounding in an objective reality. Other domains of the musical discourse are self-reflective. Historical musicology questions its status as an explanatory or critical investigation or questions the place and function of its historiographical narratology; and comparative musicology (ethnomusicology) engages in a seemingly endless internal critique of its assumptions, methods, and ideologies. These investigations have at their respective cores, however, a cluster of empirical disciplines – archival research, paleography, textual criticism, field reporting. The particulars of evidence they marshal – the archival entry, the scribal practice, the informant’s response – are ultimately and unquestionably factual. Thus, at some level they need never justify their status as knowledge, only the validity of their motivations and interpretations. By contrast, music theory is caught always between the demands that (on the one hand) it report true musical intuitions and (on the other) convince us that these intuitions are real; and even at the most atomic level the “evidence” of theory (be it pitch relations or chords or linear spans) is always constructed rather than factual. Hence music theory finds itself in a state of chronic (if frequently low-level) epistemological crisis. By directly questioning its own basis as a system of knowledge, though, theory can aspire to a priority within the musical discourse, and can claim to examine music before it becomes available to the empirical studies of music.

In fact, we recall quite well that a sophisticated formalism, an attempt to recenter the discourse on unimpeachable epistemological foundations, won for music theory its modern place in the American academy. Admittedly, many of the theorists of the 1960s were concerned with gaining an academic status for musical composition, and thus in a sense coopted music theory as a reflective, pre-compositional activity. This strategy, however, would not have been successful had their theoretical
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The project itself not made radical and striking claims, claims derived from Babbitt's program for an epistemological critique of music theory, its language and suppositions, its structure and internal coherence. The authority of music theory was in fact to derive directly from its self-knowledge, its capacity to (in a sense) be present at its own creation.

It is questionable, though, whether the formalist theorist's bid for an institutional prestige and autonomy would have succeeded without the coincident and charismatic renaissance of the half-century-old music theory of Heinrich Schenker. (This is not to deny that independent “Schenkerian” circles and a more pragmatic middle-group of theorists led by Allen Forte did most of the work of explicating and disseminating Schenker, yet I think it doubtful that Schenker's theory in isolation would have captured such a prominent place in the musical discourse.) This coincidence made for a convenient alliance (if not an alliance of convenience). Schenker's theory, through its analytic practice, made strong claims on musical experience, securing the formalist theorists' flank while they concentrated on theory construction. It held out a complexly ramified explication for the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thus implicitly promising an equivalent explication applicable to twentieth-century music. Pragmatically (or politically), it rendered traditional harmonic analysis inadequate or obsolete, thus calling into question an analysis comfortably situated in the methodological heart of music theory's institutional rival, historical musicology.

In two respects, however, this alliance on reflection seems very curious. The first is trivial: Schenker would deny the possibility of further composition, and is indeed strikingly anti-modern in his rhetoric. The second is more striking: The epistemological underpinnings of Schenker's theory are far from obvious. That such underpinnings must exist is evidenced by the claims and demands he makes particularly in his later works: music is to be heard according to the principles he sets out; one must learn and internalize these principles if one is truly to experience the masterwork; some music cannot be experienced in this way (and is therefore, in one sense, not music); other investigations of music must presuppose this experience in order to arrive at a true knowledge. Yet he almost goes out of his way to foreclose any justification for these claims (or his justifications are ideological rather than epistemological).

That Schenker's theory justifies itself by its uncovering of certain musical intuitions is a given. That there is a contradiction between our expectation of some epistemological argument and Schenker's frustration of such is
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evidenced by a complex of receptions ranging from attempts to represent his theory as a phenomenology or as a sort of proto-generative grammar to attempts to reconstruct his analysis as a formal logic, and by a complex of accommodations or partial readings which take his analysis to be suggestive rather than definitive of a theory of hearing.

The premise of this work, however, is that Schenker has his own epistemology (in the informal sense of the term), one which is masked or displaced from the surface of his texts by ideological manifestos and the like, but which is crucial to the success (both analytic and institutional) enjoyed by his theory. While his rhetoric would seem to foreclose an epistemological reading, it would be unreasonable to assume that the burden of justifying his theory (in a world full of competing music theories, all of which he dismisses) is adequately shouldered only by his ideological postures, and to assume that he does not make some more sophisticated (if implicit) argument for the situation of his text within the world of musical discourses. Indeed, the world of theory is one which would have demanded such an argument. The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnesses a re-creation of the musical discourse in the grand projects of such figures as Helmholtz, Riemann, Wundt, Stumpf, Macquereau, and Adler. In particular, the study of music gains status within the intellectual world at large through the constitution of two great empirical sciences—the investigation of the psychology of perception (with its foundation in psychoacoustics) and systematic musicology. Figures such as Schering, Wagner, Ludwig, Schoenberg, von Hornbostel, and Kurth in the first quarter of the new century elaborate the work of their predecessors and venture new projects such as comparative musicology (ethnomusicology) and a musical hermeneutics. The place of music theory within this evolving and complex discourse (let alone its relation to a rapidly evolving compositional practice) is complex and delicate. Theory would seem, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the principal beneficiary of the turn to empiricism, recreating itself through a rhetorical alliance with the new musical psychology. Within a generation, however, the contradiction inherent to this alliance, the implausibility of any coherent extrapolation between empirical psychology and music theory comes to the surface, leaving in its wake a theory which both cures the authority of science and yet has abandoned its naive faith in empiricism. Further to unsettle the situation, systematic musicology and the study of musical perception not only constitute themselves as empirical investigations in a way impossible for music theory, but recover or discover musics (and music theories) for
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which the received doctrines of music theory can provide but scattered and inadequate descriptions. Concomitantly, they undercut the conception of a theory that is simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive. In fact, they would almost create new investigations (such as the comparative study of musical origins, and the reconstruction of music criticism as a hermeneutics) that at some philosophical level compete for music theory’s place as a foundational discipline.

It is in this situation that we locate Schenker. In his writings he places his work above or beyond this myriad of new musical sciences and investigations. It is not difficult for us to enumerate reasons for this stance. Given what we can surmise from Schenker’s rhetoric about his situation, his sense of rejection, his sense of standing outside the powerful and secure halls of the academy, it is not difficult to see why he feels compelled to claim a kinship with the masters which has been lost by the academicians. (The figures cited above were all successful academics, and all occupied positions of authority. Perhaps significantly, I do not believe that any were Jewish.) Nor should we discount the attractions of a fashionable and general reaction against the positivism of the new musical sciences in the first half of the new century. Yet the very certainty with which Schenker (for whatever reason) dismisses the scientific study of music gives us cause to suspect that at some level his rhetoric conceals a powerful and ramified engagement with the claims of these very investigations that he professes to deny.

As the thesis of this study, therefore, I proceed from the assumption that Schenker’s late analysis entails a powerful if unacknowledged epistemological argument, directed first (and most obviously) at the psychologies of music perception available at the opening of the new century, and second (and more importantly) at the sciences of history which flourished simultaneously, and that the strength of his argument is to be found in the combination of these two strands. I assume (as a very schematic historical a priori) that we can trace the formation of this argument in his earlier work, and that the evidence of this formation can be extrapolated from those passages which refer (if only obliquely) to investigations which stand outside of music theory, and that this argument is ultimately revealing (in its similarities and differences) of the sort of arguments music theory must assert in order to situate itself within the general musical discourse.

Several points need to be made in regards to this agenda. First, this is a critical rather than explicatory or hermeneutic study. Schenker’s theory comes under question in terms of its relations with other investigations...
rather than as a thing in itself (either as the product of a particular psychology or ideology or as a location in which music is directly addressed). Methodologically, this involves a double bracketing or exclusion, first of the sort of personal or ideological considerations that would be the province of the biographer, and second of the particulars of his theory (scale-steps, unfoldings, the workings of different levels, and the like) that are the province of the music theorist. The Schenker who remains (and comes under examination) is thus an abstract agent within what we might loosely think of as an epistemological economy (i.e. an exchange of arguments as to what constitutes musical knowledge), and the formation of his argument is reconstructed as a series of transactions (overtures, appropriations, rejections) he makes with a field of other investigations.

Second, the fact that this is a critical study determines a somewhat unorthodox style of presentation. Schenker’s argument itself is reconstructed (theoretically) within the text. The footnotes and bibliography (beyond their traditional function) constitute a complementary text which locates Schenker’s argument within a constellation of other arguments. In other words, at many points the footnotes reconnoiter a discursive terrain which I believe surrounds Schenker’s text.

Third, I assume an intertextuality which is not customary to the study of the history of music theory. It would be of intrinsic interest to have a better grasp of what Schenker has read and which figures within the musical discourse at large most occupy him. If Schenker, however, is taken as but one agent within a large epistemological economy (in which every agent is engaged in making some sort of argument), we can assume that there exists a certain body of implicit rules governing the transactions among these agents, that there must be a general consensus about which arguments make sense and which do not, which are effective and which are not. Thus I do not feel it necessary to pursue such normative causal ideas as “influence” or “borrowing” or the like. Rather, I think that in looking (if only quickly) at what sort of work stands alongside that of Schenker, in looking for coincidences, for other arguments, for indications of the respective prestige of other projects, for transactions between other projects, we stand to gain a sense of this body of implicit discursive rules, and a sense of how Schenker uses them to his advantage.

Fourth, I assume that this intertextuality (taken here in the true sense of the word) operates at a different level. I think that the discursive rules that underlie the epistemological economy of music in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first portion of the twentieth continue to hold
to the present. While the substance of the arguments made has to some extent changed, the structure of rules that governs these arguments has not. Were this not the case, I believe that Schenker would today have no more standing than (let us say) Kirnberger or Rameau. On occasion in the first two sections of this text, the footnotes stray outside of the historical bounds of the particular text of Schenker that is under discussion when a path leads interestingly to more recent work. Within the third section of this study, however, I bring Schenker's argument wholly into an engagement with our own discourse about music. This motion hinges on a quick reading of the epistemological archeology of Michel Foucault which I believe provides an insightful map of the epistemological dispositions of the modern human sciences which can be extrapolated to the musical discourse. (This entire work is to some degree informed by Foucault. I make rather more of the psychologism of the later nineteenth century than does he in the first section of my argument, and rather less of the historical consciousness in the second.) Several purposes are served by this move. We gain a purchase on the engagement between Schenker's theory and the epistemologically reflective music theories which came into being in the 1960s, and arrive at a rather different reading of Schenker's appropriation by the modern theoretical community. We also come to see a curious engagement between Schenker's theory and the work of some of the more radical theorists of the later 1970s, and we bring Schenker's analysis into a rather charged encounter with the discipline of music criticism, and ultimately into an encounter with a rather remote critical theory.

Lastly, I would note that the double exclusion which constitutes the methodological premise of this study (the deferral of an explication of his theory and of its hermeneutics) is not absolute. It is impossible to study Schenker's writings from even a very abstract vantage and not arrive at some sort of explication for the particulars of his theory such as strata and prolongation. Nor is it possible to leave his personality and (in particular) his ideology unremarked. Accordingly, the final section of this study brings Schenker's ideology into play, not to explain it, but to demonstrate how his ideological argument operates on his epistemological argument in order to give us the Schenker we know today.

A book (particularly one which has gone through a lengthy gestation) is never completely the product of a single author, and this particular work could not have come into being without the support and contributions of many individuals. Peter Westergaard and Scott Burnham ably critiqued
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many of the ideas contained herein as they arose in conference papers and
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