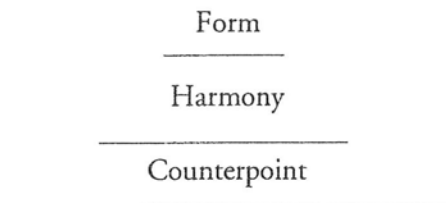


Counterpoint and Musical Form: some Remarks about Schenkerian Backgrounds

One can imagine the structure of classical music in the form of a three-stage pyramid.¹ Its foundation is counterpoint. In the middle there is harmony, and at the top there is form:



In this pyramid, the higher stages are based on the lower ones and originate in them. On the other hand, the lower stages are directed by the higher ones and are functionally subordinate to them. No direct relationship exists between counterpoint and form. Therefore, it is not logical to analyse form in terms of counterpoint and vice versa. The contrapuntal structure of tonal music is based on a continuous process of voice-leading. Form, on the contrary, is based on the articulation of the whole into discrete units, usually by means of harmony. Form can be most adequately analysed in its own traditional categories and terms. However, it is just as wrong to overlook counterpoint, analysing form and harmony, since counterpoint has an essentially hierarchical structure which it imparts to harmony as well.²

The seeming contradiction between contrapuntal and formal structure can arise from different causes. Sometimes it may be of subjective nature, connected with specific analytical strategies (e.g., the placement of the “principal tone”).³ In other cases (e.g., in the case of an unusual tonal plan), it is of more objective nature and caused by the hierarchical structure of classical tonality where all the non-tonic chords are subordinate to the tonic triad, and the dominant possesses a privileged status among the non-tonic chords. According to Felix Salzer, it is the only chord among them having an essentially harmonic function, whereas the other non-tonic chords are *harmonic chords* only as members of “a progression coming from I and proceeding to V”; otherwise these are *contrapuntal chords*.⁴

Form has its own hierarchical structure, different from that of counterpoint and harmony. Its principles are well known. For example, in the ternary design $a^1 b a^2$ (one of the most common form in the music of the 18th–20th centuries), each part is directly subordinate to the whole, and this hierarchy continues on the lower levels of form. Labelling these parts with letters a and b suggests two different grouping criteria – similarity (for parts a^1 and a^2) and difference or contrast (for part b). In terms of *A Generative theory of tonal music* by F. Lerdahl and R. Jackendoff, in the case of the *prolongational* structure, similarity corresponds to *prolongation* and difference to *progression*.⁵

What is the relationship of the contrapuntal deep-level (or background) structure to these harmonic and formal hierarchies?

The highest level of the contrapuntal structure knows nothing of form. It consists only of the initial tonic, prolonged throughout the form and leading to the concluding cadence.⁶ In terms of voice leading, there are essentially three cadence paradigms: 1) paradigm a – with $\hat{4}$ as an incomplete upper neighbour (supported by $\hat{2}$, $\hat{4}$, or $\hat{6}$ in the bass)⁷; 2) paradigm b – with interval patterns 6–5 or 8–5 under $\hat{2}$ of the fundamental line⁸ or, as its variant, with interval pattern 7–5 under $\hat{3}-\hat{2}$ of the fundamental line⁹; 3) para-

dig c – with interval pattern $\frac{6-5}{4-3}$ under $\hat{3}-\hat{2}$ of the fundamental line (supported by $\hat{5}$ in the bass), usually preceded by $\hat{4}$ (supported by $\hat{2}$, $\hat{4}$, or $\hat{6}$ in the bass).¹⁰ Paradigms a and b may be combined.¹¹ Paradigms a and b are typical of the fundamental line $-\hat{1}$, paradigm c – of the fundamental $-\hat{1}$. However, paradigms a and b are possible also in the case of the fundamental line $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$, when $\hat{4}$ does not participate in the concluding cadence.¹² The importance of these cadence paradigms is evident, for example, in the determination of the primary note.¹³

These basic structural elements – the initial tonic and the concluding cadence – are common to all the classical (and Baroque) forms. The next-to-highest level of the contrapuntal structure already contains some specific elements of individual forms. This level is determined by the presence or absence of two factors: 1) the high-level structural parallelism – i.e. repetition of the initial thematic material (e.g. the main theme) – and 2) interruption – a high-level dominant harmony preceding this repetition, frequently in the form of a half cadence.¹⁴ (A high-level dominant *not* connected with the parallelism does not create interruption.) Ch. Smith is right in claiming that “a reprise is best analysed by a return to the same background configuration that represents its original (first-section) appearance”¹⁵. And what is more: one can even say that the exact restatement is essentially a high-level prolongation of the first statement’s configuration.

Different background structures are illustrated in the following examples where eleven well-known works (or passages) are analysed, mostly on two middleground levels.¹⁶ Whereas Examples 1–4 present some typical background structures of the 18th and 19th-century homophonic forms, Examples 5–11 present more specific backgrounds.

Examples 1 and 2 analyse two of Mozart’s minuets – from Piano Sonata in A major K. 331¹⁷ and from *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* K. 525¹⁸. Although having the same formal design on the higher level (*Menuetto-Trio-Menuetto*), as well as on the middle level (both *Menuetto* and *Trio* are written in ternary form a^1ba^2), they possess very different harmonic profiles, resulting in different contrapuntal backgrounds. In the former, the tonal plan is: A major–D major–A major (I–IV–I), in the latter it is: G major–D major–G major (I–V–I). Therefore, only the latter has a high-level interruption created by the dominant harmony before the return of *Menuetto*.¹⁹

Example 1. Mozart, Sonata, K. 331, II. Voice-leading graphs.

Example 2. Mozart, Serenade, K. 525, II. Voice-leading graphs.

There are many other differences between these minuets in the formal and harmonic structure of individual parts of their form:

1. In K. 525 sections a^1 of both *Menuetto* and *Trio* are closed (concluding with the tonic cadence), with interruption in the *Menuetto* and without it in the *Trio*; in K. 331 these are open (concluding with the non-tonic cadence) and without interruption.²⁰
2. In K. 331 *Menuetto* as the whole contains an interruption; in K. 525 it contains none.
3. In K. 331 the midsection (b) of both *Menuetto* and *Trio* prolongs the dominant harmony (attained in section a^1); in K. 525 the midsection of the *Menuetto* prolongs tonic harmony and the midsection of the *Trio* modulates to the dominant.

Thus, on the background level, there are both parallelism and interruption in K. 525 but only parallelism in K. 331. The same two background structures characterise other forms as well. For example, in the parallel period ($a^1 a^2$) whose antecedent phrase concludes with the dominant cadence, there are parallelism and interruption (see Example 2, mm. 1–4). However, in the case of the antecedent phrase concluding with the tonic cadence, there is only parallelism (see Example 3 – Prelude in A major by Chopin).

Example 3. Chopin, Prelude A major, Op. 28/7. Voice-leading graphs.

Therefore, on the most general level, three kinds of background structures exist in terms of parallelism and interruption:

1. non-parallel structures;
2. parallel structures without interruption;
3. parallel structures with interruption.

Characteristically, in the case of ternary forms, this classification does not depend on the cadence of section *a*¹. Followed by a contrasting midsection (*b*), this section tends to be more closely connected with the midsection than the latter with the reprise (*a*²): whereas the midsection is separated from the reprise at least by parallelism, and frequently also by interruption, there is no such caesura between sections *a*¹ and *b*. As the result, on the background level, the first two sections of ternary form constitute an undivided whole. They are separated on a more or less remote *middleground* level, depending on the harmonic profile of the form.

For example, in the case of the tonic and dominant cadences (as in Examples 1–2), the caesura at the end of section *a*¹ is stronger than in the case of the mediant cadence (Example 4 – Beethoven, Sonata Op. 2/2, last movement, mm. 57–79²¹) – this mediant cadence only tonicises a passing harmony half-way to the dominant which arrives at the end of the midsection.

Example 4. Beethoven, Sonata, Op. 2/2, IV, mm. 57–79. Voice-leading graphs.

In Examples 5 and 6, the parallelism of sections a^1 and a^2 of the ternary form is undermined by the harmonically reinterpreted reprise. In Example 5 (Brahms, Waltz, Op. 39/1²²), where section a^1 also modulates to the mediant, the reprise is transposed to the subdominant key; in Example 6 (Schumann, *Aus meinen Thränen sprissen* from *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48/2²³) it is re-harmonised to begin with the V/IV rather than the tonic. It is highly remarkable that these different ways of reinterpretation result in very similar background structures (cf. Examples 5b and 6b). This is caused by the similarity of harmonic profile – tonicisation of the subdominant at the beginning of the reprise. In both cases, no interruption occurs. Instead, a middleground descending third-progression $\hat{3}-\hat{1}$ into an inner voice arises, arriving at $\hat{1}$ just at the moment when the tonic reprise might begin. It is followed by a high-level incomplete neighbour $\hat{4}$ supported by the cadential pre-dominant $\hat{4}$ in the bass. In Example 6, this upper neighbour appears also in section a^1 but only on a lower structural level, *before* the concluding cadence.

Example 5. Brahms, Waltz, Op. 29/1. Voice-leading graphs.

The image displays three voice-leading graphs (a, b, and c) for Brahms' Waltz, Op. 29/1. Graph a) shows the full piece with measures 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13, 17, 20, and 21 marked. It includes a '6-6-6' figure in the bass and harmonic labels (I, (III), (IV), V, I). Graph b) is a simplified version of graph a). Graph c) shows a specific voice-leading path with labels 3, 2, and 1 above the notes.

Example 6. Schumann, *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48/2. Voice-leading graphs.

This descending third-progression $\hat{3}-\hat{1}$ into an inner voice is highly typical of binary forms (without reprise). In Example 7 (Haydn, Quartet, Op. 76/3, II, Theme – *Kaiserhymne*²⁴), the initial tonic is prolonged by two high-level voice-exchanges, connecting it with two first-inversion tonic chords, the first of these following the medial dominant cadence (m. 12), the second initiating the concluding cadence in mm. 15–16. Both voice-exchanges contain a descending third-progression into an inner voice $b^1-a^1-g^1$. As a result, the formal division by means of the medial dominant cadence (m. 12) is undermined by the high-level contrapuntal, voice-leading structure.

Example 7. Haydn, *Kaiserhymne*. Voice-leading graphs.

The same occurs in Example 8 (Schumann, *Wenn ich in deine Augen seh* from *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48/4²⁵), except that the undermined medial cadence occurs in the tonicised subdominant (m. 8). Here the harmony prolonged throughout most of the form is the supertonic (II). It arrives after the first phrase (m. 4) and is connected by means of a high-level voice exchange with the cadential pre-dominant II_6 in m. 14.

Example 8. Schumann, *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48/4. Voice-leading graphs.

The last three examples present cases of ternary forms (with interruption) having quite unusual harmonic profiles. The form of Example 9 (Beethoven, *Moonlight Sonata*, Op. 27/2, first movement²⁶) is quite ambiguous. The first section contains a subtonic (B-minor) cadence in m. 15 followed by a codetta in the same key (returning at the end of the movement in the tonic key). However, here this codetta modulates further to the subdominant F# minor, where another cadence occurs (m. 23), followed by the restatement of the initial phrase (in the subdominant key) and a long prolongation of the dominant harmony (mm. 28–41). This restatement of the initial phrase creates a parallelism marking the possible beginning of the second section. The first section thus concludes in the subdominant key. As frequently in the case of the fundamental line $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$, this $\hat{4}$ (arriving at the moment of the subdominant cadence) does not participate in the concluding high-level half cadence (creating the interruption). It is supported by the bass moving further to the tonic, rather than the dominant, by means of the unfolding F#–H# (m. 23–26) which can be reduced to the lower neighbour (H#) of the tonic C#. As a part of this dissonant unfolding, rather than part of “a progression coming from I and proceeding to V”, the subdominant has still lower status than, for example, the mediant of Example 4 (mm. 66).

Example 9. Beethoven, Sonata, Op. 27/2, IV. Voice-leading graphs.

Example 10, presenting the *a*¹ section's consequent phrase and section *b* of Chopin's Etude, Op. 10/12 (mm. 19–46²⁷), shows one of the few cases of section *a*¹ ending with a subtonic (VII) cadence. This cadence belongs to a low level of structure. Here it is undermined by the high-level voice-exchange (mm. 21–35) connecting the initial tonic with the V/IV harmony (initiating the concluding half cadence of section *b*). This voice-exchange is elaborated by means of two third-progressions – descending $d^2-c^2-b^1$ (mm. 27–28) and ascending $a^1-b^1-c^2$ (mm. 33–35). The descent $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ of the subtonic B_b-major (leading to the *a*¹ section's concluding cadence) is contained in the first third-progression. Moreover, the subtonic $\hat{7}$ is a part of a descending high-level inner-voice fourth-progression $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-6\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ ($c^2-b^1-a^1-g^1$; mm. 21–41) connecting the beginning of the *a*¹ section's consequent phrase with the concluding half cadence of section *b*. The subtonic cadence is thus only indirectly, rather than directly related to the fundamental structure.

Example 10. Example 9. Chopin, Etude, Op. 10/12, mm. 19–48. Voice-leading graphs.

Example 11 – the first A_b -minor part of Beethoven's *Marcia funebre* from Sonata Op. 26 (mm. 1–30²⁸) – has the most unusual harmonic profile. Its first period (mm. 1–8) modulating from A_b minor to C_b major is repeated a minor third higher (mm. 9–16), leading to E_{bb} major (spelled as D major). Examples 11a–11d show, by means of a four-stage transformation, the integration of this bV into the main key.

Example 11. Example 4. Beethoven, Sonata, Op. 26, III, mm. 1–30. Voice-leading graphs.

In the most simplified, diatonic prototype of this passage (Example 11d), there is a descending high-level fourth-progression $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-6\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ ($a_b^1-g_b^1-f_b^1-e_b^1$, mm. 1–20), analogous to that of the preceding example. At the first stage of chromatisation (Example 11c), the tenth $d_b-f_b^1$ (between $\hat{6}$ of the aforementioned fourth-progression and the pre-dominant $\hat{4}$ which supports $\hat{6}$ in the bass; mm. 16–17) is chromatically raised to $d-f^1$, and the sixth $c_b^1-a_b^1$ (and $\hat{1}$ of the main key, mm. 8–14) is elaborated by means of two voice-exchanges (which create ascending and descending third-progressions $A_b-B_b-C_b$ and $C_b-B_b-A_b$ in two octaves; mm. 14–16 and 16–17).

The most radical changes occur at the next stage (Example 11b) where the third-progression $a_b^1-b_b^1-c_b^2$ of the first voice exchange is replaced by $a_{bb}^1-b_{bb}^1-c_b^2$ in the upper voice (mm. 16–17), and a descending third-progression $g_b^1-f_b^1-e_{bb}^1$ into an inner voice arises from $\hat{7}$ of the aforementioned fourth-progression $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-6\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ (mm. 15–16) supported by the cadential bass figure $bbb-ebb$ (this ebb will be immediately reinterpreted as d_b). It is this third-progression that constitutes the cadential descent $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ in the key of bV .

At the last stage (Example 11a), this cadence in Ebb major is further elaborated by means of the cadential six-four. It is created by a passing third-progression $a_{bb}^1-g^1-f^1$ (mm. 14–15) connecting the incomplete neighbour a_{bb}^1 ($\hat{4}$ of Ebb major) with the second tone of the aforementioned cadential third-progression $g^1-f^1-e_{bb}^1$.

Comparing Examples 10 and 11, we see that whereas in Example 10, the tonicised subtonic, although not contained in the fundamental line, is a part of the high-level fourth-progression $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-6\hat{6}-\hat{5}$, in Example 11, the tonicised $b\hat{5}$ belongs to a third-progression descending into an inner voice from this high-level fourth-progression $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-6\hat{6}-$, rather than to this fourth-progression itself. Therefore, the relationship of the *a*¹ section's concluding cadence to the fundamental structure is still more indirect than in Example 10.

Schenkerian analysis, in essence a contrapuntal analysis of 18-th and 19-th-century music, cannot replace formal analysis. Far from being identical, these two methods of analysis nevertheless have an important common denominator. Counterpoint is connected with form through harmony in the broadest sense of the term (including the principles of tonal hierarchy). It is not the formal design as such but form in its inseparable unity with harmony that corresponds to the contrapuntal structure of this music.

References

¹ See: Mart Humal, "The Structure of Classical Theme: Some Preliminary Concepts," *A Composition as a Problem: Proceedings of a Conference on Music Theory*, Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Music, 1997, 18

² In Chapter 5 ("Form") of Heinrich Schenker's *Free Composition* (trans. E. Oster, New York: Longman, 1979, 128–145), an attempt is made to analyse form through counterpoint: "All forms appear in the ultimate foreground; but all of them have their origin in, and derive from, the background. [...] I have repeatedly referred to form as the ultimate manifestation of that coherence which grows out of background, middleground, and foreground" (Ibid., 130). "Coherence in language does not arise from a single syllable, a single word, or even from a single sentence [...]. Similarly, music finds no coherence in a "motive" [...]. Thus, I reject those explanations which take the motives as

their starting point and emphasize manipulation of the motive [...]. I also reject those explanations which are based upon phrases, phrase-groups, periods, double periods, themes, antecedents, and consequents. My theory replaces all of these with specific concepts of form which, from the outset, are based upon the content of the whole and of the individual parts; that is, the differences in prolongations lead to differences in form" (Ibid., 131).

On the other hand, Charles Smith's "Formal theory of structure", outlined in his thought-provocative article "Musical Form and Fundamental Structure: An Investigation of Schenker's *Formenlehre*" (*Music Analysis* 15/2–3, 1996, 253–259), represents the other extreme:

"I envisage a theory in which every unambiguous form would be associated with small number of background structures, and in which any background structure could be automatically associated with a particular form" (Ibid., 242). "The principal postulate of such a theory is that form and fundamental structure are essentially the same thing [...]" (Ibid., 270).

As a result, the author even denies the contrapuntal nature of the background: "[W]e can no longer think of Schenkerian backgrounds as pure counterpoint" (Ibid., 279).

³ Compare, for example, the placement of the principal tone in Examples 7, 9, and 11 with that in H Schenker's readings of the same works (see Notes 25, 27, and 29, respectively). These delayed principal notes by Schenker seem to have their origin in the dramaturgy rather than the tonal structure of the works under consideration.

⁴ Felix Salzer, *Structural Hearing: Tonal Coherence in Music*, New York: Dover, 1962, Vol. I, 15.

⁵ Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1983, 181–182.

⁶ This is true not only of the form in general but also of classical theme which, according to Janet Schmalfieldt, "frequently projects a complete middleground harmonic-contrapuntal structure" ("Towards a reconciliation of Schenkerian concepts with traditional and recent theories of form," *Music Analysis* 10/3, 1991, 237–238).

⁷ See Example 1a, mm. 23–30; Example 2a, mm. 26–28; Example 6a, mm. 2–3 and 14–16; Example 9a, mm. 7–9 and 44–46; Example 11a, mm. 14–16.

⁸ See Example 1a, mm. 99–100; Example 2a, mm. 3–4, 7–8, 15–16, 23–24, 35–36; Example 3a, mm. 13–15; Example 4a, mm. 65–66 and 73–74; Example 7a, mm. 11–12; Example 9, mm. 21–22 and 50–51; Example 10a, mm. 39–41; Example 11a; mm. 7–8 and 29–30.

⁹ See Example 11a, mm. 16–20.

¹⁰ See Example 1a, mm. 17–18 and 47–48; Example 4a, mm. 60–61 and 78–79; Example 7a, mm. 15–16; Example 8a, mm. 7–8; Example 9a, mm. 13–15; Example 10a, mm. 27–28.

¹¹ See Example 5a, mm. 20–24; Example 8a, mm. 4–16.

¹² See Example 9a, mm. 21–22 and 50–51; Example 11a, mm. 29–30.

¹³ Charles Smith's statements about the difficulties in determination of the principal note (Op. cit., 274–276) are connected with his refusal to recognise the cadence paradigm *c* – at least, for the background structure (compare the reading of the first and last cadences in his example 37b, Op. cit., 261). This refusal results in an underestimation of the contrapuntal function of cadence by him in general.

¹⁴ Interruption do not always occurs in the upper voice. In one of the sonata-form patterns, described by Ernst Oster in his commentary to § 316 of *Free Composition* (Schenker, Op. cit., 139), it essentially occurs in an inner voice. See also Examples 1 (Menuetto) and 2 (Trio).

¹⁵ Smith, Op. cit., 243.

¹⁶ The greater part of these pieces has been analysed both by Schenker and Ch. Smith. My readings, usually different from both of them, are closer to those of Schenker.

¹⁷ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figures 35.1 and 20.4; Smith, Op. cit., Example 29b.

¹⁸ Cf. Roger Kamien, "The Menuetto from Mozart's Eine kleine Nachtmusik, K. 525: An Analytical Study," *Theory and Practice* 7/1 (1982), 7–19.

¹⁹ Trio of K. 331 can be reduced to a high-level tenth D–F# prolonging both $\hat{5}$ (in the upper voice) and $\hat{3}$ (in the bass – here conceptually an inner voice) of A major by their upper neighbours.

²⁰ The terms of "closed" and "open" form are used in Smith, Op. cit.

²¹ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figure 100.3d; Smith, Op. cit., Example 37b.

²² Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figures 49.2 and 110b 1; Smith, Op. cit., Example 4b.

²³ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figure 21b.

²⁴ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figure 39.3.

²⁵ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figure 152.1; Smith, Op. cit., Example 5b.

²⁶ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figure 7a.

²⁷ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figure 12; Smith, Op. cit., Example 13b.

²⁸ Cf. Schenker, Op. cit., Figure 140.6; Smith, Op. cit., Example 12b.

**Counterpoint and Musical Form:
some Remarks about Schenkerian Backgrounds**

Summary

Schenkerian analysis is essentially contrapuntal analysis of the 18th- and 19th-century music. The contrapuntal structure of tonal music is based on a continuous process of voice-leading.

Form, on the contrary, is based on the articulation of the whole into discrete units, usually by means of harmony. Although classical music rest on the principle of inseparable unity of counterpoint, harmony, and form, there is not always an absolute correspondence between its contrapuntal and formal structure.

The contradiction between these can arise for different causes. Sometimes it may be of subjective nature, connected with specific analytical strategies (e.g., the placement of the “principal tone”). In other cases (e.g., in the case of an unusual tonal plan), it is of more objective nature and caused by the hierarchical structure of the classical tonality.

**Kontrapunktas ir muzikinė forma:
keletas pastebėjimų apie Schenkerio giluminius planus**

Santrauka

Schenkerio analizė iš esmės yra kontrapunktinė XVIII–XIX muzikos analizė. Tonaliosios muzikos kontrapunktinė struktūra remiasi nenutrūkstamu balso plėtros procesu.

Forma savo ruožtu yra pagrįsta visumos artikuliacija į atskirus vienetus, paprastai harmonijos priemonėmis. Nors klasikinė muzika remiasi neperskiriamos kontrapunkto, harmonijos ir formos vienovės principu, atitikimas tarp kontrapunktinės ir formalios struktūros nevisada būna absoliutus.

Prieštaravimas tarp jų gali atsirasti dėl įvairių priežasčių. Kartais jis gali būti subjektyvios prigimties, susijęs su specifine analitine strategija (pvz. „pagrindinio tono“ padėtimi). Kitais atvejais (pvz. neįprasto tonacinio plano atveju) prieštaravimas yra objektyvesnės prigimties, sąlygojamas klasikinės tonacijos hierarchinės struktūros.