

Morgan, Robert P. 2014. *Becoming Heinrich Schenker: Music Theory and Ideology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Reviewed by Bryan J. Parkhurst

In my view, there is a real need for the kind of book that Robert Morgan's *Heinrich Schenker: Music Theory and Ideology* aspires to be: a succinct, lucid, and sympathetic summary of the most important works of the most important music theorist, one that shows how those works comprise an integrated theoretical program, a "complete, self-enclosed system" (14)—in a word, a *Wissenschaft*. Needless to say, this is in many circles no longer seen as a fashionable, or even remotely credible, way of doing intellectual history. A backward glance at the last few decades of developments in music studies leaves one with the impression that the project of rational reconstruction died a mostly unmourned death when Dahlhaus died a premature death in 1989.¹ But "Schenkerism," as Narmour dubbed it, has always been a flagrantly, joyfully, and (in large part) self-consciously unfashionable "ism," even (or especially) back when Schenker was figuring out how to be a Schenkerian. And, in the case of a temporally and culturally remote, sometimes willfully opaque, unfailingly cantankerous thinker like Schenker, reconstruction—which blends the exegete's task of making a text as comprehensible as possible with the advocate's task of making it as convincing and relevant as possible—is arguably a necessary precondition for anything resembling *deconstruction*, however important and edifying that hermeneutic occupation may be.

Thus I side with Morgan on a fundamental level, in that I think his book aims at a target worth aiming at. Many in the field will disagree. So be it; I'm happy to submit the opinion as a minority report. On this point, however, I anticipate consensus: Morgan fails to hit his target's bull's-eye. While there is plenty to be learned from *Becoming Heinrich Schenker*, and while everyone who likes to think about Schenker should read it (*faute de mieux*), I have reservations about how successfully it prosecutes the goals it sets for itself. In what follows, I will use the three components of the book's title—"Becoming Heinrich Schenker," "Music Theory," and "Ideology"—to orient my criticisms and substantiate this verdict.

"Becoming Heinrich Schenker"

Curiously, *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* has little to do with how Heinrich Schenker became Heinrich Schenker. Aside from a thumbnail sketch in the

first chapter, the book contains little biographical material. A more appropriate title for *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* would have been *Becoming Free Composition*, the better to reflect two facts: 1) that the text is essentially a chronological book report on Schenker's best-known writings ("The Spirit of Musical Technique," *Harmony, Counterpoint* vols. 1 and 2, Schenker's monographs and explanatory editions, *The Will of the Tones*, *The Masterwork in Music*, and *Free Composition*); and 2) that the overarching thesis of this *Literaturübersicht* is a teleological one, to the effect that everything prior to *Free Composition* "can be beneficially viewed as evolving toward the final theory" (xiv), since "Schenker's evolution can be understood as basically consistent and unidirectional" as it "moves toward the final theory" (xviii).² In a refinement of this thesis, we are told that Schenker's early ideas and his final theory are non-equivalent but genealogically connected: "I do not myself feel that a direct line can be drawn between all the ideas expressed in Schenker's early works and those in the later ones, nor that they are in any way equivalent. But I do feel that some concepts expressed in the early works anticipate later ones in a way that seems both powerful and inevitable. It is not, then, that the earlier works completely predict the subsequent ones, but that some ideas introduced there can be viewed as both related to later ones and providing them a sort of prior foundation" (xviii). The book's objectives, accordingly, are to 1) provide some historical background and a resume of "Schenker's final theory" (Chapters 1–2); 2) selectively interpret passages of Schenker's pre-*Free Composition* publications by viewing them through the lens of the final theory (Chapters 3–7); and 3) evaluate the merits of Schenker's final theory (Chapters 8–10).

Let me reiterate that I have no grievance to bring against Morgan's self-avowedly teleological approach *per se*. In the face of the prevailing post-structuralist historiographical orthodoxy, which legislates that progressivist historical narratives are uncreditable, and that even conceptualization itself is to be held in some degree of suspicion,³ I have grown nostalgic for a bygone Hegelian age, one in which we were given to believe that the past has intelligibility for us only as a repository of potentialities that find their complete realization in the present, potentialities that progressively actualize themselves in a way that is, in the broadest possible sense, *rational* (a process Hegel discusses under the heading of "the march of reason through history"). Thus there is something bold and refreshing, for unrepentant Hegelians at least, in Morgan's candor about his desire to tell a Whiggish, retrospective tale about the cumulative revelation of an "entire mature system" (103 and 224) across Schenker's oeuvre.

Unfortunately, there is at times something stale in the telling. Many of Morgan's ceremoniously unveiled interpretive theses strike the reader as

either self-evident or tritely familiar. We are told that *Harmony's* theorization of *Stufen* and *Counterpoint's* theorization of the strict/free composition dichotomy are, later on in *Free Composition*, united in a “concrete method that would show how the idealized content of *Stufen* in free composition could be derived from the actual content of musical progressions, and a concrete method that would show how the idealized content of species counterpoint could also be derived from those same progressions” (97); that Schenker’s earlier essays and books contain analyses that exhibit inchoate anticipations of methods that Schenker brings to bear in his later analyses; that *Geist* deals with some themes that remain preoccupations of Schenker’s for the rest of his life but also expresses some views Schenker later came to repudiate. And, compounding platitude with redundancy, *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* displays throughout an almost incantatory repetition of these and other stereotypical chestnuts. I lost track of the number of times it was reaffirmed that Schenker’s focus was on a smallish group of mostly German masterpieces, that Schenker was fixated on the topic of genius, that his analytical technique is distinguished by its synoptic and totalizing pretensions, and so on.⁴ None of this is wrong, but none of it is newsworthy. That being said, an instructor might find it useful to assign Morgan’s thematic summaries to students in order to provide them with an interpretive skeleton to be fleshed out later by treatments of Schenker’s conceptual development (e.g. in the work of Pastille, Blasius, Korsyn, Snarrenberg, Karnes, and others) that are rather more nuanced and penetrating, but *ipso facto* less comprehensive than what Morgan provides.

However, those who have little familiarity with Schenker will find Morgan’s overview of Schenker’s *Musikanschauung* (Chapter 2) to be forbiddingly abstract, for Morgan does not situate Schenker’s interpretive categories within the matrix of musical details that gave birth to those categories. Nobody who doesn’t already know what *reaching over* is will be able to make heads or tails of the sole thing Morgan says about it, which is that it “combines an incomplete descending neighbor motion and superimposed inner voices in a regular pattern that often results in a rising linear progression” (22). Giving a rundown of Schenker’s analytical concepts without referring them back copiously to the passages of real music they are meant to explicate leads necessarily to a certain kind of fetishism, in that it tends to reify those concepts and treat them as though they held some intrinsic interest all on their own. What interests us, though, isn’t the Platonic form of *Übergreifung*, glimpsed in the purifying light of total abstraction, but instead the real music that yields up something of the secret of its beauty when brought under this concept.

Yet I don't think Morgan can be faulted too severely on this score. In the first place, the person guiltiest of fetishizing Schenkerian analytical concepts is Heinrich Schenker; Morgan is a minor offender by comparison. In the second place, the error is forgivable in proportion to its unavailability. Inasmuch as Schenker studies has established itself as an academic discipline, it has placed itself under an obligation to produce the trappings thereof, such as book chapters that encapsulate Schenker's musical horizon of reference. But the nature of the material prevents this obligation from being satisfactorily fulfilled. The Schenkerian conception of music cannot be distilled down to a list of discrete propositions. Instead, Schenkerian analysis is an activity that flows from an irreducibly intricate musical *form of life* (to borrow an expression from one of Morgan's favorite philosophers, Wittgenstein, to whom we will return), one which must be lived out if its indigenous concepts are to be grasped. And this isn't just a problem for *Becoming Heinrich Schenker*; it is a problem for *Free Composition*. How does one summarize what is refractory to verbal summarization? How does one substitute *saying* for *doing* without remainder? It is no coincidence that the most expedient means of transmitting and inculcating Schenkerian modes of knowing, the kind of proficiency the analyst bodies forth when she gives a Schenkerian reading of a piece, is not, and never has been, the textbook summary, nor indeed the written word in any of its manifestations. "Schenkerizing," like piano playing, must be learned at the knee of an expert whose actions can be emulated—a fact which dooms from the start the genre of the Schenkerian conspectus.

This does not entirely exculpate Morgan. I imagine that novitiates will not find his digest of *Free Composition* to be appreciably easier to digest than *Free Composition* itself. And I would think that any reader with enough expertise to comprehendingly follow Morgan's summary of Schenker's analytical technique probably has too much expertise to feel very engaged by it, as it contains nothing groundbreaking or novel. However, I could be wrong. Maybe I am underestimating the appeal of hearing a familiar story told with different words. *Semper idem, sed non eodem modo*, as Schenker says.⁵

"Theory"

One problem with *Becoming Heinrich Schenker's* teleological argument is that its conception of the pertinent *telos*—its stance on what counts as part of a putative final theory—is overly inclusive. In Chapter 2 we get an itemized list of "the theory's basic assumptions" (19). Most of these are the canonical Schenkerian interpretive categories: composing out, trans-

formation, the *Ursatz* and *Urlinie*, foreground/middleground/background, interruption, compound melody, substitution, and so on. But another entry on the list is the “assumption that tones have egos whose spiritual tendencies must be obeyed” (30), also described as “the idealistic belief that tones have ‘wills’ or ‘egos’: a spiritual dimension that requires them to behave in a certain way and no other” (17). One of these assumptions is not like the others. That is problematic: running together Schenker’s formalist categories with his penchant for anthropomorphizing sound is a bit like running together Newton’s laws of motion with Newton’s claim that space is the *sensorium Dei* (“God’s sense organ”), in that it tends to erode the distinction between modes of discourse whose differences should be acknowledged. Is the “assumption” that music can and should be parsed according to certain structuralist/organicist paradigms analogous to the “assumption” that “tones have a biological nature which gives them their own egos”? Couldn’t Schenker’s talk of wills and egos be impressionistic and metaphorical in a way that his talk of a five-line isn’t (even if the latter way of talking still bears an irremovable residue of metaphor)?

These questions are only partly rhetorical, for it seems to me that the very *purport* (not to mention the truth-value) of the claim that tones have a “biological nature” is far from obvious. Simply saying that Schenker believed such a thing is roughly as informative as saying that Hegel believed that the true is the whole (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*) and leaving it at that. Most of us will have little notion of *how* to believe this, much less *whether* to believe it. In other words, in the absence of serious and sustained philological work, much of what Schenker wrote confronts us as a cipher. But instead of philology, what we often get in *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* is the uncritical adoption of idiomatic Schenkerian forms of expression⁶ in passages that are supposed to clarify what Schenker believed. In his own voice and without irony, Morgan offhandedly refers to music’s “spiritual nature,” the “spiritual meaning of strict counterpoint,” music’s “harmony-based spirituality,” “spiritually anchored tones,” the “spiritual unity of a second-species third progression,” “spiritual verticalities,” and the “spirituality of counterpoint in general.” My soul! As a rule, one should try to avoid talking like Schenker when talking about Schenker—it makes the reader search for missing quotation marks.

There is a basic question lurking in the background of all this: what kind of a theory is Schenker’s theory? Is it a predictive empirical stylistics? A theory of auditory ethics? A Kantian theory of unity? These questions have set a river of ink flowing. To my surprise, *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* hardly dips its toes in the current. The absence of engagement with the secondary meta-theoretical literature on the epistemological underpinnings

of Schenker's system goes hand in hand with the author's assumption that Schenker's "final theory" is something like the sum total of all the pronouncements that Schenker issued about music after some sufficiently advanced date (say, the publication of *The Masterwork in Music*): if you aren't worried about what kind of theory Schenker's theory is, you don't need to worry about which of his statements are properly *theoretical* statements. But both of these seem like worries worth having. Certainly they are in the case of Newton, where we would like to acknowledge an important difference between "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" and "space is the *sensorium Dei*" by saying that the former statement does, and the latter statement does not, belong to Newtonian physics properly so-called.

The danger of being insufficiently concerned with these meta-theoretical issues comes to the fore when we read that Schenker's graph of Bach's Prelude No. 1 in C major "contains not only theoretical information about the pitches but non-theoretical information about the rhythmic and phrase relationships supporting them" (Schenker's hypermetric indications aren't underwritten by some sort of tacit theory?), or when we try to reconcile the claim that "Schenker believed—and consistently stressed—that his final theory provided music with ultimate truth" (8) with the claim that one of "Schenker's fundamental beliefs" was that "only a small canon of compositions with a great deal in common and susceptible to detailed analytical explanation can provide the complete musical truth demanded by his theory" (29). I don't know what it means to say that the theory provides the music with truth, nor what means to say that the music provides the theory with truth, but I do know that it is circular to say both, and I doubt that Schenker is the one thinking in circles here.

"Ideology"

For many, "ideology" rings either Marxist or post-Marxist bells. Either the word picks out a form of mystification, conducive to the economic interests of the ruling classes, that it is possible to transcend or unmask as false (as in the classical Marxist model); or the gist of it is that our forms of consciousness are conditioned by the dominant economic formation and resultant superstructural phenomena fully and absolutely, making ideology an inescapable force that shapes our very appreciation of the distinction between what is real and what is unreal, essential and inessential, a force whose influence cannot be escaped so long as we remain within the confines of what Nietzsche calls "the prison house of language" (as in a

Lacanian or Althusserian model of ideology). *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* begins with an attempt to unring those bells:

Since ideology, as a conceptual framework through which experience is filtered as part of a more orderly overall picture, is often viewed with suspicion, some explanation of its stress here seems appropriate. Distrust of ideology stems mainly from the negative meaning it acquired through association with Marxism, within which it has consistently been understood as a source of ‘false consciousness’ that distorted normal conceptions of material reality by turning them upside down, rather like a camera obscura. Yet ideologies can also be consensual and pervasive, and they can exist in forms that reflect general social and intellectual positions rather than specifically political ones. In addition, they are held with various degrees of emphasis, professed or unacknowledged, conscious or unconscious, rigid or flexible. In this more general sense, ideology exists behind all forms of thought, including Schenker’s. (4)⁷

Morgan is frank about wishing to extinguish the political charge of the term “ideology.” And perhaps *The Magic Mountain*’s Settembrini is wrong to insist that “The apolitical does not exist—everything is politics.” Still, the political overtones of “ideology” are hard not to hear, especially when the ideologist in question is an arch-reactionary nationalist, and one feels therefore that the word is wildly overused in Morgan’s book, whose title belies the fact that it is mostly an exposition of a set of beliefs Schenker publicly attested to holding. Explicating and tracing the literary provenance of Schenker’s overt aesthetic platform is very different from diagnosing the etiology of the all-embracing, materially- and socially-determined, class-based normative take on things of which that platform is symptomatic. To be sure, Morgan can use “ideology” however he sees fit to use it.⁸ But I can’t help but think that it is misleading for the cover of *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* to cash in on the academic vogue enjoyed by the word “ideology” while the pages of the book remain at a cautious distance from anything most critics of ideology would wish to call “ideology critique.”

What is inscribed upon the doxastic edifice equivocally labelled “Schenker’s ideology?” First and foremost we find an incompatible blend of the new and the old, or of the old and the older: “there are some distinct peculiarities to the theory, one of the most telling being that it contains an ideological paradox consisting of two apparently independent and opposed philosophical strains: a nineteenth-century Idealist one and a twentieth-century Modernist one. Although both influenced the theory’s formation in a critical way, the Idealist one should be considered the dominant one, for it supplied the theory with its basic core—the spirituality of tone” (xiv). However, having been assured of the central importance of an “ideologi-

cal paradox” and of the “conflicted nature of Schenker’s theory” (xiv), we then encounter, bafflingly, the assessments that Schenker’s theory grows up around an “internally consistent ideological framework” (4), that it can be understood as “basically consistent” (xviii), and that (according to the book’s conclusion) “much of Schenker’s [idealist] theoretical development was consistent with his scientific orientation.”

Which is it? Is Schenker’s theory riddled with paradox, or has Schenker succeeded in constructing a “complete, self-enclosed system” that hangs together consistently and coherently? Contrary to what one might expect, no answer to this question is ventured in Chapter 9, entitled “Critical assessment: Ideology,” which is meant to “[take] into account both the advantages and the disadvantages of the theory.” Instead the chapter leaves to one side theory-internal questions about consistency and coherence and turns its attention to allegedly powerful external objections to Schenker’s theory. One of these is a Wittgensteinian refutation of Schenker’s whole agenda. “A . . . Wittgensteinian point is that any human activity, such as music, must take place within a ‘public’ arena where it participates in what Wittgenstein calls a communally sanctioned ‘language game,’ which is itself embedded in shared ‘forms of life’ . . . It may be that Schenker’s manner of theorizing, even measured against the standards of music theory, is obsessively cult-like and that, by relying upon what Wittgenstein calls a ‘private language,’ it takes part in what for him is a logical impossibility. Human communication always requires the presence of public conventions” (185).

Wittgenstein’s private language argument is a tough nut to crack, and there is no consensus among Wittgenstein’s commentators about how the argument is supposed to go or about whether it succeeds. Minimally, though, all parties to the debate agree that the private language argument is intended to demonstrate that the very concept of a language spoken by one person (a language comprehensible *in principle* to one and only one person) is incoherent or unintelligible or self-abnegating—like the concept of a square circle or of an equitable capitalist society. I won’t offer my own or anyone else’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s tortuous argument here; I’ll merely mention a few points that are wholly obvious and uncontroversial. The private language argument has nothing at all to do with criticizing the use of jargon or esoteric speech, nor does it have anything to do with dialects or idiolects (the characteristic ways in which groups or individuals speak a public language), nor does it have anything to do with the mutual intelligibility of linguistic subcultures. It is nonsensical to raise the worry that Schenker is guilty of “relying on what Wittgenstein calls a ‘private language,’” given that Wittgenstein’s whole point is that there can’t be any such

thing and that we can't coherently conceive of such a thing. It is equally nonsensical to wonder whether Schenker's theory "takes part in what for [Wittgenstein] is a logical impossibility." It is not likely that Wittgenstein thinks that the impossibility of a private language is distinctively logical (i.e. *formally* contradictory, in violation of the law of non-contradiction), but, in any event, logically impossible states of affairs cannot obtain (at any possible world!) so nothing can "take part" in them. Private languages aren't naughty things; they aren't things. This total mishandling of Wittgenstein unintentionally corroborates Morgan's earlier claim that "attempts to clarify [Schenker's ideas] often result in further distortion" (160).

Just as there is confusion in *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* about the consistency of Schenker's "theory" and its "ideological framework," there is confusion about the nature of the twin components of this ideological economy, Schenker's so-called "idealism" (a.k.a. Schenker's "speculative" side) and its counterpart, which Morgan variously designates as "modernism," "materialism," "empiricism," and "scientific orientation." Time and again we are reminded that Schenker is an idealist who believes in the "ideal nature" and "spirituality" of tones, a belief that allegedly is in tension with Schenker's investigatory/explanatory/scientific impulses. But, to re-pose a question from above, what is Schenker committing himself to when he calls music *geistig*? And how is this commitment manifested in, or traceable to, the system propounded by any particular idealist philosopher? If one wishes to document Schenker's allegiance to (some form of) idealism, it is not enough to superficially note that there is something rather "subjective," and thus empirically suspect, and thus "idealist" or "speculative," about particular Schenkerian turns of phrase. Yet that is the altitude at which *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* mostly hovers: "Although Schenker may have couched his subjective elements—such as the will of tones, mental retention, prolongation, and long-range hearing—in terms that suggested that they were somehow scientifically sanctioned (as he himself seems to have believed), they cannot be empirically justified, as they are linked to the ephemerality of human hearing. The theory, characterized by a mixture of speculative (personal) and empirical (impersonal) elements, is thus seen by Schenker himself as the work 'of an artist'" (12).

The reason that topics such as human hearing and the mental retention of tones are supposed to lie outside the purview of empirical investigation is just as unclear to me as is the reason for positing a close kinship between the subjective or personal and an imagined philosophical monolith called "idealism" or "speculative philosophy." It is important to bear in mind that the idealists were a diverse bunch who spent most of their time arguing with one another rather than with non-idealists and that there is no single

creed called “German idealism.” Fichte perhaps gave some latitude to subjectivity and personality (a much greater concern of the romantics than of the idealists) when he claimed that “[W]hat sort of philosophy one chooses depends on what sort of man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture that we can accept or reject as we wish; it is animated by the soul of the person who holds it” (1982, 16). But Hegel, famously, purges such individualism from his account of the attainment of “absolute knowledge,” humankind’s objective (yet self-directed) knowledge of its own socially-enacted spiritual and philosophical *Bildung* (cultural maturation). Hegel also would not have regarded himself as being at all implicated in the glib insistence that it must be “understood that Schenker, following the Idealists, believed that truly imaginative, constructive knowledge exists only when it is unaware of itself” (202). Schelling rhapsodizes about the unconscious now and then (although he never characterizes it as the *only* source of knowledge) but, in purposeful opposition to Schelling, Hegel maintains that the only conversation worth having about knowledge is a conversation about how the world is ineluctably coming to know *itself* (indeed, to know itself *knowing itself*) by means of the relentless attainment of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity by what he calls “*Geist*” (the normative human world of value structures, institutions, culture, and language). For Hegel, knowledge *just is* collective self-awareness, the *emergence from* unselfconsciousness.

This demonstrates that it is perilous to talk about the German idealists as though there were some philosophical catechism to which they were all pledged. Idealism, like Schenkerism, is more of a philosophical posture or *Denkungsart*, a way of addressing oneself to the materials of thought, than a creed that can be decomposed into a set of discreet teachings or orthodoxies. It is also perilous, though in a different way, to use “idealist” as a kind of catch-all pejorative for any commitment of whose empirical credentials one is suspicious: “In fact, the idealist origins of some of the theory’s most fundamental assumptions—its basis in nature, appeal to genius, nationalistic bias, etc.—indicates that these have no objective empirical grounding. Their features, as well as others such as musical logic and necessity, provide from an empirical perspective at best an efficient means for grounding the work theoretically” (205). Often, in *Becoming Heinrich Schenker*, “idealism” simply stands for whatever is opposed to “the empirical assumption that musical understanding is derived from close musical observation” (xiv), as in Morgan’s claim that “despite the emphasis that has been correctly placed on his idealist roots, [Schenker] was also strongly influenced by scientific attitudes, especially in his later stress on musical hierarchy, theoretical notation, and the empirical observation of actual music” (43). This use of

“idealist” will perplex anyone who has studied the German idealists’ writings on nature. For one thing you *can* say about all these philosophers is that, whatever internecine disagreement may have divided them, they were united by zest for establishing the notional foundations of the natural sciences (even if they sometimes levelled peculiar criticisms against practicing scientists, as Hegel and Goethe did against Newton). Of great concern for Kant and his philosophical heirs was the need to demonstrate that both we and nature are constituted in such a way that empirical observation can be a source of genuine knowledge for us. There is no sense in which Schenker’s idealism (whatever congeries of positions and affiliations “Schenker’s idealism” might turn out to signify), insofar as it is bequeathed to him by the luminaries of classical German philosophy, is even *prima facie* opposed to his penchant for the “close musical observation.” It seems to me, therefore, that the fundamental dichotomy upon which *Becoming Heinrich Schenker’s* axial interpretive claim hinges is a false one.

A nice feature of *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* is the amount of primary source material it contains. Roughly an eighth of the book is made up of block quotations, some of them previously untranslated, many of them improvements upon the existing translations. Additionally, all of the original German (about 50 pages) is given in an appendix, a feature that should be standard in all publications about Schenker. Morgan’s own translations are by and large both readable and impeccably accurate, and he plainly has an enviable command of the German language as well as compendious knowledge of Schenker’s published writings.⁹ This makes one wish that *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* were in its entirety what it occasionally verges on being: a topically organized Schenkerian “reader” that allows Schenker to “speak of his own work in his own voice” (xx). It would be useful to have a single volume that collates, translates, and annotates Schenker’s wide-ranging commentary on German nationalism, organicism, freedom, God, and other topics dear to his heart, since this commentary is dispersed across many publications and is often a byplay to a music-analytical argument that takes center stage.

Schenker scholars have a big job ahead of them figuring out how Schenker became the thinker he became, probing the question of what kind of a theory Schenker’s theory is, and delivering an analysis and critique of Schenker’s ideology. Robert Morgan is to be commended for making some headway on this front even if, as I have tried to indicate, his book exhibits less philosophical acumen than his topic demands. I hope that all those who are fascinated by the philosophical/ideological side of Schenker will read *Becoming Heinrich Schenker* and feel motivated to build and improve upon it.

Notes

1. In music theory, and Schenker studies in particular, one finds countercurrents to this trend, notably in the work of Matthew Brown and Mark DeBellis.
2. Everything, that is, with the exception of everything that Schenker wrote prior to “The Spirit of Musical Technique,” which allegedly “contain[s] little . . . that relates directly to the later work” (41) and is thus in no way “vital to Schenker’s overall development” (xx). This is a flatly unbelievable claim for which no substantiation is offered.
3. See Taruskin 2010, 380–82.
4. “This emphasis on masterpieces and genius indicates that Schenker does not have all music in mind, but only a limited canon of what are in his view great works” (101); “Schenker’s theory thus views the composition’s overall tonal structure as an unfolding of the tonic triad, its first level [like all others] covering the entire piece, and consisting of the unfolding’s simplest form: a stepwise descent in the top voice [the most proximate type of melodic motion] down to the tonic, accompanied by a three-part triadic arpeggiation in the bass [the most fundamental type of harmonic motion]” (227); “One of the theory’s most important features thus became its hierarchical structure, which allowed this theoretical framework to be presented as a set of interrelated layers, each included in the following one” (227).
5. My own pleasure in hearing *Becoming Heinrich Schenker’s* version of the story of Schenker’s conceptual odyssey was diminished by numerous banalities and infelicities of style: “This last point provides Schenker with a wedge showing that minor—even if vicariously—also partakes of nature, though the rescue is conflicted” (65). “The theory, then, serves a useful purpose; but like all things in life, it is imperfect. Its ideological foundations cannot be dismissed, whether they are related to Schenker’s historical evolution or to the theoretical result. But our own conception of the theory is the only one available to us, and this depends finally on how we feel about it” (228). “Indeed, Schenker was surprisingly encompassing, rigid, and open in stating the ideology behind his work, to whose underlying assumptions he was unequivocally inclined” (4). “Schenker will thus always remain a puzzle, even if he is by no means uniquely so” (228). What is a puzzle, even if it is by no means uniquely so, is how some of these sentences got past an editor at Cambridge University Press.
6. Morgan notes that, as Schenker uses it, “*Geist*” and its derivatives “are associated with mental states that go beyond purely material matters by referring to musical situations that transcend the unprocessed musical stimulus itself” (96), a statement which is both too vague to be informative and too deflationary to do justice to the richness of Schenker’s conception of *Geist*.
7. Curiously, a book that begins by repudiating Marx ends by warmly embracing him: “Since we have argued that Schenker’s position in Western music derives at least partly from his ideology, and that ideology is inseparably tied to theory, it seems appropriate to close this book with a quotation by one of the foundation thinkers of nineteenth-century social and economic history, Karl Marx. With reference to his contemporary, the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, and his mistaken views on eternal verities, Marx wrote:

He does not see how the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one . . . [T]he cherry tree, like almost all fruit-trees,

was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a definite society in a definite age it has become ‘sensuous certainty.’”

As far as I can tell, this quote does not epitomize anything about Morgan’s reading of Schenker. Indeed, Morgan’s hermetic “history of ideas” approach to discussing Schenker’s “self-enclosed system” is fundamentally inimical to Marxist analysis in general and to the sensibility Marx conveys in the quoted passage in particular.

8. See, for example, the seventeen “interconnected theses” whereby Morgan provides a “conceptual ‘snapshot’” of Schenker’s “ideology” (171–72). The first three hold that “(1) great music is based on purely musical principles; (2) these are derived from nature; (3) from them music acquires organic coherences.” Such beliefs are of course indicative of an ideology. But the (admittedly important) activity of enumerating Schenker’s professed beliefs, explicating them, and identifying their textual provenance, is not an activity best described as ideological analysis. At the least, we would like an ideological thesis to tell us something about how a given power structure (economic, political, or otherwise) engenders, and gets reproduced by, a form of subjectivity.

9. Morgan denies being a “dyed-in-the-wool” Schenkerian or one of Schenker’s “true disciples” on the grounds that he “does not think [that Schenker’s] analytical approach is the only valid one, or that the compositions in his canon are the only ones worthy of theoretical attention” (xix). But if those are the criteria for counting as a “dyed-in-the-wool” Schenkerian, I doubt there are any left, if there ever were any besides Schenker himself. (As Nietzsche quipped, the last Christian died on the cross.) Although Morgan promises that his account of Schenker’s theory will not be “an account from within” (xix), he later acknowledges that “in Part II of this book a primarily Schenkerian perspective was taken in treating the theory’s development, as it seemed appropriate to examine it from a basically neutral position” (183). I fail to understand how a Schenkerian perspective on Schenker could count as neutral, or could fail to count as “an account from within.”

References

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