

# Rethinking Contextuality in Tonal and Post-Tonal Centricity

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This essay examines the dichotomy between tonality and post-tonality, and in particular the point at which one theory trades into the other. This dividing line is hardly well-defined. A musical work may be treated to radically different analytic interpretations depending upon where it is drawn. On the surface, it may seem that the line between tonality and post-tonality marks a point of conflict between these two territories over repertoire. To a degree, this is true. But I think there is something deeper at stake in which the territorial interests of tonal and post-tonal theory intersect. What is paramount at this level is not so much *where* the line is drawn, but the integrity and stability of the line itself, which rests to a great extent on a dual function of the concept of centricity.<sup>1</sup>

I will restrict the discussion of this topic primarily to two theorists: Miguel Roig-Francoli and Joseph Straus. I single these theorists out because they are authors of influential textbooks which, by design and by necessity, define and rationalize the tonal/post-tonal dichotomy. I will not get into the history of this territorial configuration. It is a long and fascinating tale intertwining all manner of ideologies, dogmas, polemics, institutions, and personalities. I will say this. It would be naïve to presume that tonal music and post-tonal music are simply distinct empirical phenomena which have unilaterally ‘given rise’ to their respective theories. Granted, there is some empirical basis for speaking of a tonal repertoire,

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<sup>1</sup> By this I mean two distinct types of centricity: tonal (or ‘systematic’) and post-tonal (or ‘contextual’) centricity, which both seem to have a similar *musical* function while being generated in under very different conceptual conditions.

as distinct musical conditions can be singled out.<sup>2</sup> But there is far less of an empirical basis for post-tonal music, which seems to be designated primarily by its relationship to tonality. Roig-Francoli, for instance, defines post-tonal music as “all the techniques and styles of pitch organization that resulted from [the] search for alternatives to functional tonality.”<sup>3</sup> He designates the post-tonal repertoire not in terms of any musical traits, but in a pervasive psychology where every post-tonal composer is unified in a common antipathy towards tonality. Straus, however, would like to see something objective in the category. He has it that post-tonal music, at least what he thinks is *important* post-tonal music, is unified in some deep structural way not apparent on the surface. He says, “We are becoming increasingly aware of the common structures that underlie the obvious stylistic diversity of (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Stravinsky, and Bartok).”<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the complexities may be in distinguishing tonal from post-tonal music, their distinction in theory *appears* rather stark. The symbolic order of the two systems bear little resemblance to one another, and the way they are applied to music seems rather different as well. According to Straus, one interprets *prolongations* in tonal theory as opposed to *associations* in post-tonal theory.<sup>5</sup> Prolongations are transmissions between surface and depth,

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<sup>2</sup> Dmitri Tymozco proposes five features of tonal music. These are: 1) Conjunct melodic motion 2) Acoustic consonance 3) Harmonic consistency 4) Macroharmony (the use of a relatively small number of notes) and 5) Centricity. Tymozco’s conception of tonality is dramatically broader than the more conservative notions singled out in this essay, applying to “not just eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western art music, but rock, folk, jazz, medieval and Renaissance music, impressionism, minimalism, and a good deal of non-Western music besides.” (web source)

<sup>3</sup> Miguel Roig-Francoli, *Understanding Post-Tonal Music*, (McGraw Hill, 2007) pp. 2

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Straus, *Remaking the Past*, (Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 3

<sup>5</sup> see Joseph Straus, “The Problem of Prolongation in Post-Tonal Music,” *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 8

while associations are transmitted horizontally.<sup>6</sup> But they are similar in a more fundamental way. Prolongation and association ultimately represent two strategies of an organicist paradigm. In the exemplary case of Schenkerian theory every work is interpreted as a ‘composing out’ of the same fundamental structure, resolving, as Schenker puts it, “all diversity into ultimate wholeness.”<sup>7</sup> Straus reminds us that Schenkerian theory allows us to “hear through the musical surface to the remoter structural levels and ultimately to the tonic triad itself.”<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, post-tonal associations ensure “that the music is motivically integrated at all structural levels.”<sup>9</sup> A motive, which is usually reduced to an abstract interval structure, is found to link pitch-points in some pervasive, arboreal manner. Talk of organicism and ‘underlying unity’ is replaced by references to *coherence*. These essentially belie the same intelligence, collapsing everything to the One or to the Identical as the supreme analytic value. This paradigm has proven a productive tool for the determination of certain kinds of theoretic objects, although what is gained in these objects seems to me to be lost in terms of *aesthetic* engagement.<sup>10</sup>

There is no universal agreement over what music can or cannot sustain a prolongational interpretation. There have been sporadic efforts to expand the orthodox Schenkerian approach ever since Saltzer’s *Structural Hearing*. Even some contemporary composers, like Morris Rosenzweig, *begin* with a Schenker-like prolongational scheme, which is then filled out with

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<sup>6</sup> Straus writes “Associations of this kind draw together elements separated in time and create coherence at the middleground.” Joseph Straus, “The Problem of Prolongation in Post-Tonal Music,” pp. 13

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, Longman, 1979, pg. 5

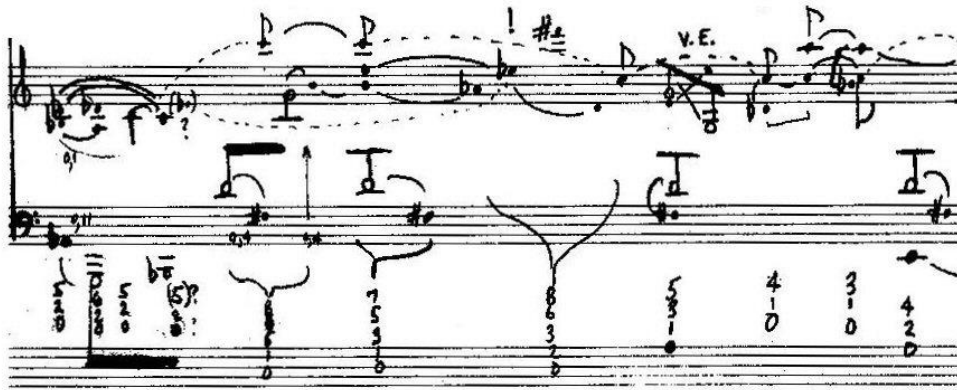
<sup>8</sup> Joseph Straus, “The Problem of Prolongation in Post-Tonal Music,” pp. 1

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 15

<sup>10</sup> My argument here is that idealist forms of analysis (musical metrics, equivalences, identities, and other structuralisms) circumvent aesthetic issues by nature. They are identifiable irrespective of the musical or artistic quality of musical works.

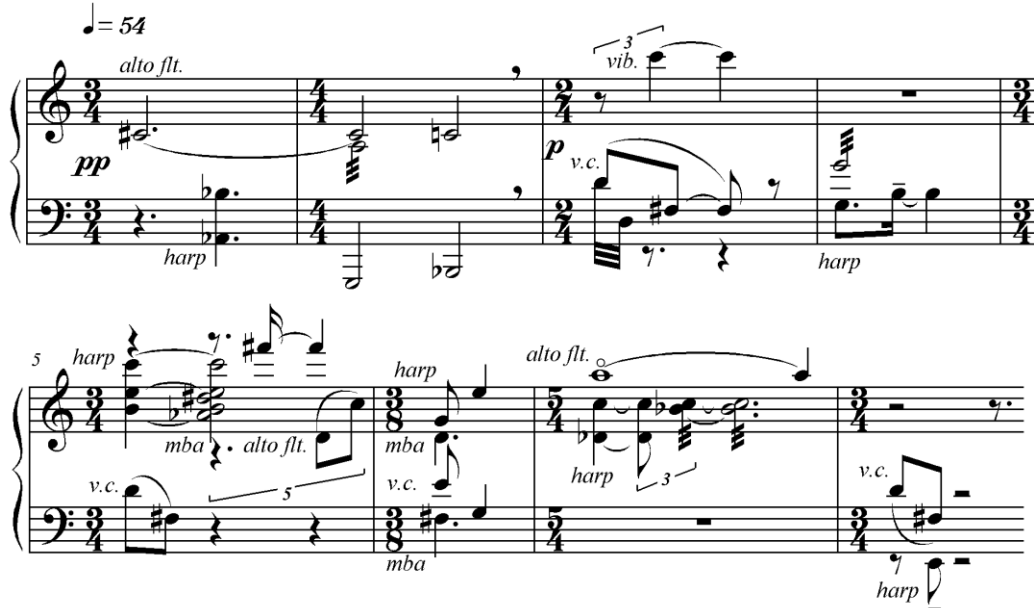
atonal textures.<sup>11</sup> **Example 1a** reproduces his preliminary composition sketch for his work *Melpomene* for chamber ensemble.

**Example 1a**



A reduction of the score corresponding to this sketch is given in **example 1b**.

**Example 1b**



The correspondences between the graph and the score are straightforward enough, although there is little correspondence between the graph, the score, and anything approaching

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed study of centricity in Rosenzweig's music, see my article "Of Art and Artifice: Style and Technique in the Music of Morris Rosenzweig," *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 43, No. 1

an authentic Schenkerian procedure. That being said, the sketch does direct the listener's attention to certain features that are to be heard prominently. It suggests that the pitch C is to be heard transferring registers from cluster to cluster as a kind of pedal tone. It also highlights the significance of the recurring D/F-sharp dyad played by the cello, meaning that this dyad is prolonged through its appearance within different textural and harmonic situations. Most theorists would likely dismiss these prolongations as *contextual* – that is, they persist simply by means of textural emphasis, prominence, and repetition. However, in listening to this passage it is not difficult to perceive the almost magnetic qualities that the D/F-sharp dyad acquires. In each occurrence, there is a subtle shift in the way the dyad 'sits' within the harmonic context, creating a sense of ongoing pull or tension evolving throughout the passage. But perhaps even more striking is the way in which the texture sets up a polarity between those chords with the dyad sounding and those without it. One begins to sense the presence of the tones precisely when they are absent as a kind of pulling or magnetism.

None of these phenomenal effects overcome the charge of their being contextually created. My point is that by discovering these sorts of effects (gravitation, magnetism, etc.) in non-tonal contexts, a procedure is taken up which may be brought to bear on tonal contexts. There is nothing preventing the question as to the extent to which similar affects in tonal music might themselves be contextually generated. If in any sense they are, we are immediately brought to significant ontological questions about the actual foundation of tonal centrality. Tonality, firmly established in the minds of theorists as dependent upon some systematic

functioning for its centric affects, is exposed to the possibility that these affects may pre-exist the functions which are applied to them.<sup>12</sup>

Another example of non-tonal centricity is discussed by David Smyth, who shows how Stravinsky coordinates his serial materials in *Threni* so as to centralize certain tones, collections, and motives.<sup>13</sup> A passage from the movement De ELEGIA PRIMA (**example 2**) features many centric procedures:

**Example 2**

Example 2 is a musical score for a passage from the movement De ELEGIA PRIMA. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 54-57) includes parts for Bugle (in C), Tenor (solo), Chorus (S/A), and Vln/Vla. The second system (measures 58-61) includes parts for C Bgl. and T. The lyrics are: "prin - - - cepts pro - vin - ci - a - rum fac - - - ta est sub tri - bu - to, sub tri - bu - to." The score features complex rhythmic patterns and chromaticism, characteristic of Stravinsky's serial techniques.

<sup>12</sup> Many theorists are accustomed to equating harmonic qualities to the location or identity of a corresponding function within a harmonic system. In reality I believe these functional ‘assignments’ are simply applied to qualities that are already there (and which may exist in one form or another in many other musical styles, real or possible). The qualities are ‘retroactively’ attributed to systematic functions, despite the fact that functions in themselves are empty dialectical markers or nodes.

<sup>13</sup> David Smyth, “Stravinsky as Serialist: The Sketches for *Threni*,” *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 221

The material culminating in the unison D-sharp at the fermata (m. 61) is the first instance of three similar passages, each of which creates sectional articulations (the final instance providing the cadence for the entire movement). Measure 56 articulates the end of a penultimate phrase, with the tenor solo and bugle arriving on a unison D-sharp in tandem, both coming as upward leaps from G-sharp. Besides this confluence, its egogic stress and its phrase-ending placement, the centrality of D-sharp/E-flat is already well established. It has been serving as a pedal point in the chorus for some measures and has been used to articulate endings and beginnings in previous phrases. The final phrase commences with reduced texture (tenor solo and bugle alone), running through the series in a kind of 2:1 canon or imitation. This produces an internal reprise of the G-sharp-D-sharp cadential gesture in the bugle in measures 59-60, with both lines coming to a close once again on the D-sharp fermata.

Stravinsky deploys his serial materials here in such a way as to produce tonal centers which have meaningful implications for the articulation of phrases and sections. In this regard it may be asked whether the articulation of phrases creates the centrality of D-sharp/E-flat, or if the centrality of D-sharp/E-flat creates the articulation of phrases. The answer, of course, is that *both* are true. Reciprocity between pitch and rhythm in musical articulation in general is bread and butter for just about any music – although, as we shall see, confusion exists as to just how such reciprocity is regarded (if at all) in tonal contexts.

Of course, Rosenzweig and the serial Stravinsky are relatively extreme cases. There is plenty of music much more similar to Haydn or Chopin in which prolongation-like events may be found. But if there is no allowance made for tinkering with Schenker's original theory, it

seems basically pointless to extend it beyond the repertoire for which it was designed. And this is Straus' interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

So what music is to be considered tonal? Straus' staunchly conservative position is only Western classical music from Bach to Brahms.<sup>15</sup> Roig-Francoli offers a somewhat more inclusive conception, which is reflected in the content of his tonal theory text. It includes a handful of show tunes and pop songs.<sup>16</sup> By not restricting tonality to European Classical and Romantic music Roig-Francoli makes a bit of a mess of the clean historical division that Straus argues for – and generally complicates the issue of what constitutes tonality versus centricity. This notwithstanding, both theorists clearly understand post-tonal theoretic and musical territories in direct relation to the territory defined for tonality. What's at stake is more than the simple 'range' of post-tonal music. The more distinctly tonality is defined, the more enhanced the theoretic identity of post-tonal theory becomes, even as it dilutes the post-tonal repertoire itself.

At the line dividing tonal and post-tonal musics, functional tonality trades into nonfunctional centricity. According to Straus, such centricity lacks the 'resources' of tonality,

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<sup>14</sup> This is the thrust of his argument in his article "The Problem of Prolongation in Post-Tonal Music"

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Straus *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*; 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), pp. 130; in this text he defines tonality according to these conditions:

I. Key. A particular note is defined as the tonic...with the remaining notes defined in relation to it.

II. Key relations. Pieces modulate through a succession of keys, with the keynotes often related by perfect fifth, or by major or minor thirds. Pieces end in the key in which they begin.

III. Diatonic scales. The principle scales are the major and minor scales.

IV. Triads. The basic harmonic structure is a major or minor triad. Seventh chords play a secondary role.

V. Functional harmony. Harmonies generally have the function of a tonic (arrival point), dominant (leading to tonic), or predominant (leading to dominant).

VI. Voice leading. The voice leading follows certain traditional norms, including the avoidance of parallel perfect consonances and the resolution of intervals defined as dissonant to those defined as consonant.

<sup>16</sup> Miguel Roig-Francoli, *Harmony in Context*, (McGraw Hill, 2003)

specifically that of prolongation.<sup>17</sup> “Even without the resources of tonality, music can be organized around referential centers.”<sup>18</sup> The sort of organization attributed to nonfunctional centrality is referred to as contextual – which essentially means that the onus is on the music to create whatever referential quality or prominence of a pitch that makes it centric (through repetition, accent, duration, etc.) Straus argues that “In the absence of functional harmony and traditional voice-leading, composers use a variety of contextual means of reinforcement.”<sup>19</sup> Roig-Francoli invokes a similar notion of a ‘contextual’ versus a ‘systematic’ centrality, asserting that “there are no such things as ‘systems’ of nonfunctional pitch centrality, and to determine a center achieved by nonfunctional means we need to examine and interpret specific musical contexts.”<sup>20</sup> His notion of system curiously excludes contextualizing processes. In a *dynamic* system, system *equals* process – something manifested by anything intelligibly musical.<sup>21</sup> Roig-Francoli seems to mean by the term a trans-historical, a-contextual structural presence which becomes relevant in conjunction only with a highly particular set of musical properties.

It is clear both Straus and Roig-Francoli think there is some a-contextual, structural presence that exists separately from an actual piece of music; otherwise tonal music would not be entitled to omit the requirement of contextually reinforcing its centrality. This function-presence would seem to return on the notes something that they are lacking, something they need to make them work. Without there being a gap between what the notes *do* to bring into existence the

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<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere Straus frames the dichotomy as between centrality and prolongation. See “The Problem of Prolongation in Post-Tonal Music,” pp. 6

<sup>18</sup> Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, pp. 131

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 131

<sup>20</sup> Roig-Francoli, *Understanding Post-Tonal Music*, pp. 5

<sup>21</sup> Examples of conceptions of dynamic systems include the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and in the theory of projection put forward by Chris Hasty in his book *Meter as Rhythm*

presence of function and what is *returned* by the function-presence not already possessed by the notes, there can be no claim that tonal centrality is not just as ‘contextual’ as any other music. I do not believe it has been demonstrated there is such a gap in tonal music that calls up and is returned with some function-presence which exempts it from the contextual burdens of other centric music.<sup>22</sup>

Taking at hand any piece of tonal music one is sure to find an abundance of ‘contextual reinforcement.’ Extreme cases come to mind, such as the eccentric repetitions of E-flat in the second movement of Beethoven’s string quartet Op. 135 (**example 3**):

### Example 3

(Vivace)

15 *vln I, II*

*vln, vc*

*dim.*

21 *p* *pp* *cresc.* etc.

There are, indeed, functional explanations for this passage – or rather, explanations which situate the *drama* of this passage in functional harmonic terms.<sup>23</sup> Lingering, as it does, the

<sup>22</sup> In advancing his positions, more often than not Straus appeals to the ‘power’ of the analytic model to ask and answer its own analytic questions, rather than to the validity of its application. This sort of circular idealism is quite common among North American theorists.

<sup>23</sup> The Eb can be seen initially as a 7<sup>th</sup> of a V of IV

musical meaning of E-flat is placed in doubt – a doubt which Beethoven seizes in order to craftily reinterpret the downward whole-tone tendency of F→E-flat as a lower chromatic neighbor in an upward leading motion D-sharp→E.

So what is driving this drama? Is it the functioning of functions, or is it what I would call a play of ‘tone-rhythm?’<sup>24</sup> Are the notes and rhythms deferring to the cueing of functional authorities, or is the tone-rhythm creating the very conditions from which functions may be intelligibly abstracted? It may well be that Beethoven is working in qualities and intensities which cannot be adequately plotted in an a-priori structure (forming a ‘liberated line,’ as Deleuze and Guattari say<sup>25</sup>). This is the possibility I am asking the reader to consider.

**Example 4** presents an even more radical contextual situation in the same movement: the dramatic repetitions of an A Major scalar fragment – a bit of music whose only operative determinant seems to be the number and total duration of the repetitions themselves. If there can be any existence of harmonic function, it is a function without a purpose; a function forced to ‘wait’ while some other musical force or necessity – something lying outside the clean rational dialectic of tonal functions – follows its purposes unabashedly.

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<sup>24</sup> This is a multidimensional concept in which tone is not abstracted from rhythm or vice-versa.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari write that musicians draw “their own diagonal, however fragile, outside points, outside coordinates and localizable connections, in order to float a sound block down a created, liberated line, in order to unleash in space this mobile and mutant sound block...” Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 297

### Example 4

The image shows a musical score for Example 4, consisting of three systems of music. Each system is in 3/4 time and the key of A major (two sharps). The first system starts at measure 143 and includes dynamic markings of *ff* and *sf*. The second system starts at measure 150 and includes a *sf* marking. The third system starts at measure 158 and ends with the text "etc." to the right of the staff. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices in both the treble and bass staves, including sixteenth-note patterns and sustained notes.

What is this music ‘doing’ once the A Major scale is clearly established? I would immediately dispense with the answer of ‘nothing,’ for each repetition, each sound, adds something. The relevance of a functional or Schenkerian interpretation is quickly suspended – for an embarrassingly long passage of time – because there is no structural answer, once the function ‘exists,’ for why this texture persists (and persists and persists).

**Example 3** and **4** are admittedly unusual situations. But the differences between these passages and more conventional ones are of degree rather than of kind. Any bit of typical music, such as the opening two segments of Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* (**example 5**) consists in

repetitions, extensions, and other musical ‘needlework’ which implicate questions beyond those answerable by recourse to harmonic function:

**Example 5**

The musical score for Example 5 is in 3/4 time and marked 'Vivace'. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (measures 1-5) features a right hand with repeated chords and a left hand with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamics include *p*, *f*, and *sf*. The second system (measures 6-9) continues the pattern with a *sf* dynamic and ends with 'etc.'

Before undertaking the usual procedure of assigning harmonic functions to this music, consider the ways in which this passage *contextualizes* the centrality first of the CM chord and then of the Gm7. In both cases, the right hand rearticulates its chord ten times. The left hand alternates between the first and fifth chord degrees, and the ‘ends’ of both segments feature flourishes which emphasizes the root tone. Reinforcing the pitch-centeredness of the music, the second segment re-traverses the virtual trail or ‘trace’ set out by the first, only it switches out the chord (‘pitch level’). These belong to the same category of centric contextuality we found in the Stravinsky, where repetition, stress, accent, and other elements of phrase formation are noticeably at work. We may ask why there are ten repetitions of the chord and no more (or less)? Why does the left hand repeat the fifth-root gesture? Why does the second phrase follow the particulars of phrasing (minus the chord) of the first? Why these melodic figures and not others?

Just as Stravinsky creates conditions involving the articulation of phrases and the reciprocity of pitch and rhythm outside any ‘inherent’ properties of a twelve-tone set in *Threni*, so too does Beethoven’s rhythmicization of CM and Gm7 engage in similar centric actions. Both involve a kind of reciprocity of rhythmic activity and tone ‘placement’ that seems to take place on an independent, a-systematic plane; a plane which consists in the direct apprehension of sonic intensities in play; in which form, so to speak, forms itself.

Even if it is granted that the establishment of tonic in this (or any typical first phrase) is contextual, one might regard this as a temporary and fleeting situation applicable only to musical beginnings. And yet we still have the extension of other harmonic situations in their duration and texture, including in that of the next segment which continue to pose the question as to why *this* number of repetitions and *this* aggregated duration is required to produce this particular musical affect. In the case of the second segment, it seems clear to me that the most salient issue in the musicality of the second segment is the duration(s) and patterning of the first segment. In other words, though we may be in a position to finally (re)claim the jurisdiction of tonal function, the musical particulars continue to be governed by the contextual behaviors of previous events. From this perspective it is easy to conclude that the contextualization of events in tonal music is absolutely pervasive – to the point where it is not possible to find any examples of passages or situations where there is not some kind of contextualization going on. The question becomes what exactly is left over that requires explication by way of the concept of tonal function? What can be separated out that would place tonal music in an ontologically distinct category exempt from the context of its own flow and flux?

Clearly, pervasive contextual reinforcement in tonal music challenges the claim that tonal music is somehow exempt from the requirement to ‘reinforce’ its centrality. The claim may also be challenged counterfactually by showing that reducing or effacing the contextual reinforcement of centrality in tonal compositions results in the breakdown of expressive and musical effectiveness, or at least in the mutation of one qualitative experience into another. Indeed, durations – rhythms, repetitions, and so on – can be manipulated without altering a functional-tonal analysis. By way of experiment, take Schenker’s middleground analysis of Chopin’s *Etude in F Major* Op. 10, No. 8. **Example 6** shows the first four bars of the opening, its equivalent middle-ground structure according to Schenker, and a re-composition of that middle-ground structure to a different foreground.

**Example 6**

Etude in F Major  
Op. 10, No. 8

Allegro. (♩ = 88.)

The image displays two staves of music. The top staff is the original notation for the first four bars of Chopin's Etude in F Major, Op. 10, No. 8. It is in F major (one flat) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegro. (♩ = 88.)'. The first bar starts with a forte 'f' dynamic and a 'veloce' marking. The melody is characterized by rapid sixteenth-note passages. The bottom staff shows a Schenkerian middle-ground analysis of the same four bars. This analysis uses brackets to group notes into phrases and numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8) to indicate their structural function. For example, the first bar is analyzed as a phrase starting with a '1' (the tonic) and ending with an '8' (the octave tonic). The second bar continues this structure with a '4' and '1'. The third bar has a '4' and '1', and the fourth bar has a '1' and '8'. This analysis reveals the underlying tonal and rhythmic structure that supports the surface ornamentation.



3

(Nbn)

B.) 1 2 3 4

(Zu A, T.41)

Mtg. I-

Vdg. I-

=

Moderato ♩ = 76

*pp*

3

3 6 7

3

I hope the reader will agree that what I have composed is a completely different musical animal than the Chopin without materially affecting Schenker's middleground graph. The intention was to create something of at least passable musicality, rather than simply disfiguring the rhythms and gestures. Without wishing to overstate the implications, I will simply conclude that my re-composition poses a problem for the procedure that would abstract the same harmonic function (and in this case voice-leading) from two very different contexts. The difference of

context in these cases appears to consist in just those elements that Roig-Francoli and Straus bracket out for non-tonal (or non-functional) music.

These observations suggest that there is much more to the efficacy of tonal centricity than the presence of function is able to explain. Perhaps if tonal works are approached as if their centricity really were a function of contextual events, we may find that various parameters such as duration, rhythm, the quality of harmonies, the particular asymmetry of the diatonic scale (patterns of whole and half-step qualities), and so on, go a long way in accounting for the phenomenological affects of tonal centricity. It is true, after all, that these variables can be configured limitlessly to create centric effects like ‘gravitation’ and the presence *in absentia* of tones in innumerable ways, whether tonal or not. From here it is a short step to the conclusion that the general belief that surface textures are ‘supported’ by underlying harmonic structures or progressions is backwards. Rather, harmonic progressions are themselves supported by the rhythmic and contextual events that constitute musical surfaces as such. In abstracting away from surfaces we arguably leave behind everything that is essential – which is to say, *everything* is essential.

There are other reasons for questioning the ontological segregation of tonal and post-tonal centricity besides the musical observations and philosophical arguments I have thus far presented. Recent psychological research reassesses the conventional cognitive model of listening in which listeners rely on the recollection of a memory accrued through cultural saturation over long periods. Carol Krumhansl explains that, contrary to received wisdom, the more adept and experienced people are in a particular musical style, the better they do in

discerning unfamiliar styles.<sup>26</sup> Musicians trained in Western classical music are not restricted by “familiar tonal hierarchies,” rather, they seem to be equally skilled at differentiating sounds regardless of whether the musical system is known to them or not. Krumhansl notes that these findings stand in contrast “to the general assumption that musical knowledge develops gradually over years.”<sup>27</sup> Marc Leman argues that studies claiming the existence of tonal hierarchies in long-term memory “provide no evidence for the claim that listeners familiar with Western music have abstracted tonal hierarchies in a long-term memory.”<sup>28</sup> According to this research, the immediate functioning of short-term memory appears much more responsible for the moment to moment processing of musical listening. I suggest that the more nimble and flexible musical listening is conceived to be, the less we need to rely on concepts like functionality to understand tonal centricity. This, effectively, would demote functional tonality, exchanging it with a limber, ‘contextual’ absorption of tonal centers and the resulting qualities such as gravitation and the presence-in-absence of tones.

One of Straus’ reasons behind denying the privileges of tonality to non-tonal centricity is that any prolongation that may be said to occur in most post-tonal music doesn’t reach all the way to a deep structure, or even a consistent middle-ground. I would rejoin that the ability to procure such deep structure analytically has more to do with a fetish for the metaphysical than with how music is really heard or what is important about it. I personally favor a Levinson/Gurney concatenationist view where music consists primarily in the local movement

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<sup>26</sup> Carol Krumhansl, “The Cognition of Tonality – as We Know it Today,” *Journal of New Music Research*, 2004, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 257

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 257

<sup>28</sup> Marc Leman, *The Role of Short-Term Memory in Probe-Tone Ratings*, *Music Perception*, vol. 17 no. 4, summer 2000 pp. 507-508

from gesture to gesture and from phrase to phrase.<sup>29</sup> Any middle-ground to back-ground progression in this conception is pure fancy – there would instead be a kind of ‘fadeout’ of foreground formations into a void; a void whose threshold marks the transition from a musical understanding to a musical *metaphysics*.

In conclusion, Straus and Roig-Francoli’s views provide but two examples of an ongoing tension in music theory – a tension that is very much about where to mark the territories of tonal and post-tonal theories and their corresponding repertoires. Both theorists presuppose the presence of a system that in some fundamental sense transcends the necessity of contextualizing centrality for tonal music. How to situate a Bartok or a Shostakovich, or for that matter an Indian *rāg*, or any other sort of centrality becomes a problem that is wholly other. But if an *ecumenical* concept of centrality ultimately carries the day, as I think it must, the dichotomy is thrown into ontological disarray. We are confronted with the uncomfortable dissonance between mismatching states of music and states of mind. But music itself is immune from these problems. It continues to be what it always has been: eccentrically centric.

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<sup>29</sup> see Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, (Cornell University Press, 1997)