Questions on Carl Schachter's *Unfoldings*

Chapter 1:

Q1) Edward Cone: Cone's central rhythmic concept is that of the "structural downbeat," defined by Schachter as "when an important tonal event, such as a cadential tonic, coincides with a point of rhythmic emphasis" (31). The motion of a piece of music on both small– and large–scales, according to Cone, is towards these structural downbeats. Schachter's main issue with Cone's notion of a structural downbeat is that cadential tonics do not always coincide with points of rhythmic emphasis. Often, the culmination of a cadence will occur on a metrically weak measure, the event thus not necessarily having "the character of a downbeat" (32).

Q1) Cooper and Meyer: The rhythmic theory of Cooper and Meyer aims at dividing music into rhythmic groups via a hierarchical process based on five basic Greek poetic grouping structures. These Greek grouping structures are based on the organization and alternation of accented and unaccented subdivisions. Schachter finds three main flaws with this process: 1) each grouping structure can only account for a single accented event, thus disallowing a motion of accent to non-accent back to accent within a group; 2) the system propagates labels at each level without any necessary connection of one to another ("extraordinarily reductive"); and 3) at the higher levels (i.e. large spans of music), the concept of accent seems highly questionable. (32-33). Schachter goes on to complain that the accents used by Cooper and Meyer refer to different things on different levels, e.g. meter at a low-level versus "areas of tonal stability" at higher-levels (33).

Q1) Komar: The rhythmic method of Komar continuously reduces the measures of a piece of music into a smaller and smaller number of measures. Similar to Schachter's third contention with the theory of Cooper and Meyer, Schachter does not believe that meter can operate at such a high level, far removed and reduced from the surface of the work. Moreover, Schachter argues that meter requires a succession of a least a couple strong and weak beats to be established, something that disappears at the more remote levels of Komar's analysis (34). Finally, the almost patently flawed concept of the "measure 0" seems highly doubtful to Schachter as well (35).

Q2) Tonal Rhythm: Schachter conceives of tonality itself as creating a sense of rhythm through the course of music. Using the example of a few bars from Scarlatti, Schachter shows how, despite a steady stream of eighth notes on the surface of the music, the harmonic motion moves at a varied and different rate, thus creating a separate pace from the figuration itself (37). Partially, tonal rhythm derives from the sense of consonance versus dissonance, where consonant tonal areas create a sense of arrival while dissonant areas create a sense of tension and thus forward motion. The *Ursatz* itself may be thought of as the ultimate distillation of tonal rhythm behind a piece of music.

Q2) Durational Rhythm: Divorced from any change in pitch, a stream of notes itself creates a sense of meter and rhythm though changes in the duration and stress of each note. Probably more closely connected to the average person's conception of meter, durational rhythm describes this inherent motion resulting from a succession of tones.

Chapter 2:

Q3a) The A and A' sections of the piece both end with perfect cadences, yet the cadential tonic of the original A section lands on a metrically weak measure (measure 16) while the cadential tonic of the later A' section occurs on a metrically strong measure (a "true" downbeat). Schachter, in a presumed jab at the rhythmic theory of Edward Cone, observes that, if all cadential tonics were viewed as structural downbeats, such small yet significant differences would be marginalized or ignored completely (68).

Q3b) A hypermetrical expansion occurs in the Beethoven in measures 45-47, where an eighth-note figure from measure 44 becomes repeated to expand the phrase beyond its typical length. Schachter remarks that Beethoven sets up the syncopation in these bars, the repeated syncopation which is acting to expand the phrase, by using the resolution of a dissonance in the previous measure to create an expectation that he subverts, resulting in a "sudden reversal in dynamic 'gesture'" (70).

Q3c) All of the sforzandi in this piece accent weak beats or weak measures, thus producing both local and hypermetrical syncopation. Beethoven's use of this hypermetrical syncopation seems to actually be carefully planned and controlled, as the syncopations keep happening earlier and earlier within the hypermeter, creating a sort of hypermetrical compression that "contributes greatly to the developing momentum of the piece" (70).

Q3d) Schachter maintains that a metrical relation of strong and weak beats occurs from measure to measure as well as from one hypermetrical unit to the next. His greatest piece of evidence for such a relation is that he actually hears it in the piece (and others) (75). Over large divisions of time, however, Schachter does not hear any sort of similar alternation of strong and weak accents, an opinion he voiced in his comments on Cooper and Meyer. Hedging his bets (or perhaps accounting for the possible imperfections of his own ear), however, Schachter qualifies this dismissal by saying, "...at our present state of knowledge, it would be premature–and, therefore, wrong–to closer our minds even to such seemingly doubtful possibilities" (76).

Chapter 3:

Q4) Duple Meter at Higher Levels: The issue of duple meter at higher levels relates to Schachter's (or rather, one's) inability to hear meter at a very high level or when it is in regard to a very large groups of measures. Inherent in his argument is the concept of well-formed grouping rules, since Schachter maintains that, as an example, four 8-bar phrases would group themselves into two 16-bar periods, which would then be grouped into one 32-bar unit. Two 32-bar units would be grouped in a 64-bar section and so forth, the growth rate quickly producing spans of music that would be difficult to hear as distinct units in terms of meter. The argument for duple hypermeter is based mostly on how much more quickly triple or quadruple meters would create groupings that would be out of the realm of tangible and hearable metrical units. "Because it can proliferate over many levels, duple hypermeter brings an important advantage to music where large-scale metrical organization is a significant issue" (88).

Q4) "The" Meter: Using the example of a song from Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*, Schachter shows how often there appear to be multiple meters occurring at the same time within a given span of music, these meters possibly even contradicting one another (97). Schachter argues that such events in a piece are regulated by the notated meter ("the" meter) of the work, thus deferring to the metrical sensibilities of the composer. I imagine Schachter also chooses to define a single, overriding meter in an effort to ignore local disruptions of meter in favor of finding a more globally relevant pulse.

Q4) Prototypes and Transformations: With the discussion of phrase models, Schachter begins to bring Schenker's influence and theories more to the fore. Much like the elaboration and prolongation of structural tones, transformation of prototypical phrase models centers on complex forms arising out of simpler patterns. In a sense, transformation can be related to the melodic variation as the prototype relates to the model of the variation. Schachter also distinguishes transformations that derive from previously existing prototypes in the piece as opposed to transformations for which no prototype can be found within the music. Ernst Oster suggests that such latter transformations without literal models "must be inferred from events at a deeper level of structure" (106), again harkening back to Schenkerian modes of thinking about elaborations.

WORKS CITED

Schachter, Carl. *Unfoldings: Essays in Schenkerian Theory and Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.