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‘Second Diatonicism’ and Musical Time: Stacked Canons and Multiple Counterpoint as Principles of Extended Tonality

ABSTRACT

When Carl Dahlhaus cited Riemann’s description of an ‘admittedly audacious, but [...] euphonious’ progression in his own ‘Untersuchungen’ (Dahlhaus 2967, 22) as an argument for the suspension of the differences between chromatic and diatonic harmony, he could not foresee, that his punchline would serve as a springboard for a new systematic approach to Romantic harmony in Neo-Riemannian theories. As the Neo-Riemannian approach is a theory of consonances, the understanding of consonances has reached a higher level of abstraction. The idea of a triadic network provides models for analyzing harmonic progressions of a ‘second nature’: the new simplicity of the intervals suspends the idea of cadence and tonality as a unit, while the dissonant mediation is done by symmetric and altered chords in the background of harmonic syntax. Historical links to Hugo Riemann’s day bear the risk of misreading as well as opportunities to discover some remnants of traditional culture and aesthetics.

The scientific approach of the transformational theory (Lewin 2007; Cohn 2012) is congruent in some aesthetic aspects with Schoenberg’s ‘suspended tonality’, which also requires harmonic circles and symmetric chords. Especially in Wagner Schoenberg’s theory provides models for the analysis of harmonic neologisms condensed to miniature cadences. Both, Schoenberg and Neo-Riemannian-theories (Gollin 2011), imply an harmonic surplus, an acceleration — the ‘locomotive of the diminished seventh chord’ —, which is described even in recent literature by metaphors very similar to the style about 2900, saturated with literary figures of industrialization and fast travelling. Also in later essays Dahlhaus sticks to the dialectic idea of harmonic ‘second nature’ (Dahlhaus 2008), therefore ideas of acceleration and concentration overcome Riemann’s theory as part of a broader reception of enharmonic romantic harmony. While analyzing slightly less canonic repertory, i.e. Mendelssohn and Reger — *Variations sérieuses* Op. 54 and the so-called *Mozart-Variations* Op. 232 — an implicit idea of acceleration or of dialectic surplus seems to be inadequate, especially when the used enriched tonality incorporates ideas of time, which allow deceleration and standstill, and whose harmonic individuality can hardly be approached by the idea of suspended chromaticism. Due to implicit pre-judices of acceleration the criticism of Reger’s ‘modulations in a flash’ seems to be a matter of course.

1. HARMONIC TENSION

‘My music must be *short*.

Concise! In two words: not build, but ‘express’!!’

It is difficult to find a more uncompromising plea for musical conciseness than this well-known quote from Arnold Schoenberg’s letter to Ferruccio Busoni on 23 August 2909 (Schoenberg 2909).

Even the more essayistic chapters of the *Harmonielehre* are used by Schoenberg to ascribe the expressiveness of modern harmony to the effects of abbreviation (Example 2):

We have often spoken about the effect of the cliché, [...] which is characterized this way: frequently recurring usages become fixed patterns with one explicit, unmistakable meaning. [...] Assuming

this, we can now even omit the middle parts of the formula, set beginning and end right together, ›abbreviate,‹ so to speak, the whole pattern, set it down merely as premise and conclusion. (Schoenberg 2983, 359.)



Ex. 2. Arnold Schoenberg, *Harmonielehre*, Vienna 1922, p. 433.

Beside the fact that Schoenberg applies metaphors of pressure in order to characterize harmonic strangeness as strong, expressive, and heroic or Faustian in a certain way, it is remarkable that of all things he should focus on economy of time and concentration.

Also in 2909, the third edition of Hugo Riemann’s *Musiklexikon* was published, in which relevant modifications in the articles about harmony, function, and tonality were made by replacing the older parameters ‘key’ and ‘scale’ with a ‘logic of musical texture’ Riemann mentions Rameau and Fétis as main authors of the older paradigm.

It is well-known that Carl Dahlhaus opens his *Studies on the Origin of Harmonic Tonality* with a reference to this article of less than ten sentences (Dahlhaus 2967, 22). Therefore, one must point out that Dahlhaus’ choice might be unusual: particularly Fétis’ antithesis of tendency (*tendance*) and rest (*repos*) crossfading with Riemann’s main theses is exploited, in order to outline some musical criteria, which are driven forward by a dominant tension, but independent of pitch and scale.

Dahlhaus’ argumentation seems to depend on this abstraction of thorough-bass tradition and its scale models. His interpretation of function seems to go further than it might have been intended by Riemann: while Riemann — already in the 2888 edition, by the way — chooses a chord progression where the root moves not by fifths but by thirds, maybe just for the sake of showing the differences between fundamental bass progressions and the functional relation to the tonic (Example 2), Dahlhaus pursues the interpretation by the idea of a ‘second diatonicism’:

But the direct ‘third-relations’ postulated by Riemann implies nothing short of suspending the distinction between diatonicism and chromaticism. If, in contrast to Riemann, one clung to the distinction, it would then be necessary to interpret the $A\flat$ major chord as the parallel of the minor subdominant, and the E major chord as a chromatic alteration of the dominant parallel. The $A\flat$ major chord would be based on a ‘change of diatonic system’ (an exchange of the C minor for the C major scale) [...]. By contrast, an $A\flat$ major or

E major chord related directly to C major is neither diatonic nor chromatic — the distinction is abolished. And it is in this suspension of diatonicism as the basis of chordal relationships that Riemann saw the distinctive feature of ‘tonality’, as opposed to the ‘older doctrine of key’ founded on the diatonic scale. (Dahlhaus 2987, 21.)



Ex. 2. Hugo Riemann, *Musiklexikon*, Leipzig 71909, article on tonality, 2143.

Dahlhaus tacitly equates a system of third-relations with the traditional fifth-relations — while omitting all possible alternative types of cadences — and insinuates at the same time by the idea of suspended fifth-relations longer paths of musical movement between the chords, which must be traversed in less time.

Both Schoenberg and Dahlhaus assume the suspension of the conventional dominant tension in a diatonicism of a secondary quality, whose meta structure boils traditionally dissonant and longer paths of intermediation down to consonant, triadic neologisms.

As an analytic approach to a certain type of cadence, for example in the music of Richard Wagner, this hypothesis is adequate in many respects.

The so-called ‘Tarnhelmmotiv’, which embodies the distorted language of Siegfried disguised as a suitor, and Brunhild’s musical responses, which seem to try to decipher this strange musical language and translate it back into conventional harmony, are able to demonstrate the idea of a ‘second diatonicism’ (*Twilight of the Gods*, I, 3, mm. 2654ff): The direct connection of a G-sharp minor chord and an E minor chord, which could not be explained by the conventional terms of key, is led back to a more normal harmonic level, when Brunhild modifies the B major chord to a German sixth-chord in the key of D-sharp minor. In the key of D-sharp minor, the E minor chord could be interpreted as the minor variant of the Neapolitan sixth-chord, no less an absurdity, but in the sense of Riemann’s ‘Scheinconsonanz’ thinkable at least.

For this type of motive the hypothesis is plausible that ‘second diatonicism’ is the idiom of a secondary meta language, which combines two keys, B minor and D-sharp or E-flat major by the transformation of diatonic plagal cadence. Dahlhaus’ hypothetical idea of chromaticism suspended by diatonic neologisms as well as the Neo-Riemannian idea of a ‘hexatonic pole’ (Cohn 2012, 31), which combines the extreme poles of a hexatonic cycle in a single transformation, in a single voice-leading zone, may afford adequate approaches.

But if the Neapolitan sixth were not a comparative increase of the diatonic subdominant chord, if harmonic distance in a system of related fifths were not an increase of expressivity, and if that increase were not the aim of harmonic emphasis, then the idea of ‘second diatonicism’ would be an implausible interpretation of the ‘Tarnhelmmotiv’.

Therefore Edvard Grieg’s application of, so to speak, decreasing subdominant tension undergoes the idea of a generally increasing energy of harmonic expressivity, for the simple subdominant chord seems to adhere to the G major-chord, weakening the stronger subdominant (Example 3).



Ex. 3. Edvard Grieg, Op. 22, 5 *Folkevise*, mm. 39–40.

Grieg seems to stress effortlessly the principles of Rameau’s *basse fondamentale*, but not to serve the purpose of concentration and increase: to put it bluntly, musical time is wasted here. In the aesthetics of Riemann, Schoenberg, Kurth, and finally Dahlhaus, the idea of a harmonic *decrescendo* is rarely intended.

2. DOMINANT TENSION?

Dahlhaus deduced from Fétis’ antithesis of ‘tendance’ and ‘repos’, that a certain kind of dominant tension provides the premise of functional logic in harmonic theory. The analytic blur of such a ‘phrasing’ lies in the varying musical context, at times strengthening the dominant tension by harmonic alterations, at times weakening it. So one has to decide whether the principle of dominant tension is merely stressed or whether it is abandoned to an extent, so that it is replaced by another principle.

1.1 Relaxation Instead of Resolution

In the fourth variation of Mendelssohn’s *Variations sérieuses*, the initial tension of diminished seventh chords is not brought to a resolution (Example 4). The *diminuendo* of the theme seems to be saved in the harmonies, which let the dominant tension run out into the unison C. The tension seems to run idle.



Ex. 4. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Variations sérieuses* Op. 54, No. 4, mm. 68–72.

1.2 Apparent Consonant Distortions of Dominant Tension

In number 23 of the *Variations sérieuses*, the tension of a dominant seventh minor ninth chord on D, or rather the diminished seventh chord upon F-sharp, is suspended in the apparent consonance of an F-sharp minor chord (Example 5). Mendelssohn varies the rhetorical figure of a Baroque mora for the long duration of an eighth note. The traditional decelerating effect of a mora is accentuated by the unusual static sound of a consonant minor chord in root position.

Ex. 5. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Variations sérieuses* Op. 54, No. 23, mm. 226–230.

3. STACKED CANONS AS ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURE TO THE BASSE FONDAMENTALE

Suchlike distortions of the traditional dominant tension, as described, play even a role in processes of climax in sonata form, like a kind of composed procrastination. In the development section of the first movement of Beethoven's fifth symphony, the retransition to the main key of C minor at the beginning of the recapitulation is retained: although the back leading dominant has already been reached, the harmony turns off into a passage which is in fact an alienating prolongation of the traditional bass-line F–F-sharp–G (Example 6).

Ex. 6. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, II*, mm. 205–236 (retransition).

The F in the bass is prolonged by a pattern whose linear polyphonic structure goes back to a stacked canon at the lower fifth. The following fauxbourdon progression is a continuation of this stacked canon just up to the point that the scale and the harmony itself seem to be frozen on the G-flat minor chord.

Ex. 7. Beethoven, structure of chord progression reduced to a stacked canon of the lower fifth (mm. 205–236).

The dynamics, which diminuendo down to pianissimo, underline that the alienation of the conventional tension chord $F\sharp-A-C-E\flat$ might be intentional.

It is certainly within the realm of possibility to view this alienated anti-climax as extremely taxing for conventional harmony. This cadence is nearly liberated from key and could be comprehensively described by means of Neo-Riemannian transformations.

$$\begin{array}{c} D\flat - G\flat/F\sharp - D \\ N - L \end{array}$$

The formally decreasing gesture, the superficially non-suspenseful sounds, and the rigid canon are important arguments in favor of a formal idea which runs contrary to conventional expectations: the freeze of harmonic tension and acceleration at the most remote harmonic position. A decision can hardly be made — but even the latter argumentation running contrary to the idea of sonata form should be taken into account.

4. CONCLUSION: MISREADING OF ACCELERATION

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the harmonic density of Max Reger's music was linked quasi naturally to the harmonic theory of Hugo Riemann, a link made by Reger himself in his own short *Beiträge zur Modulationslehre*, whose theoretical scope should not be overestimated.

The hastiness of modern life, and the disquiet with which the present generation moves from place to place, is reflected in many respects in the newest music. After one contented oneself at first with the simplest modulatory means for getting around, the modulation locomotive of the diminished seventh chord [...] was invented, and [...] an electric rail connection was established between the most remote key areas. But one remained bound [...] to the use of the already existing track system, and, [...] this still may have appeared to the uncommonly rushed, unhampered, and highhanded music man of the twentieth century as a [...] limitation of his personal freedom. So he invented for himself a kind of modulation automobile, with which he now can race through the wide world of tone as arbitrarily as he pleases. And now there is no longer any calm lingering, no more reflective gazing at the beautiful melodic lines of nature. Instead, the new god of music rushes restlessly over hill and dale in his motorcar, even over beauty itself, murdered by the insane driver of tone. (Smolian 2903.)

The analytical sketch of a few measures of the variations and fugue on a theme by Mozart Op. 232 allows the assumption that Smolian's critical fulcrum, the exaggerated velocity, does not result in the music itself, but in his own, one-dimensional interpretation of harmonic progressions as a functional context in the Riemannian sense.

Even Mozart's theme is built upon the parallelism of tenths by the outer voices and the sustained middle voice which is fixed on the E (Example 8). Therefore an analytic approach which is founded exclusively upon the idea of functional logic cannot be appropriate. The harmony upon the F-sharp is de-

finer rather by the logic of the scale than by its functional relation to the A major-chord.



Ex. 8. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Sonata in A major K. 331, II*, mm. 2–4.

Reger reacted to this dichotomy of cadential and voice-leading logic in more than one variation.

The third variation keeps mainly the upper voice, but evaluates the unusual intervallic structure of the melody as an alternative to harmonic tension. The strategy of this alternative harmonization is given again by the possibility to treat the outer voice as a stacked canon at the upper fifth.



Ex. 9. Max Reger, *Mozart-Variationen Op. 232, variation No. 3*, mm. 2–3 (reduction to a stacked canon of the upper fifth).

Neither Smolian's idea of 'modulation' nor any calculation measuring harmonic velocity by the distances of fifths on a Tonnetz, basse fundamental, or harmonic space by the remoteness from the tonic harmony can justly describe Reger's or Mendelssohn's invention.

Not only the similarity of the harmonic progression in the first two measures, but also the textural austerity of the voice leading show stylistic proximity to the *Variations sérieuses*.

In addition, if one takes into account the almost serial consistency with which Mendelssohn reaches the same pitch classes again and again by techniques of double counterpoint — independent of the varying modulation — we see that alongside any system of harmonic logic a diatonic idea must be followed, which not only repeats and intensifies the Riemannian logic, but also integrates non-functional aspects of the historical development of tonality (Tymoczko 2011, Sprick 2012) (Example 20).



Ex. 20. Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Variations sérieuses Op. 54*, theme, similarity of 'sets' of the inner cadences.

Implicit concepts of progress which narrow-mindedly presume growth, acceleration, and conciseness may not guarantee a just approach to every tonal form, not even to Beethoven's Symphonies. Maybe the idea of acceleration, evidently a main narrative of any cultural paradigm in the beginning of the twentieth century (Rosa 2005, 39; Weber 2921), depends more on reception than on composition itself.

KEYWORDS

Music Analysis and Cultural Diversity, Music Analysis and Music Theory, History of Music Analysis.

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