

Arnold Schoenberg. *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*. Edited, translated, and with a commentary by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. xxiv, 462 pp. Illustrated.

Reviewed by Murray Dineen

What's a historian of music theory to do? A historian of music theory is an oxymoron, torn between the impartial task of historical text criticism and the theoretic partial tasks of speculation and analysis.

The oxymoron is particularly acute in a gloss or commentary on a historical treatise. The historian tries to read with an unbiased eye. A theorist, on the other hand, reads selectively, looking for that which pertains to her theories, thus leaving unbiased historical perspective questionable. Under the historical guise of consulting older treatises (Schenker's manifold developing thoughts, to cite but one example),¹ a veneer of authority, sanction, and benediction has been applied to many a theoretic or analytic enterprise. And questionable results have been discovered, obtained, or simply produced. In the wake of poststructuralism, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies, we ought to know that no theory is the product of an immaculate conception. Born of a context—much of it polemic—theory carries its fair share of baggage. To pretend to the cool impartiality of historical textual criticism is to invite mischief.²

The history of music theory, then, is a deceptively difficult enterprise from a critical perspective. Any new foray into the field, such as this long-awaited edition and translation of the Schoenberg *Gedanke* manuscripts, is to be heralded with great foreboding and greeted with baited breath, not only for the actual contents themselves but also for the methodology brought to bear upon them. Despite some mechanical problems of presentation, this first edition of the manuscripts is a welcome addition to the swelling ranks of Schoenberg primary literature. My principal reservation: I wish that the editors, the late Patricia Carpenter and her colleague Severine Neff, had been able to distinguish their thoughts proper (Carpenter's in particular) from Schoenberg's conception to a greater degree. But then who is to point fingers in a discipline conceived along the lines of an oxymoron?

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The manuscript *Der musikalische Gedanke und die Logik, Technik, und Kunst seiner Darstellung* is fragmentary and incomplete, but nonetheless a comprehensive representation of Schoenberg's thoughts about music. In truth, this edition comprises not one but twelve manuscripts devoted to the "musical idea," written between 1923 and 1936 (the authors give a full list and description of the manuscripts as appendix 1). The body of the book, however, is taken up by the legendary tenth manuscript, known to theorists as the *Gedanke*. The remaining eleven, being much smaller, are relegated, untranslated, to appendix 3. (Whether this appendix presents the totality of each manuscript or only a fragment is not clear.)

This edition of twelve manuscripts comes on the heels of other recent translations of Schoenberg manuscripts, such as the important collection *Zusammenhang, Kontrapunkt, Instrumentation, Formenlehre* (1994). At the hands of Neff, Carpenter, and the indefatigable Charlotte Cross, the Schoenberg primary literature devoted to music theory has at least doubled and begs a careful reexamination of his thought and its relevance to modern and to historical theory.

The tenth manuscript is not presented here in its original, disparate form; instead, the editors have rearranged its contents under seven topical headings. Schoenberg himself made a particular collation entitled "Rhythm" in his revisions to the manuscript (although not without errors in page references), but with other topics the editors have made the collations themselves. The seven topical headings are as follows, with a thumbnail sketch of their contents:

1. *Preface and Overview*. Schoenberg's various attempts to write a preface and to sketch the musical idea and related concepts such as comprehension and coherence.

2. *Elements of Form*. An overview along the lines of a traditional *Formenlehre* but supplemented with offshoots of the musical *Gedanke* concept (such as *Gestalt* and *Grundgestalt*) and a kinetics of the musical phrase (the notion of liquidation).

3. *Rhythm*. The shortest but certainly not the least consequential of these collations, a set of jottings about stress, accentuation, meter, and rhythmic shapes or figures. The treatment of this subject is quite unprecedented in Schoenberg's published thought.

4. *Formal Procedures*. A discussion of formal articulation, connection, and variation that deals with topics such as tonic and dominant forms, cadence, liquidation, principal and subsidiary ideas, introduction, and development.

5. *Miscellaneous*. The relationship of performance to the *Gestalt* of a work, the meaning of repetition, and the tempo or speed with which a musical idea is presented.

6. *Harmony*. A lengthy essay on the “constructive function” of harmony, or tonality and its formal function as a framework or “blueprint” for motivic and thematic work in music. The essay includes discussion of the “extended cadence,” regions, and “monotonicity,” along with a brief mention of “centripetal” harmonic function and the tonal “problem.” All of this is illustrated with score reference to Brahms’s chamber music.

7. *Addendum*. Motivic analyses of fragments from Mozart string quartets, and a list of words to be indexed.

In addition to reordering the manuscript, the editors have included a lengthy concordance to the often-esoteric lexicon of the *Gedanke*. Many of the entries therein are cross-referenced to Schoenberg’s other theoretical works.

By means of these abundant cross-references, the editors confirm a longstanding suspicion: there are cogent theoretical issues in Schoenberg’s thought that only collation and cross-reference of the various manuals and treatises will reveal. Largely utilitarian, written for elementary pedagogic needs, works such as *Structural Functions of Harmony* (1954) and the lamentably now unavailable *Models for Beginners in Composition* (1943) are sprinkled with deeper insights. Had these been collated before, Schoenberg’s writings might have spawned a greater critical interest in his thought about harmony and form, and a more profound respect than that accorded it in recent years.

In addition to topics held in common with other treatises, however, there are novelties in the *Gedanke* manuscripts. Among these, surely the passages on rhythm are most striking, with little prefiguring them in the published work to date. Novelties aside, however, much of the material in the manuscript appears already in Schoenberg’s other treatises. The volume’s worth, then, lies largely in its supplementary and synthetic nature, and as a locus for thoughts scattered throughout Schoenberg’s previously published writings.

The translation of Schoenberg’s thorny phrases is evenly good, often comparable to Leo Black’s excellent rendering of *Style and Idea* (1984). Because both the original and the translation are available to the reader on facing pages, accuracy of translation is not always crucial, nor with Schoenberg’s turns of phrase is it always possible. The English rendering is clear, logical, and diplomatic to a fault, preserving various manuscript indications, such as underlining, and adding linking-arrows, in clear and legible format. The typeface is remarkably luxurious in these days of economic compression—large, clear, and easy to read.

Included are seven photos from the Schoenberg Institute’s archives, some of which are discoveries: Schoenberg with Charlie Chaplin, with Zemlinsky, with Klemperer, Webern, and Scherchen, and another with a

bevy of conductors from a towering Klemperer to a tiny William Van den Berg.

The volume is not without its small faults of presentation, in the concordance and index particularly. Given the scattered nature of Schoenberg's thoughts throughout his published works and now the *Gedanke* manuscript, the concordance and index of terms are extremely important to Schoenberg studies, and deserve better care than they receive here. The concordance lists entries for the important concept of the *problem*—or “tonal problem” as it has come to be called—on pages 134–35 and 224–27, but nothing pertaining to the tonal problem is to be found there. As well, the concordance misses entries on pages 106–07, 246–47, and 320–21 (where Schoenberg ties the notion of *problem* to Brahms's Trio in C minor, op. 101). The relationship of the concordance to the subject index at the end of the book is quite unclear. At the head of the subject index, an instruction tells us: “Asterisks indicate terms included in the concordance.” The asterisked term *tonal problem*, however, is not given a separate entry in the concordance; the concordance lists only *problem*. The entry *problem* in the subject index, however, refers us to *tonal problem*. Like the concordance, the subject index entry *tonal problem* misses the entries noted above and adds other mistaken entries. These various errors, however slight, are unfortunate in a reference tool devoted to consolidating Schoenberg's diverse and scattered thoughts.

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Between the preface and the translation the editors have provided a commentary, a lengthy essay attempting to sew a thread through the manuscript. Patricia Carpenter's hand is particularly evident here. Indeed, her reading of the manuscript is a kind of tacit rereading of her published essays, and many of the issues raised in her various publications pertaining to Schoenberg³ naturally resurface here: a concern for the ontology of the work of art, which Schoenberg (despite his avowals of teaching merely the “craft” of composition) essayed throughout his life; an abiding interest in the notion of art as embodying internal, immutable “ideas” (as opposed to external “styles”—extraneous to the essence of a musical work); a notion of nineteenth-century organicism taking as its locus the living body as an indivisible whole; a concern with the musical work as a multidimensional creation in a properly musical “space”; a kind of logic proper to music (“musical logic”); the notion that a motive possesses a “characteristicness” linked to its harmonic or rhythmic shape or *Gestalt*, from which consequences are to be drawn during the course of a work (thus rendering the motive a *Grundgestalt*, or basic shape linked organically with the remainder of the work); and the notion of a “tonal problem,” a perceptible sense of unrest or ambiguity, to which the remainder of the work relates as a kind

of resolution or restoration of balance and clarity.⁴ These topics have been of abiding concern to both Carpenter and colleague Neff, and the manuscript is read largely in their terms.

The problem of separation between history and theory cited at the beginning of this review looms large here. To what degree does the commentary mirror Schoenberg's thought? How much comes directly from Schoenberg and how much have the editors produced? In particular, how much is the product of Carpenter's astute observations of music and tonality, observations inspired—but only inspired—by Schoenberg, her teacher at UCLA? The publication of this translation, taken together with other treatises now available, sheds a little light upon these questions. Unfortunately, some obscurity remains. Carpenter apparently derived from Schoenberg at least three concepts; the origin of a fourth, the "tonal problem," is not entirely Schoenberg's and is in all likelihood primarily Carpenter's. These four concepts are as follows:

1. *Tonality as scale degree function.* Schoenberg's conception of tonality as a set of scale degree functions has never really been in question since the publication of *Structural Functions of Harmony* and the chart of the regions contained therein (nor in fact since translation of the *Harmonielehre* (1978), with its treatment of modulation according to regions as scale degrees removed from the tonic). The *Gedanke* manuscript provides further evidence of this conception: a prototype chart of the regions on pages 334–37 and 340–41, with photograph facsimile on 338–39. A similarly geometric relationship of scale degrees lies at the heart of Carpenter's conception, in particular her use of the circle of fifths to represent modulation between regions of a monotonicity. Here, Schoenberg's precedent is patent.

2. *Intervals as motives.* The *Gedanke* manuscript shows us that Schoenberg conceived of motives in tonal music in terms of simple intervals, and for good reason. A single interval allows itself to be located easily in a compound monotonic space built of scale degrees, and, as Richmond Browne (1981) noted some years ago, single intervals are basic signposts of tonality. In her analyses, Carpenter has always proceeded from a motivic shape comprised of two or three simple intervals, which combine in such a way as to suggest a tonality at the outset of a musical work. (As we shall see shortly, she linked this shape inextricably with the transformation of scale degree and harmonic function throughout a work, following the procedure known as the "tonal problem.") This concentrated motivic intervallic conception, it could quite properly be said, she had from Schoenberg.

3. *Motivic intervals as scale degree functions.* The linking of motive to scale degree is essential to Schoenberg's thought, witness its many manifestations: the notion of tonic and dominant forms, set forth in greatest detail in *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (1967); the idea of the multiple

scale-degree meaning of chords and tones, ubiquitous in Schoenberg's writings; and the conception of keys or regions as scale degrees of a tonal center, implicit in the principle of monotonicity. The *Gedanke* manuscript takes up these topics again: tonic and dominant forms (234–35), multiple readings of chords as scale degrees of different regions (311), and the thesis that “every establishment of a so-called foreign tonality should be regarded only as the xth degree that is carried out as if it were a key” (331). All these Schoenbergian aspects of motive as scale degree are to be found in Carpenter's work, and this again puts her squarely in the tradition of her teacher.

In this regard, let us set one record straight: the reputed “Schoenbergian” analyses of Rudolph Reti (1961, 1967) have nothing to do with the present understanding of Schoenberg's conception. Reti's notion (interesting in its own right and in terms of its day) shows nothing of Schoenberg's *a priori*s: a concentration on simple intervals, on scale degree functions, and ultimately harmony. From this point on, Reti's analyses can only be held up as “Schoenbergian” in error or as strictly limited to their time and scholarly context.

4. *The tonal problem.* Merely linking motives to scale degrees in local musical space tells us little about the larger facets or aspects of a musical work. To represent the musical work in these larger terms, an analyst needs to present the function of select motives and their scale-degree contents in terms of some dynamic vehicle. The tonal problem as construed by Carpenter constitutes just such a vehicle or theoretical apparatus: for Carpenter the multiple meanings of certain motives—the tonal ambiguity of their intervals and scale degrees—constitutes a problem posed structurally in a musical work. In essence (and following Schoenberg), the first pitch of every piece takes on a kind of tonic or tonal centrality. Every subsequent pitch can in principle usurp this central referential status. From competing claims of centrality a problematic tonal obscurity emerges. The tonal problem is solved through the logical relation of all pitches in a work to a tonal center. The motivic clarification of certain critical scale-degree motives throughout the work effects this structural solution to the problem. This process of clarification constitutes the formal element—or what, following Schoenberg, we might call the “constructive function of harmony”—in a work of tonal music. But just how much of this is Carpenter's thought and how much belongs properly to Schoenberg are questions left largely unsettled by this manuscript and its edition.

The answer to both questions is an uncomfortably close call. Schoenberg was aware of the form-building possibilities of an ambiguity (see the entry “problem” in the concordance). But in none of his theoretical writings published prior to the *Gedanke* manuscript is the concept of a *problem*

related directly to motivic content with the same kind of motive/scale-degree/tonality linkage established by Carpenter in her writings. While there is evidence that Schoenberg drew such a linkage in the *Gedanke* manuscript, nowhere is this explicit, at least with such detail and rigor as in Carpenter's work. That the editors' commentary does not adequately distinguish between Schoenberg and Carpenter in this respect is a shortcoming, but also a lacuna not out of keeping in a field just beginning to develop a critical relationship between history and theory. The section of the commentary devoted to Schoenberg's appraisal of the first movement of Brahms's Piano Quartet op. 60 serves the editors as the locus for assessing his conception of the tonal problem. They suggest that in the analysis of op. 60 "he focuses on a harmonic detail that represents the problem" (63). Since Schoenberg, immediately after quitting his discussion of op. 60, introduces his remarks on Brahms's op. 101 Trio by noting that it "shows a similar problem" (similar presumably to op. 60), I would concur with the editors that the term lay within his lexicon. To what extent he conceived the problem, and whether it approximates Carpenter's thought, remains unclear, however. Whether out of modesty or editorial effacement, the commentary is not helpful on questions of provenance for the tonal problem.

For example, the editors state that in his treatment of op. 60, "Schoenberg noted three features in [the] opening phrase: the initial semitone (interval *a*), the descending hexachord, and the cross-relation contained in that hexachord, $B\flat/B\sharp$ " (67). In the manuscript pages devoted to op. 60, however, the interval *a* appears in a musical illustration (Schoenberg's pagination 207a, reproduced on p. 317) but is not mentioned in Schoenberg's text. A hexachord containing or implying a cross-related $B\flat/B\sharp$ is to be found in neither text nor example. (The editors speak in the previous paragraph of a hexachord ($E\flat D C B\sharp A\flat G$), but again this does not appear to be Schoenberg's concept.) Nor is the cross-relation $B\flat/B\sharp$ marked by him in any way.

Despite these problems of authority, we are thankful for the commentary as an analysis. The notion of a hexachordal frame applied to tonal music is, like so many of Carpenter's insights, fresh and exciting. The editors go on to demonstrate the importance of these motives to a tonal problem—a foray into the remote keys of $C\flat$ major and $A\flat$ minor, alongside the initially inexplicable presence of the sudden E-major chord at mm. 28–30. But this is their reading, their analysis, their application of the concept of tonal problem. In subsequent discussion, the editors make a convincing argument for the importance of these "three features," but by no stretch of the imagination can all three be called Schoenberg's. (It must be said that not all the evidence of Schoenberg's thought is on the

table yet, and indeed reference is made in the footnotes to Patricia Carpenter's class notes⁵ and in the footnotes and glossary to the class notes of Gerald Strang held by the Schoenberg Institute⁶—neither source being mentioned in the bibliography, however.)

The methodological problem of the commentary is one of critical distance. A more careful indication of the gradation between Schoenberg's and Carpenter's thought should have been remarked. Fortunately, the methodological problem does not detract from Carpenter's work, which is strikingly original on its own terms as a remarkable synthesis inspired by and thus distinct from Schoenberg's thoughts.⁷ One cannot help but wonder at the neglect accorded her work in the field of music theory in general, unless one notes that she was active in a field peopled by men in the days before this was seen as an inequity, and that she was a lonely advocate of Schoenberg in the days of the Schenkerian conquest, or the "Americanization of Schenker" (Rothstein 1986: 5–17). This self-effacing commentary will not do much to support the fact that Carpenter was a major theoretic mind in our time, capable of great depth and persuasion (in this regard, perhaps Schoenberg's equal).

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In summary, the publication of the *Gedanke* manuscript, while making available some new material, will function primarily to confirm and solidify our impression of Schoenberg's thought as continuous and comprehensive. In light of the project of tonal-problem analysis, the manuscript reveals less than we might have hoped for, although there is evidence to strengthen the thesis that Schoenberg conceived of tonality and motive in the rigorous particulars of scale degrees.

Apart from the content of the manuscript, there remains an unsettling question: Where does Schoenberg's work leave off and Carpenter's begin? As noted at the beginning of this review, the division of music theory from its history is quite unsettled. Ideally, the historian as translator and editor will keep careful diplomatic distance from the application of the ideas contained in a manuscript, and the theorist in applying those ideas will keep careful distance from their diplomatic presentation. In practice, history pulls one way and theory pulls another, and rents and fissures are evident in much work done under the twinned rubrics. But what's a historian of music theory to do?

Notes

1. See Proctor and Riggins (1988: 102–26) and Snarrenberg (1994: 29–56).
2. See Littlefield and Neumeyer (1992: 38–65) for a disturbing disclaimer (page 48) absolving Schenker of his autocratic opinions as simply a product of his time.
3. See Carpenter 1983: 15–38; 1984: 394–427; 1988a: 341–74; 1988b: 31–63; 1991: 21–47.
4. See especially Carpenter 1983, 1988a, and 1988b.
5. See footnotes 93, 148, and 224.
6. See footnote 190, and the glossary entry “Joining Technique” [Anschluss-Technik] on page 380.
7. Perhaps because this is a commentary on Schoenberg’s text and not a self-standing analysis of the Brahms movement, the analysis itself is condensed and difficult. Someone not familiar with Carpenter’s analytic method (or with the Schoenbergian concepts of cross relation and tonic and dominant form) will want to turn to her earlier analyses, and to Schoenberg (1943, 1954, 1967).

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