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Analyzing Analyses: Towards a Reconciliation of Schenkerism and Riemannism

ABSTRACT

Comparative studies of Schenkerian and Riemannian theories and analytical methods tend to be biased and focused only on the writings of Heinrich Schenker and Hugo Riemann themselves. This paper, by contrast, argues that Anglo-American Schenkerism and European *Funktionstheorie* may cross-fertilize each other in mutually beneficial ways, and that a reconciliation between the two traditions must take as its starting point not the writings of Schenker or Riemann, but the analytical practices in the respective traditions. As a case study, the paper compares Schenkerian and functional analyses of Brahms' Intermezzo in B minor Op. 119 No. 1. It is concluded that, despite some significant differences between the analyses, they may well speak in dialogue with each other in order to analyze both voice leading and chord function. The paper proposes a 'Functional-Schenkerian' analysis that shows interesting convergences between the basic motive uncovered by the Schenkerian method and the oscillation between B minor and D major accentuated by functional analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1907 Heinrich Schenker designated Hugo Riemann as 'the most dangerous music bacillus in Germany' in a private letter to his publisher (Schenker 1907). Today, more than a century later, this conflict manifests itself as a theoretical and methodological border between two traditions: the Schenkerian tradition in Anglo-American music theory and the Riemannian *Funktionstheorie*-tradition in European music theory.[1] Unfortunately, it seems that this schism leads not so much to a healthy methodological pluralism as to two separated paradigms that seem irreconcilable in many aspects. This divide often leads to quarrels and misunderstandings at international conferences, and it entails that a lot of the research based on Schenkerian theory is more or less inaccessible and incomprehensible in Europe — and vice versa.

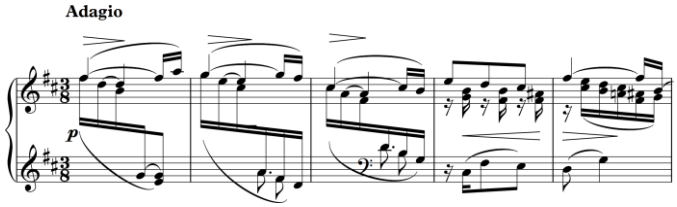
This paper is part of a PhD project that compares the two theoretical and analytical traditions, not in order to declare a winner of the ongoing dispute, but in order to explore how the analytical methods might work together and cross-fertilize each other. Compared to previous comparative studies, such as Silberman (1949), Federhofer (1958, 1981 and 1989), and Redmann (1996), my project differs in several ways. First of all, I find that many of these texts are clearly biased towards one of the traditions. Be that as it may, a more serious shortcoming is that they tend to only compare the theories of Schenker and Riemann — their own writings, that is — and thus overlook or de-emphasize the subsequent analytical traditions that they have established, even though both traditions have evolved and modified the theories, sometimes quite significantly.[2] This leaves pertinent questions unanswered: what are the analytical practices in the two traditions and what consequences do they have for the reading of a musical work? These are some of the questions in my PhD project and this paper.

Taking Johannes Brahms' Intermezzo in B minor Op. 119 No. 1 (1893) as a point of departure, this paper examines how Schenkerian and Riemannian traditions have produced different analyses of this music, and asks how the assumptions made within the theories influence interpretations of the music. The paper also asks whether the analyses can 'speak together' meaningfully. Several analyses of the Intermezzo will be discussed with special attention given to those by Allen Cadwallader (1982 and 1983), representing the Schenkerian viewpoint, and Jens Rasmussen (2011), representing the functional. While not adequately representing their entire analytical tradition, they do exemplify how some analytical points are made valid, or even findable, only through the assumptions made within their respective theories.

Firstly, I will present a few general words about the Intermezzo and the analytical literature's treatment of it. I then proceed to discuss a corpus of Schenkerian analyses of the piece, as well as a corpus of functional analyses. Finally, I discuss the ramifications of the analyses and suggest a tentative synthesis of the approaches.

2. THE INTERMEZZO

The composition in focus, Brahms' B minor Intermezzo, is a piece in ternary form, ABA′. In an overall perspective, the A-parts are in B minor and the B-part in D major. Bars 43–46 function as a retransition from the B- to the A-part. Example 1 shows the initial five bars.



Ex. 1. Brahms' B minor Intermezzo, bars 1–5.

[1] For brevity's sake, I refer to 'Europe' in the meaning 'Europe minus Great Britain', since Great Britain in an overall perspective is part of the Schenkerian tradition.

[2] For instance, Rothstein (1990) talks of an 'Americanization' of Schenker's theory; Cohn (1992) suggests that motives sometimes gain autonomous value in Schenkerian analytical practice, even though Schenker warns against it. In the functional tradition, the changes are obvious: they concern, first and foremost, the abandonment of harmonic dualism, and the subsequent wave of alternative systems of *Funktionsbezeichnungen* (see for instance Imig 1970).

The piece has been analyzed many times with different approaches and is indeed a *locus classicus*, as Daniel Beller-McKenna (2004, 6) has labeled it. This is first and foremost due to the characteristic descending thirds that open the piece and make several harmonic interpretations possible: any row of three, four or five tones can potentially be heard and understood as triads, seventh or ninth chords.

Regardless of method, almost all analyses agree that the initial bars' descending thirds outline a sequence of descending fifths (Newbould 1977; Clements 1977; Cadwallader 1982; 1983; Diergarten 2003; Beller-McKenna 2004; Rasmussen 2011). Usually, this observation is accompanied by a discussion of the uneven metrical distribution of the chords in the sequence; particularly, the D major chord in bars 2–3, the fourth harmony of the sequence, is problematic. For example, Beller-McKenna (2004) interprets an F♯ minor chord in bar 3, breaking the sequence, while Felix Diergarten (2003) suggests two metrical readings of the sequence, both emphasizing the D major chord across the barline. These are only two of the many analyses that discuss exactly these aspects of the piece. The only ones to seriously question the sequence of descending fifths are Jonathan Dunsby (1981) and Stefan Rohringer (2013). They both argue that the sequence cannot be demonstrated in any systematic way because it entails an inconsistency in the level of reduction.

3. THE SCHENKERIAN APPROACH

The Intermezzo has been under the microscope of Schenkerian analysts several times. Schenker himself did an analysis that he never published, but that has been presented in the anthology *Schenker Studies* (Cadwallader and Pastille 1999). Felix Salzer analyzed it in its entirety in *Structural Hearing* (Salzer 1952, 248–51), and Allen Forte and Stephen Gilbert presented two shorter and rougher graphs in *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* (Forte and Gilbert 1982, 215 and 227). A more thorough and comprehensive analysis, which also comments on these earlier analyses, was given by Allen Cadwallader in his PhD dissertation (1982) and a subsequent article (1983).

All of these Schenkerian analyses agree on the *Urlinie* of the Intermezzo: the *Kopfton* is scale degree 5, the first note of the intermezzo, and it is prolonged for almost the entire piece. The structural descent occurs in the last bars: in bar 62, the F♯ has shifted register, and in bar 66, the *Urlinie* lands on scale degree 1.

Forte and Gilbert's analysis shows the *Kopfton*'s neighbor note g as a recurring mode of prolongation. In Salzer's analysis, this neighbor note is approached from above through the tone a, thus creating the motive F♯–A–G–F♯ equivalent to the initial motive of the piece's top voice. Salzer shows that the initial motive is nested within a larger one in the Intermezzo's A-parts, but he makes no further point of this in his almost uncommented analysis, and he does not show the motive in the B-part of the Intermezzo.

The basic motive, F♯–A–G–F♯, is at the core of Cadwallader's analysis. His main point is to show that the motive occurs on several structural levels in both the A- and B-parts of the Intermezzo. He finds this so-called *concealed* or *multileveled motivic repetition* to be characteristic of several of Brahms' late piano pieces.[3] Cadwallader explicitly addresses the analyses that focus on the harmonic ambiguity in the opening bars, stating that they confuse surface detail with structural significance, and that the progression is in fact a quite straight forward circle of fifths (Cadwallader 1983, 7).

This claim, that there is *in fact* no harmonic ambiguity, is interesting when comparing to functional analyses; though both methods find a sequence of descending fifths that 'solves' the ambiguity, functional analyses tend not to consider the ambiguity an insignificant surface detail.

Another interesting aspect of Cadwallader's analysis is the remark that:

> it is, of course, the reharmonization of the untransposed basic motive that 'determines' the choice of key, not just the fact that it is a typical secondary key area for B minor. (Cadwallader 1982, 36.)

In other words, he interprets the rather insignificant key area of D major as important to this specific work — an observation that is also found in some functional analyses.

4. THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

Before discussing the functional approach to the Intermezzo, a short excursus on function theory is presented.

4.1 Excursus

As is well known, Hugo Riemann was an extremely productive music theorist. Within the area of harmony and tonality alone, at least three theories can be identified: the theory of harmonic functions, the theory of harmonic dualism, and the *Tonnetz*.[4] It is, amongst other things, this vast number of interrelated ideas that complicates a short, adequate description of function theory. It also entails that speaking about 'Riemannian theory' or 'Riemannism', as I do in the title of this paper, is in fact problematic, precisely because Riemann created several theories.

Over the years, numerous changes have been made to Riemann's function theory, the most notable one being the abandonment of its dualistic foundation. Monistic function theories were developed simultaneously in many different countries and hence the European tradition is, as opposed to the Anglo-American, split into many different linguistic and national sub-traditions. There are thus numerous variants of function theory, but the ones that are practiced today — Post-Riemannian theories — all share the monistic foundation. As mentioned earlier, the fact that the European tradition is a monistic one is overlooked in most, if not all, comparative studies of Riemannian and Schenkerian theories.

For the reasons sketched here, I do not include Neo-Riemannian or transformational approaches to the Intermezzo in this paper's attempt to reconcile Schenkerism and Riemannism — or Post-Riemannism, as it were. David Lewin's dual reading of the Intermezzo (Lewin 1982, 43–6) is interesting but beyond my scope: paleo-Riemannian theory — as Rings (2011a) calls Riemann's own theory —, Post-Riemannian theory, and Neo-Riemannian theory are to be seen as separate areas; surely, they are interrelated, but they

[3] Cadwallader (1982) examines Op. 76 No. 7, Op. 116 No. 4, Op. 117 No. 2, Op. 117 No. 3, Op. 118 No. 2, Op. 119 No. 1, and Op. 119 No. 2.

[4] One might also add the *Harmonieschritte* from Riemann (1880) as a fourth harmonic theory.

have been detached from each other throughout the Riemann reception in different countries.

4.2 Functional analyses

There are not as many published functional analyses of the Intermezzo as there are Schenkerian; or at least not as many that are strictly functional. The already mentioned analysis of Diergarten (2003) contains aspects of functional analyses, but like many other, Diergarten combines the functional approach with Roman numeral and fundamental bass analysis. Among a large corpus of textbooks and articles on functional analysis in Danish, English, German, Norwegian and Swedish, I have only found the piece to be mentioned briefly and partly analyzed in Larsen and Maegaard (1981, 75–6), Vinther (1992, 221–2), and most thoroughly in Rasmussen (2011).

Whereas almost all analyses mentioned so far problematizes the uneven metrical distribution of the chords in the sequence of descending fifths, the functional analysis of Danish musicologist Jens Rasmussen (2011) makes an interesting point of it, particularly regarding the metrical emphasis on D major. The functional method clarifies that in the sequence, the D major chord is not only sustained across the barline of bars 2–3, it is also emphasized by its own secondary cadence, S–D–T (Em–A^7–D), starting from the E minor chord in bar 1. The cadential progression in bars 4–5, at the end of Example 1, also hints at D major as the dominant F♯ resolves to the dyad D–F♯ — the common tones of B minor and D major. Furthermore, the key of D major in the Intermezzo's B-part is introduced in a rather remarkable way: the A-part ends with a tonicization of F♯ major, and from this chord, D major is introduced completely unmediated. Finally, an important contributor to the T–Tp–ambiguity[5] is that there are in fact no clear perfect authentic cadences in the piece. Shortly before the ending, D major is again heavily implied, and B minor only vaguely appears in a manner that blurs the boundaries between the three main functions in the final cadence.

Throughout the piece, then, the relation between the functions T and Tp is explicated on *both* the harmonic *and* the tonal level.[6] Rasmussen finds similar explicated relations between harmonic and tonal functions in several of Brahms' late piano pieces.[7]

5. A FUNCTIONAL-SCHENKERIAN APPROACH?

In the beginning of the paper, I claimed that some points are made valid or findable only through the respective theories' assumptions. The comparison of Schenkerian and functional analyses aptly shows this. What is perhaps most striking is the two theories' different understanding of melody's relation to harmony: where functional analyses of course acknowledge that the two parameters are interrelated, the Schenkerian notion of *Auskomponierung* puts contrapuntal and melodic motion at the very core of harmony in a radically different way, hence enabling the analyst to uncover the concealed motive. Another fundamental difference is the two methods' handling of the foreground harmonic activity. So-called 'chord labeling' is often criticized by Schenkerians, while it is considered a valuable and detailed account of harmony in the functional tradition.

There are also similarities between the Schenkerian and the functional analyses of the Intermezzo. Both approaches notice an ambiguity between B minor and D major. While it is not the prime focus of Cadwallader's analysis, he does hint at it, writing that the basic motive implies the key of D major rather than B minor (Cadwallader 1983, 24). The question arises, therefore, if it is possible — and not least relevant — to create a synthesis of the two analyses. Of course, there may be several ways to do this. I find myself in agreement with Steven Rings' (2011b, 38) warning that in the construction of an *über-method*, a lot will get lost in translation. Rather, the two methods should engage in a dialogue, as in Example 2 (see the next page).[8] I have basically added functional symbols to a foreground reduction in an attempt to analyze both voice-leading and chord function. I am inspired by Cadwallader's and Rasmussen's analyses but there are changes to both the Schenkerian and the functional levels. For instance, I have tried to communicate the harmonic *Mehrdeutigkeit* by using dotted lines to show the overlapping functions arising as a consequence of the sustained tones. The functional interpretation of the harmonies highlights the ambiguities that a strictly Schenkerian approach easily overlooks. The constant oscillation between B minor and D major is underlined, as well as other tonal inflections of the piece. In contrast to more definite tonicizations, I define 'tonal inflections' as any short or extended, complete or incomplete modulation to or indication of a non-tonic key — see, for instance, the second line of Example 2. The Schenkerian graphing technique interprets these inflections in the larger picture, showing the voice-leading that is not easily demonstrated in functional nomenclature. This approach has a natural focus on the foreground level, whereas the deeper levels, not directly translatable to functional terms, may well be shown in the conventional Schenkerian fashion.

In general, then, it seems that the strength of the functional analysis lies in its ability to put words to the *local* grammar of harmony, and the experience of harmony and tonality in any given 'now' of the music, whereas the strength of Schenkerian analysis is to interpret the function of these moments in the large-scale structure of the entire phrase, period, and ultimately, the piece.[9] Some Schenkerians may object that there is a contradiction in both interpreting a chord as a harmonic event and at the same time interpreting it as a contrapuntal event — for example a passing or neighboring chord. I see no contradiction, however, in that the harmonic functional analysis simply adds another more detailed foreground level to the analysis. To quote William Rothstein: 'Why claim that one level — invariably the largerone — invalidates another, smaller

[5] Tp stands for Tonic *parallel*. Note the difference between the English term 'parallel' and the German and Scandinavian '*parallel*' — I use the term here in the latter meaning, so that it denotes the same relation as the English term 'relative'.

[6] Rasmussen distinguishes between analysis of the chordal level and the key level, designating them as harmonic and tonal functional analysis, respectively. In this piece, the T–Tp relation is prominent on both levels.

[7] Apart from Op. 119 No. 1, these are Op. 116 No. 2, Op. 116 No. 4, Op. 116 No. 5, Op. 116 No. 6, Op. 118 No. 1, Op. 118 No. 4, and Op. 118 No. 6.

[8] As it would lead too far, this paper will not present an exhaustive account of the functional nomenclatures used in Example 2.

[9] 'Function' is here to be understood as a broader term than Riemann's, along the lines of Polth (2001).

level? Or that one level constitutes 'appearance' and the other 'reality'?' (Rothstein 1992, 4).

As mentioned earlier, Cadwallader finds the concealed motive to imply D major rather than B minor. We may notice, then, that there are in fact convergences between the concealed motive and the T–Tp-oscillation: the motive's tone a, regardless of which structural level it occurs in, always coincides with a tonal inflection of D major, as shown in the functional analysis. In Example 2, the first chord of bar 7 is the boundary of the B minor tonic prolongation, but one that coincides with a strong inflection of Tp. The 'Functional-Schenkerian analysis' — in lack of a better term — presents a way to evaluate the concealed motive's implication of D major, or, in more general terms, to analyze and understand the interrelations between the multileveled motive and its tonal inflections.

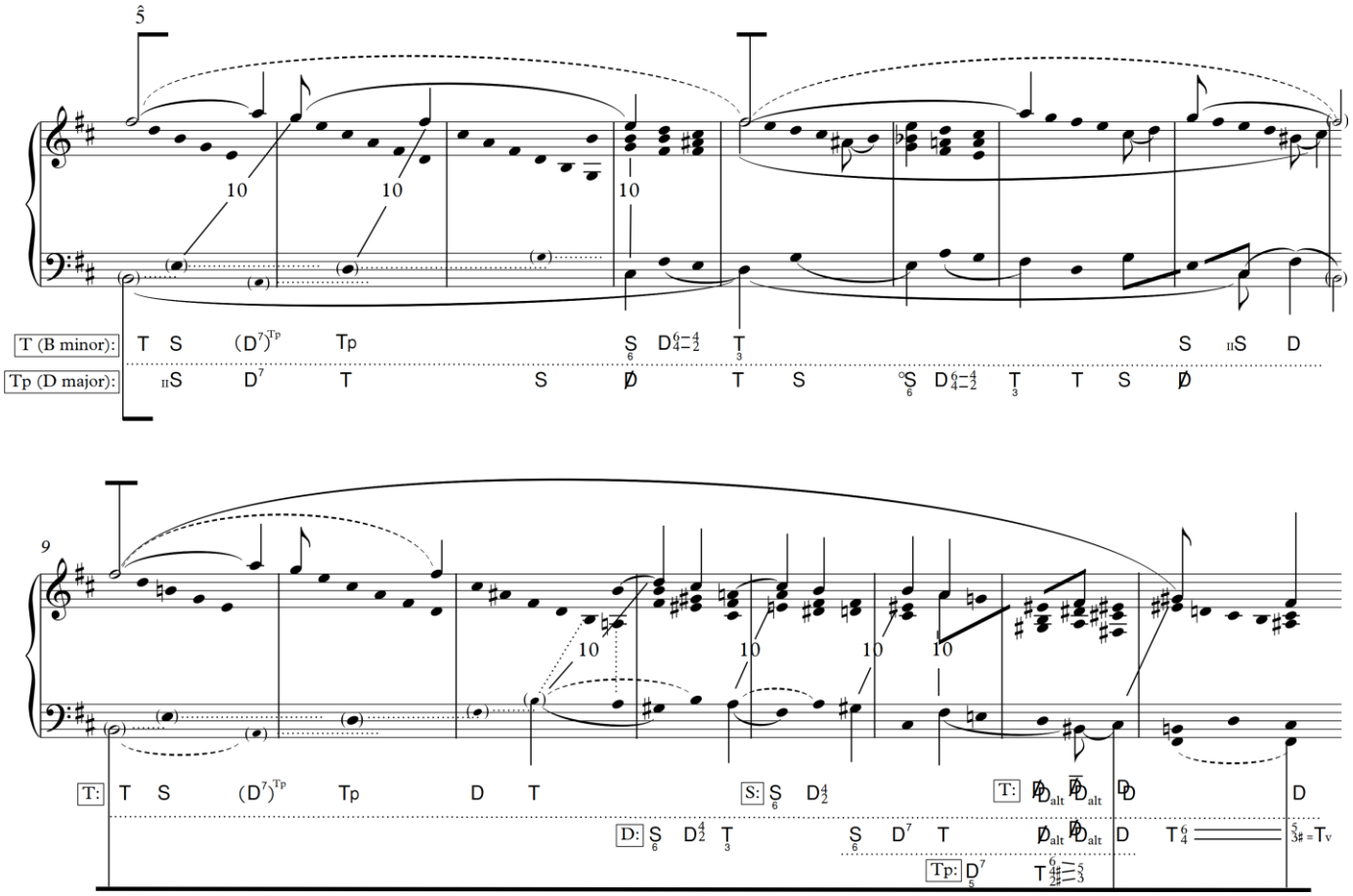
Is the B minor/D major ambiguity contrapuntally or harmonically founded? Most Schenkerians would stick with the former explanation, and functional theorists with the latter. What I hope to show with my 'Functional-Schenkerian analysis' is that in such discussions of counterpoint versus harmony, or voice leading versus chord function in tonal music, it is very often the case that any assertion of one's primacy over the other is absurd; it amounts to an irresolvable 'chicken-and-egg' discussion when instead it should be an examination and appreciation of a reciprocal relation.

6. CONCLUSION

Prompted by the observation that actual analytical practices do not correspond accurately to those suggested by the theories of Schenker and Riemann, the current paper proposes a mediation of Post-Schenkerism and Post-Riemannism based on the analyses produced within the respective traditions. As a case study, a corpus of analyses of Brahms' B minor Intermezzo has been examined, demonstrating that the seemingly irreconcilable approaches are indeed different but still methodologically compatible, and, at least in this case, mutually illuminating. The Functional-Schenkerian approach shows both local tonal inflections, their hierarchy in the long-range progressions and their convergences with the concealed motive. This method does by no means claim to be universal — indeed, there are several interesting analyses of the Intermezzo that apply completely different methods (Hollander 1972; Goebels 1983; Jordan and Kafalenos 1989; Frisch 1991; Danuser 2005; Rings 2012). As such, it seems that the Intermezzo is indeed, as stated earlier, a *locus classicus* in Brahms' oeuvre as well as in our analytical endeavors.

KEYWORDS

Harmony, Common Practice Tonality, Analytical Theory, Schenker, Riemann.



Ex. 2. The author's 'Functional-Schenkerian' analysis of Brahms' Intermezzo in B minor, bars 1–16. Boxed functions denote tonal functions rather than harmonic functions.

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