

Response to Matthew Brown

David Neumeyer

In brief, I say the fallacies are Brown's, not mine. Certain dichotomies arose from what I labeled, out of respect for its keen insights, Rothstein's paradox. To quote again from our review:

Although it is undoubtedly true that “backgrounds and even middlegrounds are not for everybody,” they are for *somebody*; and, so long as the *Ursatz*—the heart and soul of Schenker's ideology—remains, the specter of compromise will hover over every practitioner and pedagogue. The only solution is to reject the assumptions that gave rise to the paradox in the first place: either abandon the *Ursatz* or abandon the notion that Schenker's method constitutes a theory. Or, to restate these two options in positive terms: either accept complexity and potential multiplicities in hierarchical design or accept that Schenker's first priority was cultural ideology.¹

Not surprisingly, Brown finds troublesome the consequences of these dichotomies for theory-making, and he offers a vigorous recapitulation of views he has been propounding for several years now. I find nothing in his response that dissuades me from the opinion that his is a quixotic venture: arguing in a box, he can find Schenker's theory “objective,” logically consistent, empirically testable, even if in so doing he ignores its driving forces, that is, all the powerful reasons Schenker invented the method in the first place. The dichotomies I posed are not false: the end result is very different if one pares down the theory by jettisoning the inconvenient bits to create a neatly packaged scientific theory than it is if one fosters a range of interpretation and celebrates Schenkerian analysis as art, not science²—or as I would put it, a practice of interpretation, not theory. If one wants the latter (“science,” “theory”), it would be more productive to start from Lerdaahl and Jackendoff or from Narmour (or perhaps

¹David Neumeyer and Julian L. Hook, “Review: *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach*, by Allen Cadwallader and David Gagné,” *Integral* 11 (1997), p. 219.

²See David Beach, “The Current State of Schenkerian Research,” *Acta Musicologica* 57/2 (1985), p. 299, also pp. 297–98.

even from Cogan?), theories that have the kind of grounding in scientific theory-making one needs. Another possibility is neo-Riemannian theory, which has its grounding in that most strenuous of logics, mathematics.

Brown says that the “mysterious number 5” is a “ridiculous notion.”³ Probably it is, but Schenker wrote the following in *Free Composition*:

The key to form lies, in some hidden way, in the number of parts. Just as 2, 3, 4, and 5 differ from one another, so do the forms derived from these numbers differ in their inner nature and significance. Strangely, in agreement with the principle of the number 5 which I mentioned in my *Harmony* (§11), the number 5 also represents the limit in the world of form.⁴

This is not the voice of the scientist speaking in later years about misconceived or inadequate theories prevalent in his youth. This is the same voice we heard in 1906 announcing his forthcoming volume on the “psychology of counterpoint” and going on about the “procreative urges” of tones, the “biological nature of form,” and “the sacrifices which each tone had to make if a community of tones was to be established usefully and continued stably.”⁵ Throwing away the number 5 certainly makes it easier to construct a logical theory, rather like banishing Newton's alchemy as if it were the midnight brothel-slumming of an otherwise reputable Victorian husband. Historians of science have for some time now acknowledged that separating out the respectable from the unrespectable in the old masters of science gives a false picture of their work and is in part the product of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century attempts to create a pure-science high culture aloof from the sullied low-culture science of invention for commerce. In other words, banishing alchemy (like discarding the number 5) is an ideological move

³ See footnote 60, Matthew Brown, “Rothstein's Paradox and Neumeier's Fallacies,” this volume, p. 130.

⁴ Heinrich Schenker, trans. Ernst Oster, *Free Composition* (New York: Longman, 1979), p. 145.

⁵ Heinrich Schenker, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese, ed. Oswald Jonas, *Harmony* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), pp. xxvi, 6–7 (also see 28–29), 12, 40.

that became enshrined in an historical narrative, a general strategy that Richard Littlefield and I scrutinize in “Rewriting Schenker—History, Ideology, Narrative.”⁶ The notion that Schenker's theory must be construed narrowly and “understood,” not “altered,” belongs to a particular community of interpreters, a phenomenon we also discuss in “Rewriting Schenker.”

⁶Richard Littlefield and David Neumeyer, “Rewriting Schenker—History, Ideology, Narrative,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 14/1 (1992): 38–65.