

TRACING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHENKERIAN DIMINUTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Schenkerian notions of diminution describe musical content as an outgrowth of the *Ursatz*. I suggest that this version of diminution developed from other historical notions of the term. My investigation of three essays will suggest that Schenker's earlier writings adumbrate the theories of diminution that only appear in full in his latest essays. The three stages examined begin with "A Contribution to Ornamentation" ("Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik," 1904), continues with an essay from the first volume of *The Masterwork in Music*, "The Art of Improvisation" (*Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, "Die Kunst der Improvisation," 1925), and finishes with a translation of "On Diminution" ("Von der Diminution," 1937), an essay from the nine-issue periodical *The Triad* (*Der Dreiklang*)—that essay is partially included in *Free Composition* (*Der Freie Satz*, 1935), Schenker's final compendium of theories. In conjunction with these essays are stages of diminution: 1) ornamentation of a melody, 2) ornamentation of a harmonic ground plan, 3) ornamentation derived from the framework as the composition.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This essay traces the stages of Heinrich Schenker's evolution from editor to theorist. My investigation of three essays will suggest that Schenker's earlier writings adumbrate the theories of diminution that only appear in full in his latest essays. The three stages examined begin with "A Contribution to Ornamentation" ("Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik," 1904—henceforth, "Ein Beitrag"), continues with an essay from the first volume of *The Masterwork in Music*, "The Art of Improvisation" (*Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, "Die Kunst der Improvisation," 1925), and finishes with a translation of "On Diminution" ("Von der Diminution," 1937), an essay from the nine-issue periodical *The Triad* (*Der Dreiklang*)—that essay is partially included in *Free Composition* (*Der Freie Satz*, 1935), Schenker's final compendium of theories. As suggested by Ernst Oster in the introduction to *Free Composition*,¹ diminution is perhaps the most fundamental precept of Schenkerian Analysis.

The term diminution has two well-known meanings: 1) The restatement of a melodic fragment in rhythmic values that are shorter than the original (rhythmic diminution), 2) A melodic figure (typically in Renaissance and Baroque music) that replaces a long note with notes of a shorter value (elaboration).² The concept of diminution in Schenker's mature theory involves the further notion of motivic correspondence between foreground and background structures. My discussion traces the emergence of this idea from earlier discussions of ornamentation and elaboration.

¹ Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, ed. and trans. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), xiii.

² Robert Donington and Greer Garden, "Diminution," Oxford Music Online, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/978151592630.article.42071>.

The essay explores the development of diminution in three stages. Broadly speaking, these three stages include: 1) ornamentation of a melody, 2) ornamentation of a harmonic ground plan, 3) ornamentation derived from the framework as the composition.

Each stage shares concern for ornamentation. The first stage proposed here deals with Schenker's editorial concern for *embellishment* in C.P.E. Bach's keyboard works and their discussion in Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, Part I (1753)—ornamentation of a melodic line. For much of the eighteenth century, these were often written in small notation or as diacritics. As compositional practices evolved, so did the practice and notation of ornamentation, but their perceived purpose remained the same: to enliven the character of a melody. In Schenker's first essay, "Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik," certain wording alludes to ideas of diminution that were developed later, but it deals mostly with ornamentation's practical concerns. Schenker argues that the proper execution of Bach's embellishments had been misunderstood by contemporary editors. Later, a young Felix Salzer was inspired to look deeper into C.P.E. Bach's ornaments in his essay "Über die Bedeutung der Ornamente in Carl Philip Emanuel Bach's Klavierwerken" from the April 1930 issue of *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*. In it, he highlights how ornaments function as diminutions of the melody and the underlying voice leading.

The second stage proposed here, from "Die Kunst der Improvisation," continues to address ornamentation, but particularly how it relates to *improvisation* of a predetermined harmonic ground plan. Schenker's essay explores how improvisation in the eighteenth century—discussed in detail by C.P.E. Bach, *Versuch*, Part II (1762)—involved a preconceived ground plan from which a performer derived different elaborations. The improvisations enliven that ground plan.

The third stage proposed here examines how diminution becomes the central idea in “Von der Diminution” and *Free Composition*. Foreground *diminutions* are expansions of deeper structures. As Robert Morgan states in “Schenker and the Theoretical Tradition: The Concept of Musical Reduction”: “Diminution—the division of a note into several notes of shorter value through various kinds of elaboration, such as repetition, circling around, or filling up the space between tones—is, considered from the point of view of reduction technique, the other side of the coin: an augmentation of musical content through addition, and thus a process of compositional synthesis, rather than an analytical process involving music subtraction.”³ This chapter traces how musical content is created through the *Ursatz* in Schenker’s mature writing.

In the last two years, the field of music theory has been forced to wrestle with Schenker’s racism and elitism and how they affect the promulgation of his theories. John Reef’s review of the recent Damschroder and Wen textbooks on Schenkerian Analysis in the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* addresses the recent controversies of racism and music theory’s white racial frame within Schenkerian Analysis.⁴ It also lists problems associated with Schenkerian theory omitted from those texts under review, such as “the role of Schenkerian theory and practice in perpetuating canonical fictions; exclusive dead white male representation; whether ‘organicism’ (Schenkerian or otherwise) is too disconnected from how composers actually work to have theoretical value.”⁵ The examples taken from Schenker’s (and other’s) essays featured in my thesis are from exclusively dead white males.

³ Robert Morgan, “Schenker and the Theoretical Tradition: The Concept of Musical Reduction,” *College Music Symposium*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 73.

⁴ John Reef, Review of *Tonal Analysis: A Schenkerian Perspective*, by David Damschroder and *Graphic Music Analysis: An Introduction to Schenkerian Theory and Practice*, by Eric Wen, *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* Volume 34 (2020): 280.

⁵ Reef, Review, 280.

In Philip Ewell's Plenary speech at the annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory in November, 2019⁶ and the article that followed it in *Music Theory Online* in September, 2020,⁷ he brings attention to the often-ignored notions of racism and German superiority in Schenker's writings. Schenker believed all races were inferior to the German race, not only in regard to music, but to his entire world view. Ewell relates the inequality of Schenker's world view with the inequality of scale tones in Schenker's analytical system. Schenker, himself, wanted his music theory and racial views to be read and understood together.⁸ Indeed, Schenkerian diminution, the notion that background structures govern the content in the middle and foreground, could be viewed as an analogy to Schenker's view of the superior German race. However, as we have seen with the work of Steve Larson, Henry Martin, and many other modern theorists, the spectrum of repertoire and analytical concepts with which Schenkerian theory can be applied (with varying degrees of adherence) is wider than dead white males and his limited world view. Likewise, in my thesis, I choose to bring out connections between differing historical perspectives on diminution without regarding them as a reflection of racial or cultural inequality. This thesis focuses on music-theoretical elements of Schenker's thought, but I am also committed to undoing its racist legacy in the discipline of music theory.

Reef also addresses the speculation of organicism's relationship to the compositional process. Organicism is the idea that through analysis, structural levels are bound to one another through similar musical content. Since every analysis conveys an author's interpretation of a work, the degree to which organicism relates to the compositional process does not necessarily have any bearing on the analysis's value. The product of a Schenkerian Analysis elucidates the

⁶ Philip Ewell, "Music Theory's White Racial Frame," Plenary Lecture, Society for Music Theory, 42nd Annual Meeting, Columbus, OH, November 7-10, 2019.

⁷ Philip Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," *Music Theory Online*, vol. 26, no. 2 (September 2020).

⁸ Ewell, "Music," [4.5.2].

organicism of a piece. Chapter II of my essay discusses how the historically appropriate performance and notation of ornaments may have informed the development of Schenker's theory of diminution. Through the investigation of how this organicism binds an improvised free fantasy in Chapter III, performance and composition almost become one and the same.

Therefore, although it is only one of many relationships one can draw out in a composition, organicism does have great theoretical value. Without addressing organicism directly, my essay will show how it developed for Schenker over time. I will display how the musical ideas of embellishment, improvisation, and diminution form an account of intellectual music history.

CHAPTER II

ORNAMENTATION

Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach was the source of inspiration and influence for some of Schenker's ideas. *A Contribution to the Study of Ornamentation (Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik* - published in 1903 and again, enlarged in 1908),⁹ was written as the companion volume to Schenker's *C.P.E. Bach: Keyboard Works (Phil. Em. Bach: Klavierwerke*, 1903).¹⁰ Schenker used C.P.E. Bach's treatise, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, as the reference manual for his essay. *Versuch* included chapters on fingerings, embellishments, performance, intervals, thorough bass, accompaniment and improvisation. While the bulk of the book is concerned with accompaniment and thorough bass, the section on embellishments received Schenker's editorial attention in "Ein Beitrag."

From the section on the long appoggiatura in "Ein Beitrag," Schenker details the intentional use of small-notation long appoggiaturas as the composer's effort to "preserve [the large notes] as carriers of the main story line of the music."¹¹ One can easily perceive how later Schenkerian graphing techniques echo this sentiment: distinguishing the secondary tones from the primary ones (embellishments from chord tones) with stemless notes and open-faced note heads. If *Stufen* constitute the "main story," the small-notation long appoggiaturas are diminutions (elaborations) of a larger stepwise progression. In "Ein Beitrag," Schenker alludes to how the trill and the turn similarly elaborate simpler voice-leading structures and the primary melodic line. This portion of my essay will examine Schenker's support for and clarification of

⁹ Heinrich Schenker, "A Contribution to the Study of Ornamentation," trans. Hedi Siegel, in *The Music Forum: Volume 4*, eds. Felix Salzer & Karl Schachter (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977): 1-139.

¹⁰ Ian Bent and Hedi Siegl, "Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik," accessed April 27, 2020, <https://schenkerdocumentsonline.org/profiles/work/entity-001721.html>.

¹¹ Schenker, "A Contribution," 63.

Bach's discussion of ornamentation in *Versuch* and how it may have implicitly assisted in determining theoretical ideas he had later in life.

In *Versuch*, Bach writes about the turn: "Many seem to believe that the sum and substance of the keyboardist's art consists in introducing turns at every slightest instance. Hence its correct use must be carefully investigated, for, despite its complacency, many apparent opportunities arise which are not actually suitable to it."¹² By requiring careful investigation of when to use a turn, Bach implies that performers should understand their significance to the musical context. Performers must interpret each *part* of the phrase in order to understand the significance that the ornaments have on the *whole* phrase. The relationship of *part* to *whole* seems to have kindled Schenker's interest in Bach's treatise. In "Ein Beitrag," this relationship arose at the phrase level, while later, it predominated entire compositions.

With "Ein Beitrag," Schenker attempted to clarify the performance and notation of embellishments in Bach's keyboard works because the public's preference for virtuosic playing had led to many historically inaccurate editions. Schenker's essay "represents [his] first '*Urtext*' edition; its text is the result of intensive study and insightful interpretation of the sources."¹³ The first part of Schenker's essay features the first of many characteristically pointed Schenkerian polemics. Two in-fashion Viennese editors, Hans von Bülow and Expedit Baumgart, received harsh criticism for overediting the autographed scores by unsuitably adding dynamics, arpeggiations, and embellishments.

In von Bülow's editions, copious editorial additions of ornamentations and dynamics misrepresented Bach's originals. Schenker pointed out how thickened chords and arbitrarily

¹² C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1949), 114.

¹³ Introduction to Heinrich Schenker, "A Contribution to the Study of Ornamentation," trans. Hedi Siegel, in *The Music Forum: Volume 4*, eds. Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 1-2.

inserted arpeggios, reflecting the nineteenth-century virtuosic style, were highly regarded at the time. However, he argued that these supplements fail to capture the purpose and “genius” of Bach’s keyboard works. Since he knew that Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven followed C.P.E. Bach’s embellishment practices, it was improbable that editors could revise the ornaments for the better. Furthermore, within von Bülow’s editions, there is no mention of Bach’s discussion of embellishments.

Baumgart, on the other hand, acknowledged Bach’s notion of embellishments in the preface to his edition of *Sechs Sonaten Für Kenner und Liebhaber*. However, Schenker criticizes Baumgart for doing little to extend an accepted narrative. Baumgart writes: “[The embellishments] were regarded as indispensable; they served to link the tones of the un-resonant instrument (clavichord) more fluently, to lessen the tedium of long notes, and to lend elegance, luster, and life to a performance. Most of them are still in use today, only the signs have become obsolete ... One must acknowledge that embellishments are an intrinsic part of older music, and they cannot be omitted in performance.”¹⁴ The overediting of C.P.E. Bach’s keyboard works was ultimately provoked by their setting on clavichord and harpsichord. In many cases, Baumgart’s use of embellishment was seen as a way of overcoming the instruments’ lack of sustain.

In contrast to von Bülow and Baumgart, Schenker claimed that C.P.E. Bach’s autographed scores were definitive; Schenker believed that his contemporaries were “no longer able to understand the value of Bach’s works.”¹⁵ The ornaments in the original versions of *Sechs Sonaten* enliven the unambiguous voice leading, full harmonies, and clearly marked dynamics that make Bach’s music enjoyable for the amateur or student. Therefore, connecting the ornaments to the thin tone of the instruments was a fabrication, not to mention, their editions

¹⁴ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 21.

¹⁵ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 15.

were for piano. By needlessly adding dynamics and ornaments, the von Bülow and Baumgart editions sacrificed what Schenker considered the “genius” of Bach’s keyboard works.

Furthermore, with *Sechs Sonaten*, Bach strived to compose works that the amateur could easily perform. Bach remarked, “I should be very happy if the particular zeal with which I have performed this service were to be recognized.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, the zeal was not recognized in those Viennese editions.

Since Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms studied Bach’s compositions and texts, Schenker felt that properly interpreting Bach’s ideas would lead to a better comprehension of their works. He wonders, “What could C.P.E. Bach teach them that the others could not?” He continues, “Can merit become extinct?... Are we perhaps no longer able to recognize merit, or at least not as keenly as the great masters?”¹⁷ Schenker believed that since Bach’s works influenced the “Classical masters,” his ideas should continue to be taught. Also, Schenker argued that Bach’s lack of influence on Schenker’s contemporaries led to a decline of keyboard compositions, their performance, and their pedagogy.

Schenker’s essay was offered as a corrective to questionable embellishments and dynamics added to popular Viennese editions of Bach’s *Sechs Sonaten Für Kenner und Liebhaber*. However, there are some correspondences with his later theory of diminution: how the small-notation long appoggiatura preserves the main story line and how ornaments should be understood in relation to the phrase (elaboration). Salzer’s essay (to be examined later here) goes further, pointing out how embellishments in authoritative versions of C.P.E. Bach’s keyboard works repeat or anticipate specific tones in the melody or the underlying voice leading (rhythmic diminution). This corresponds to the idea that Schenker illuminates in his analyses in the

¹⁶ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 17.

¹⁷ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 15.

diminution chapter of *Free Composition* (Figure 119, to be examined further in Chapter IV), which explains diminution of the background structure through repetition and preparation. Later ideas in the chapter then either grow abstractly out of these two main concepts or develop the scope of a diminution (e.g., diminution through enharmonic restatement, bass diminutions or boundary-play, deceptive intervals arising from diminution).¹⁸

In *Versuch*, Bach discusses the embellishments commonly found in his keyboard works: the appoggiatura, the trill, the turn, the mordent, the compound appoggiatura, the slide, the snap, and the elaborated fermata (the last of which is not a written out or diacritical stock figuration but entirely improvised—to be examined further in Chapter III). Three embellishment categories frame Schenker's essay: the appoggiatura, the trill, and the turn. Salzer follows suit in his essay. I will explore how the discussion of these three embellishments relates to later ideas of diminution through their preservation of the main melodic line (elaboration) and anticipation or repetition of surface material and underlying voice leading (rhythmic diminution).

Embellishments, for Bach and Schenker, are decorative tones and figures whether they are written out in large notation, small notes, or diacritics (not improvised). Schenker claims a special status for the proper execution of embellishments: “[Bach] sees in each embellishment a special and unique expressiveness, almost as if it were a living individual organism that could never be mistaken for another.”¹⁹ In “Von der Diminution” (third stage), the term organism is one reinstalled to describe a musical work of “genius”: “An inner unity even of diminution is possible only through the origin in the same womb of the fundamental line. This unity becomes the shape of the whole, which alone is the organism in music.”²⁰ This idea that a single figure

¹⁸ Schenker, *Free Composition*, 98-107.

¹⁹ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 51.

²⁰ Heinrich Schenker, “Von der Diminution,” *Der Dreiklang*, Heft 4/5 (July/August 1937).

permeates all of a composed work is featured only in his latest essays. But in “Ein Beitrag,” embellishments act as surface-level organisms replicating melodic and voice-leading structures.

Appoggiatura. In *Versuch*, Bach discusses the appoggiatura first in the chapter on embellishments, regarding it “among the most essential embellishments.”²¹ Schenker found clarity in Bach’s psychological basis of the appoggiatura: “[Appoggiaturas] prolong [tones] by occasionally repeating a preceding tone, and musical experience attests to well-contrived repetitions.”²² Bach communicated that “well-contrived” repetitions have a great effect on the quality of the music. Schenker’s emphatic support for Bach’s notions of “well-contrived” repetitions of single pitches here are similar to diminution (elaboration) discussion of larger structures in “Die Kunst der Improvisation”.

Schenker highlights the long appoggiatura, saying that this embellishment “manifests all of the suspension’s effects and characteristics” and “shortens the principal tone ... increasing our anticipation of it through a slight but pleasurable increase of tension.”²³ This increase of tension provided by the long appoggiatura is essential to the melody. By delaying resolution, this ornamentation highlights the affect of the melodic line. The use of small notation promotes the underlying voice leading (the large notation) as the primary line.

By the time Beethoven was composing, the use of the small-note long appoggiatura had ceased. Instead, composers were expressing these embellishing tones using large notation (i.e., no longer recognizing it as an ornament). Schenker posits that the disappearance of this ornament influenced editors to use large notation for long appoggiaturas in their Bach editions. For Schenker, though, this approach disregarded the synthesis (part to whole) between melodic lines

²¹ Bach, *Essay*, 87.

²² Bach, *Essay*, 87.

²³ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 54.

and their ornaments. The use of the small-note long appoggiatura signified the composer's effort to "preserve [the large notes] as carriers of the main story line of the music."²⁴ This suggests elaboration, later used to explain diminution of an improvised free fantasy.

The change to large notes for the long appoggiatura also required the performer to imagine the main story line without the help of the composer. Schenker states that the "original [small] notation permits at least a visual appreciation of the contrapuntally decisive intervals that are formed by the first note of each melodic figure and the bass ... and clarifies the ornamental function of the small notes."²⁵ Without this notation, the function of the pitches is less obvious. The correspondences between Schenker's contributions as an editor (separating structural from ornamental) with his contributions as a theorist (the role of diminution) are bolstered by his discussion of the long appoggiatura.

Trill. Schenker focuses on this embellishment's suspension-like quality. He begins by examining the rule that trills should begin "on the tone above the principal note."²⁶ He argues that this rule "points up the scarcely noticeable and seldom observed descending suspension that is contained within the trill. This suspension multiplies itself with the repeated alternation of the upper note and principal tone."²⁷ The phrase "principal tone" describes the trill as diminution (elaboration). Schenker's perspective on the rule shifts as he explains that it "seems wholly unnecessary that the trill should always actually begin with the first suspension in order that it may express the properties of a suspension ... [because] the many successive 'suspensions' follow each other rapidly and thus establish themselves as suspensions on the basis of the total

²⁴ Schenker, "A Contribution," 63.

²⁵ Schenker, "A Contribution," 63.

²⁶ Schenker, "A Contribution," 71.

²⁷ Schenker, "A Contribution," 71.

harmonic and melodic context.”²⁸ Here, Schenker is describing harmonic prolongation through repeated suspensions. Cadences in a later Schenkerian reduction often include the primary descent in the upper voice. Similarly, stepwise descents appear in these trills, often prolonging scale-degree three to two through repetition at cadences (as will be examined in Salzer’s essay).

Bach notes that, in a fast tempo, a note slurred to another with the trill marking above indicates a short trill. Only a single repetition of pitches occurs in a short trill. Bach states that it “appears only in a descending second regardless of whether the interval is formed by an appoggiatura or by large notes.”²⁹ Because these trills begin with the note above the principal and occur only in a descending second, we can understand each as an individual diminution of the main melodic descent. His use of short trills in only faster tempos may suggest that these embellishments, when played appropriately, are meant to reflect a certain composition’s overall affect. In this way, Bach’s psychological basis for short trills is different than normal trills. As I will discuss more in Chapter III, changes in diminution signify changes in affect. The required interpretation of the short trill exemplifies the organicism promoted by Bach’s embellishments.

Turn. Schenker points out that, like the appoggiatura and the trill, the turn is derived from a suspension. However, its four-note construction—upper neighbor, principal tone, lower neighbor, principal tone—offers a broader form of diminution than the appoggiatura and the trill. Each elaboration can participate in repetition or anticipation of the melody or underlying voice leading. Schenker notes that “the turn with its four notes does indeed shorten the principal tone. However, it serves to enliven and enrich it.”³⁰ In his later examination of the significance of the

²⁸ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 72.

²⁹ Bach, *Essay*, 111.

³⁰ Schenker, “A Contribution,” 90.

C.P.E. Bach's embellishments, Salzer writes that the turn's four-note figuration make it the "most richly rewarding ornament."³¹

Salzer's Contribution. In 1930, Salzer—a young student in his mid-twenties—published the article "Über die Bedeutung der Ornamente in Carl Philip Emanuel Bach's Klavierwerken" in *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*.³² With this essay, Salzer paid tribute to Schenker's "Ein Beitrag." It begins: "In his pioneering work, 'Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik,' Heinrich Schenker, drawing on Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, brought order to the diverse and confused theories regarding the construction and performance of individual ornaments ... While Schenker's study is primarily directed toward a purely practical purpose—instructing the musician in the proper manner of performing ornaments—we shall focus here on the insight his study provides into the profound meaning of ornaments, their inner content, and their psychological effect."³³

Although Salzer's essay was written before the 1935 publication of *Free Composition*, his close relationship with Schenker (and contribution to *Five Graphic Analyses*) surely granted him access to his mentor's developments. Also, it is likely that Salzer was familiar with Schenker's 1925 essay "The Art of Improvisation" (to be discussed in Chapter III), in which Schenker examined how diminution—elaboration through repetition, circling around, or filling of the space between tones—is the principal agent of the free fantasia. There is a clear connection between Salzer's conclusions about Bach's ornamentation and diminution: "...only isolated examples [of embellishments] display an exclusively enlivening intent. By far the greater number of embellishments, because of their lively involvement with the musical

³¹ Felix Salzer, "The Significance of the Ornaments in Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach's Keyboard Works," trans. Mark Stevens, in *Theory and Practice*, vol. 11 (1986): 31.

³² Salzer, "The Significance," 15-42.

³³ Salzer, "The Significance," 16.

structure, exhibit a much deeper meaning. Bach's ornaments are rarely empty; they do not act like ornaments pasted on, as it were, merely for the sake of enlivenment. Rather, they actively participate in shaping the motives, and frequently even influence the voice leading."³⁴ Salzer describes the varieties of diminution in which the embellishments participate.

Selected examples from Salzer's essay, with my own annotations, will display how Salzer related C.P.E. Bach's embellishments to diminution (rhythmic). Salzer's examination of the ornaments elucidates four such correspondences (two of repetition and two of preparation): repetition of specific melodic tones (*die tonwiederholende Funktion*), repetition of the underlying voice leading (*die satzwiederholende Funktion*), anticipation of specific melodic tones (*die tonvorbereitende Funktion*), and anticipation of the underlying voice leading (*die satzvorbereitende Funktion*). As one would expect, the embellishments, in each case, have a shorter duration than the written-out notes—hence, rhythmic diminution. He selects excerpts from Bach's *Sechs Sonaten Für Kenner und Liebhaber*, the *Württemberg Sonatas*, and *Kurze und leichte Klavierstücke*.

The repetition of specific melodic tones within a trill. Salzer explains that the most frequent impact ornaments have on the musical content is repetition of specific tones. It is also an embellishment's simplest function. Figure 1 contains Salzer's Example 15, from Sonata No. 5 *Für Kenner und Liebhaber*, which exemplifies this function with a trill on beat three of the measure.

³⁴ Salzer, "The Significance," 16.

Figure 1 C.P.E. Bach, Sonata No. 5 *Für Kenner und Liebhaber*, IV, m.8 (from Salzer)

Example 15



Salzer's annotation (bracket) highlights how the D-C-sharp interchange of the trill is a repetition of the melodic descent that occurs on beat one and two. At first, the two-note descent harmonizes descending bass motion on B and A. The trill then embellishes the C-sharp-B motion approach the half cadence on E, with a D neighbor note. The repetition of the D-C-sharp is concealed within the trill.

The repetition of the underlying voice-leading progression within an appoggiatura.

Figure 2 contains Salzer's Example 8, the score from *Württemberg Sonata No. 1*, second movement, and Example 9, Salzer's reduction of the same excerpt. Here, a deeper-lying diminution can be observed.

Figure 2 Bach and Salzer, *Württemberg Sonata No. 1*, II, mm. 25-28 (from Salzer)

Example 8



Example 9



The primary melodic and bass pitches from the score form the simple voice-leading structures in the reduction (from Salzer's Ex. 9). The dotted line connecting the As in measures 26-27 denote the displacement of the voice down an octave. Compare the notes under the bracket in mm. 25-26, C-sharp-B-A, with the notes under the bracket in measure 28, B-A-G-sharp. Rather than repeating melodic tones like the trill in Figure 1, the appoggiatura in measure 28 permits repetition of a descending third progression in the underlying voice leading. More accurately, with the B appoggiatura, the second descent parallels the initial third progression down a step.

With the examples reproduced here in Figures 1 and 2, Salzer examined diminution through *repetition* of the specific melodic tones (Figure 1) or the underlying linear progression (Figure 2). These functions describe a greater purpose for the appoggiatura than simple enlivening of the melody. In *Free Composition*, Schenker also deals with diminution through repetition (mirroring the background structures onto other levels) in the first two groups of examples in Figure 119 and their accompanying explanations (not provided here). The third group of examples in Schenker's Figure 119 explain diminution through *preparation* (or *anticipation*). Salzer creates a cast for these later models of diminution by examining how Bach's embellishments function by anticipating melodic tones and underlying voice-leading structures in the following two examples.

The anticipation (and repetition) of tones with a succession of turns. Salzer's investigation of Bach's ornaments explores embellishments used in combination (of the same type or otherwise). Figure 3 contains Salzer's Example 58.

Figure 3 Bach, *Kurze und leichte Klavierstücke*, No. 4a, mm. 17-20 (from Salzer)

Example 58



In measures 17 through 20 from *Kurze und leichte Klavierstücke*, No. 4a, the repeated sequence of turns functions to repeat previous material and anticipate subsequent material. The first turn repeats three of the opening two beat's melodic tones with the same contour, G-(F)-E-F; the first half of the second turn anticipates the descending second that occurs on beat three of measure 18 and beat one of measure 19, B-flat and A; and the second half of the second turn repeats the ascending second from the previous beat, G-A. This chain of melodic repetition and anticipation continues through the last measure since the melody is sequenced up a step.

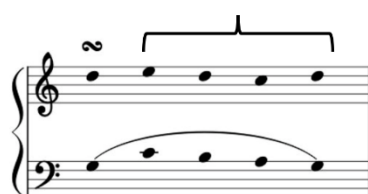
The anticipation of underlying voice leading with a turn. Figure 4 contains Salzer's Example 47, the score of Bach's *Kurze und Leichte Klavierstücke*, No. 1, and Example 48, Salzer's reduction of that excerpt. This example illuminates how a turn can anticipate the underlying voice leading. The turn at the end of the first measure in the score anticipates the contour and trajectory of its underlying voice leading shown in the reduction.

Figure 4 Bach and Salzer, *Kurze und leichte Klavierstücke*, No. 1 (from Salzer)

Example 47



Example 48



Like the examples in Figure 2, the primary melodic and bass pitches from Example 47 (the score) are reduced to create the simple voice-leading structures in Example 48. Notice how the upper staff in Salzer's Example 48 shows a D with a turn symbol followed by a written-out turn. This ornament occurs in measure 1 of the score. The pitches in the following measures are the primary tones in the upper staff of the score. The E in measure 2 of the score is arpeggiated and then composed out with an ascending third progression, E-F-sharp-G. The D and C in measure 3 of the score are realigned in the reduction in order to permit the series of parallel tenths. Finally, the principal tone, D, is regained in measure 4, elaborated by an ascending third progression. The D trill in the first measure prepared the underlying voice leading of the entire excerpt.

Of ornamentation's four functions explained by Salzer (repetition of specific melodic tones, repetition of the underlying voice leading, preparation of specific melodic tones, and preparation of the underlying voice leading), only the repetition or anticipation (preparation)

functions that influence the underlying voice leading are implicitly recognized in *Free Composition*. That is, the functions affecting the specific melodic tones remain surface-level phenomena. I presented and commented on all four functions observed in select examples in order to communicate different “levels” of analysis that employed diminution (rhythmic).

With “Ein Beitrag,” Schenker explored Bach’s ideas on embellishments from *Versuch*. Beyond describing the proper notation and performance of embellishments, the essay gave Schenker the opportunity to consider Bach’s idea of compositional synthesis, or part to whole. In the conclusion of the essay, Schenker explains that the proper execution and, by extension, the editing practices of the ornaments in Bach’s music is more an issue of capturing the “soul of man” in a true artful performance or arrangement, not finger fortitude—something that he implies von Bülow and Baumgart had forgotten. By annotating and elaborating Bach’s earlier discussions and examples, he begins to explore how melodic *embellishments* preserve the main story line and allow for organic connection between parts (embellishments) and their whole (phrases).

As a student of Schenker’s, Salzer examined embellishment’s role in repeating and anticipating simple voice-leading structures. Salzer retroactively applied Schenker’s ideas of diminution from “Die Kunst der Improvisation” to “Ein Beitrag,” *Versuch*, and its companion works. In response to this essay, Schenker praises Salzer’s analyses in a letter from May 1930. He writes, “My dear Mr. Salzer, many thanks for your reprint. Let me repeat what I said to Dr. Weisse (another teacher of Salzer’s): You took the best path, namely one that leads to music as an art not as a ‘science’ (‘Wissenschaft’).”³⁵

³⁵ Salzer, “The Significance,” 15.

In Chapter III, we turn to Schenker's essay, "Die Kunst der Improvisation" from the first volume of *Das Meisterwerk*. This essay explores how improvisation demands appropriate embellishment of a preconceived harmonic framework and how diminution (elaboration) is the primary agent in the free fantasia. It will examine how, twenty-one years after writing "Ein Beitrag," Schenker again draws inspiration from C.P.E. Bach's treatise, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, for the development of his theories of diminution.

CHAPTER III

IMPROVISATION

C.P.E Bach's influence connects Schenker's notions of ornamentation (Chapter II) and improvisation (Chapter III). However, Bach's notions of ornamentation and improvisation were conceptually distinct. Ornaments embellish a melody. Improvisations embellish a harmonic ground plan. Schenker's shift from concerns about surface-level ornaments to those of deeper-structure elaboration highlights his pathway from editor to theorist. Schenker's discussions in "Die Kunst der Improvisation" links improvisation with his fully matured theory of diminution found in *Free Composition* and "Von der Diminution" (discussed in Chapter IV). Therefore, we can trace the ideas in "Von der Diminution" and *Free Composition* to the study of Bach's *ornamentations*, continuing with discussion of Bach's *improvisations*, and ending with Schenker's own *diminutions*. In this chapter, I will examine the portions of *Versuch* and "Die Kunst" that relate to the ideas in *Free Composition* and "Von der Diminution."

Schenker's 1904 essay, "Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik," examined the performance and notational practices of ornamentation suggested by C.P.E. Bach in his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (*Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*). In Chapter II, I posited that Schenker's intense focus on ornamentation resonated with later ideas. Chapter II also explored how Salzer drew similar connections by showing how ornaments repeated or anticipated specific melodic tones and underlying voice-leading structures. Salzer revealed how the ornaments create diminution (rhythmic). Salzer's concerns for direct relations within the phrase were likely motivated by larger concerns that relate different levels of structure.

Twenty-one years after writing "Ein Beitrag," Schenker returned to Bach's *Versuch*, investigating the treatise's last chapter, "Improvisation." In it, Bach explains how to properly

approach improvising a free fantasy and provides his own written-out example. Since Bach positioned this practical approach to improvisation at the end of his book, it represents the culmination of practical keyboard methods discussed in the previous chapters.

Schenker's essay that discusses Bach's final chapter, "Die Kunst der Improvisation" (henceforth "Die Kunst") appeared as the opening essay in *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, Volume I.³⁶ In the years between "Ein Beitrag" and "Die Kunst," Schenker had shifted focus from practical performance concerns to theoretical ones. Schenker's voice-leading theories underwent complex development in these years with *Kontrapunkt* I and II and essays from *Der Tonwille*. The essay explored here represents a possible "middle stage" of Schenkerian thinking and an important occasion for the development of diminution. "Die Kunst" explained how Bach's examples of harmonic ornamentation permit diminution (elaboration) as the fundamental medium in a free fantasy. Although Schenker discusses diminution and its relationship to the *Umlinie* in many of his *Der Tonwille* essays, his discussion of diminution here positions it as the sole motivator for musical content in an improvised work. Also, Schenker seems to convey diminution's fundamental status by positioning "Die Kunst" as the lead essay in the *Meisterwerk* series.

Despite their differences, I believe Schenker's essay on ornamentation relates to his essay on improvisation. While an ornament is only one figure, it can be performed differently by each musician—just like an improvised harmonic plan. A performer must have a predetermined way of negotiating an ornament, the same way that an improviser must have a predetermined strategy for negotiating a figured bass progression, fermata, or cadenza. Furthermore, both essays should be understood as crucial steps in the development of Schenkerian diminution.

³⁶ Heinrich Schenker, "The Art of Improvisation," *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik* vol. 1, trans. Ian Bent & ed. William Drabkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

In paragraph two of the last chapter in *Versuch*, Bach states: “it is quite possible for a person to have studied composition with good success and to have turned his pen to fine ends without his having any gift for improvisation. But, on the other hand, a good future in composition can be assuredly predicted for anyone who can improvise.”³⁷ Schenker also believed improvisation to be immensely important in the proper training of a music student.

As John Rink points out in “Schenker and Improvisation,” improvisation is a term that Schenker used to mean different things throughout his life.³⁸ Rink investigates the different contexts in which Schenker used the term and declares that “Schenker thoroughly defines his notion of improvisation for the first time in his 1925 essay ‘Die Kunst der Improvisation.’”³⁹ Here, Schenker describes improvisation as the “principal agent” of a free fantasy (specifically, C.P.E.’s free fantasy at the end of *Versuch* and two examples by Handel). In designating it as such, Schenker hopes to “alert the ear to the inner laws of diminution in order to protect it from the stagnation induced in precisely those who speak out most loudly against it.”⁴⁰

Rink gleans two aims of Schenker’s essay: 1) to show that improvisatory works have a comprehensible structure and 2) to show that the basic plan for improvised pieces is realized through diminution of that comprehensible structure. Rink goes further, linking improvisation and composition, writing: “[Schenker] relates improvisation and composition by implying the importance of diminution as the latter’s ‘basic law [*Grundgesetz*]’ (1925, 11). Just as the art of diminution influences the improvisatory embellishment of fermatas and cadences, and just as

³⁷ C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1949), 430.

³⁸ John Rink, “Schenker and Improvisation,” *Journal of Music Theory* 37, no. 1 (1993): accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/843943>

³⁹ Rink, “Schenker,” 6.

⁴⁰ Schenker, “The Art of Improvisation,” 3.

diminution shapes the realization of a ‘basic plan’ in more extensive improvised works, so, too, does it guide the unfolding of a *composition* from a remote structure.”⁴¹

In his essay, Schenker uses Bach’s realization of his ornamented harmonic ground plan to elucidate how improvisation occurs through diminution (elaboration). Since improvisation is evanescent by nature, the use of a fixed realization may seem contradictory. However, as Matthew Brown points out, “Schenker was well aware that written-out fantasies, like those discussed in “The Art of Improvisation,” are not necessarily the same as *de facto* improvisations. But just as it is impossible to know how much composers reworked their pieces, so it is impossible to know how much they rehearsed their improvisations.”⁴² Furthermore, Schenker’s main purpose in “Die Kunst” is to uncover how diminutions elaborate a simple underlying progression.

Brown suggests that the list of paragraphs from Bach’s chapter in *Versuch* emphasize five facets of improvisation: 1) the importance of the free fantasy, 2) the simple prelude, 3) the modulation, 4) the figurations, and 5) the improvised realization of a figured bass progression. Brown examines which sections from Bach’s essay Schenker reacted to in “The Art of Improvisation.” Figure 5 contains Brown’s chart of the topics covered, positioning the paragraph numbers from Bach’s essay on the left and the corresponding pages and figures from Schenker’s discussion on the right.

⁴¹ Rink, “Schenker,” 8.

⁴² Matthew Brown, “C.P.E. Bach, Schenker, Improvisation, and Composition,” *Integral* 24, Special Issue in Honor of Robert Wason (2010): 22.

Figure 5: Matthew Brown, *Versuch* and “Die Kunst” Chart*Figure 8. Bach's chapter on improvisation and Schenker's response*

Bach	Topic	Schenker	
1.	General remarks		
Par. 1	Defines the fantasy.	p. 3	
Par. 2	Differentiates between composition and improvisation.	p. 3	
Par. 3	Describes the main components of fantasy. Fantasies usually begin and end in the same key and should include diverse harmonic motion and figuration. Although fantasies are metrically irregular, they are usually notated 4/4.	p. 3	
Par. 4	Instrumentation.	—	
Par. 5	Independent vs dependent preludes.	—	
2.	Improvise a simple prelude		
Par. 6	Begin/end in tonic and modulate to close keys.	pp. 3–4	
Par. 7	‘Rule of the Octave’: ascending/descending major/minor scales, sequences, pedals (I at start and end; V before end). These patterns used to harmonize unfigured bass.	—	not Fig. 472
3.	Modulation/tonicization		
Par. 8	Process of modulation.	p. 4	Fig. 473
Par. 9	Common modulation schemes: Major keys: I–V–vi (close), ii, iii, and IV (remote) Minor keys: i–♭III–♭v (close), iv, VI, and ♭VII (remote)	p. 4	not Fig. 474
Par. 10	Circuitous modulations to every key. I–♭II, ♭ii, III, iv, ♯IV, ♯iv, v, ♭VI, ♭vi, VI, ♭VII, ♭vii, VII, vii.	p. 4	not Fig. 475
Par. 11	Diminished sevenths, inversion.	pp. 4–5	not Fig. 476
4.	Figuration/motives		
Par. 12	Diverse figuration. [Later additions add an extra par. 12a]	pp. 5–6	Fig. 477
Par. 13	Illustration of diminution. Broken chords, runs, imitations/inversions.	pp. 6–8	Fig. 478
5.	Improvising a free fantasy		
Par. 14	Presents plan in figured bass and realization.	pp. 8–13	Fig. 479–80

Figure 5 outlines much of the content I will examine here in Chapter III. Moreover, this chart summarizes the influence improvisation has on two different historically imperative concepts: 1) Bach’s keyboard methodologies and 2) Schenker’s theory of diminution.

It is counter-intuitive that the building blocks of compositional “masterpieces”—diminution—examined in *Free Composition* and “Von der Diminution” came to the fore in an essay on the improvised free fantasy. In its opening, Schenker expresses that “no theorist could

furnish a method in diminution techniques for all genres.”⁴³ Although Bach chooses to discuss diminution’s importance in only the free fantasy, Schenker’s quotation suggests that he recognizes diminution’s importance more broadly. As we will see in Chapter IV, “Die Kunst” was a step toward developing a theory of diminution that would encompass other genres.

Elaborated Fermatas and Cadenzas. In “Ein Beitrag” Schenker does not discuss the elaborated fermatas and cadenzas that appear in *Versuch*. In “Die Kunst,” Schenker only suggests that the reader review those materials. He writes, “Although diminution at a fermata or in a cadenza plays a different role than it does in the free fantasy, these explanations are nevertheless of great value for a general theory of diminution.”⁴⁴ A deeper look at these examples is warranted because these two musical devices straddle Bach’s discussion of ornamentation and improvisation, linking the two essays.

At the end of the chapter on embellishments, Bach turns to elaborated fermatas. Figure 6 provides the examples. The notated fermatas and their approaching successions are written under “1., 2., 3., etc.” Their corresponding elaborated versions appear after each double bar that follows the notated fermata.

⁴³ Schenker, “The Art,” 3.

⁴⁴ Schenker, “The Art,” 3.

Figure 6: C.P.E. Bach, Elaborated Fermatas (from *Versuch*)



Notice that diacritic embellishments are deployed through the elaborated versions.

Beyond these embellishments, the example's implied harmonies get arpeggiated and runs fill the space between chord tones. For example, at notated fermata 5, a tonicized dominant harmony in C major is approached by submediant and an applied leading-tone harmony. In its corresponding elaborated version, the applied leading-tone harmony is composed out with an octave descent from C to C. The second C is then embellished with a trilled turn at the cadence. We can understand the freedom with which Bach employed these elaborated fermatas by noticing how this fermata's elaboration changes the voicing of the resultant dominant harmony.

Although these examples of elaborated fermatas do not appear as part of a larger phrase, Bach writes, "since such elaborations must be related to the affect of a movement, they can be successfully employed only when close attention is paid to a composition's expressive aim.

Other similar cases can be surmised through the figured bass signatures.”⁴⁵ In Chapter II, Bach suggested that ornaments, namely the turn and the short trill, relate to the content and affect of the phrase. In the quotation above, Bach’s suggests that elaborated fermatas relate to the content and affect of the phrase and movement, again emphasizing the influence understanding the whole has on its component parts.

The cadenza also requires diminution. A performer must create original melodic material out of a holistic understanding of the movement. In the performance chapter, Bach examines elaborated cadences (*cadenzas*), noting that they “are like improvisations. In keeping with the substance of a piece they are performed freely in an unmeasured manner.”⁴⁶ As Brown points out, Bach’s wording captures the essence of improvised diminutions in these cadenzas: when performing an elaborated cadence, “there must be a vision of the whole piece so that the variation will retain the original contrasts of the brilliant and the simple, the fiery and the languid, the sad and the joyful, the vocal and the instrumental.”⁴⁷

Affect and Diminution. Schenker equated Bach’s idea of musical affect (“passions”) to diminution. Changes of affect correspond to changes in diminution. Schenker determines that “in Bach’s word ‘passions’... [o]ne need only recall Part I, 3, §13 to understand that he means by it simply the consequences of a change of diminution.”⁴⁸ From the third chapter (“Performance”) in Part I, § 13 (cited by Schenker), Bach remarks on joyous passages: “constantly varying the passions ... will barely quiet one before he rouses another.”⁴⁹ He continues, “It is principally in improvisations or fantasias that the keyboardist can best master the feelings of his audience.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Bach, *Essay*, 144.

⁴⁶ Bach, *Essay*, 164.

⁴⁷ Bach, *Essay*, 166.

⁴⁸ Schenker, “The Art,” 5.

⁴⁹ Bach, *Essay*, 152.

⁵⁰ Bach, *Essay*, 152.

For Schenker, in this context, diminution's variety maps onto the changes of affect in order to properly convey the overall affect.

In paragraph two of the chapter on improvisation, Bach expresses that improvising a free fantasy "require[s] a comprehensive knowledge of composition."⁵¹ Building a "comprehensive knowledge of composition" is a gradual process. Through the study of different genres and techniques, a musician builds this understanding. Improvising a free fantasy requires not only knowledge of genre and technique but a comprehensive understanding of what Bach calls the "ground plan." We can conclude that the understanding required to improvise a free fantasy is built through one's experience capturing the overall affect of composed works. Ultimately, Bach's figured-bass ground plan provides the harmonic content for the improviser's extemporization. A good performance captures the essence of a free fantasy through changes in affect for Bach or appropriate diminutions of the ground plan for Schenker.

Later, in paragraph twelve of the same chapter, Bach describes variety as the all-important beauty sustained in the free fantasia. "All kinds of figures," not entirely conceived of tireless episodes or rapidly repeated broken chords, but rather, those that "stir the passions" imploring artful variation and changing dynamic level, respectively, are required to perform a free fantasia successfully.⁵² On this paragraph, Schenker remarks, "A change of diminution...renders important service even in the free fantasy: by antithesis it divides and unifies at one and the same time, and thus serves the unity of the whole as well."⁵³ Given what is known about diminution from Schenker's later essays, deducing that variation of local-level content endowed with content derived from the tonal plan fuses the piece at the global level,

⁵¹ Bach, *Essay*, 430.

⁵² Bach, *Essay*, 438-439.

⁵³ Schenker, "The Art," 5.

similarly empowering diminution in this essay. The overall tonal plan overrides the surface-level discontinuities.

Monotonicity. One of the guiding principles that Schenker (in “Die Kunst”) extracted from *Verusch*’s chapter on improvisation was monotonicity and the composing out of individual scale degrees with localized modulations. In 1902 (two years prior to the first publication of “Ein Beitrag”), Schenker published a critical edition of J.S. Bach’s *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*. In his commentary about the opening 49 measures of the fantasy, he expresses that “the feeling of the main tonality is never lost” and praises J.S. Bach’s “sureness of instinct to use such simple means to maintain the key amidst tumultuous runs, passages, and arpeggios.”⁵⁴ Schenker’s interest in the theory of monotonicity continues with C.P.E. Bach’s fantasy in *Versuch*.

In paragraph three of Bach’s chapter on improvisation, he indicates that harmonic passages can be executed with a variety of choice figures, but they must begin and end in the same key. In his comments, Schenker points out how Bach “advances the notion of a principal key for the free fantasy.”⁵⁵ In doing so, Bach assumes the principle of monotonicity. Although the free fantasy allows for a degree of freedom when deciding how to embellish the ground plan, Bach required that it rely on a singular key.

Doing so requires the diminution (elaboration) of the ground plan’s harmonies to convey their durations (in Figure 10) as accurately as possible. In §6, Bach states that longer sections of tonic should appear at the beginning “so that the listener will be unmistakably oriented. And again before the close it must be well prolonged as a means of preparing the listener.”⁵⁶ In this paragraph, Bach more clearly alludes to the principle of monotonicity than in Paragraph three.

⁵⁴ Heinrich Schenker, *J.S. Bach’s Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue: Critical Edition with Commentary*, trans. and ed. by Hedi Siegl (New York: Longman, 1984), 23.

⁵⁵ Schenker, “The Art,” 3.

⁵⁶ Schenker, “The Art,” 3.

Schenker suggests that “if, like Bach, one takes the scale degrees of the tonic for ‘keys,’ then one might already extract from §6 a theory of tonality.”⁵⁷ Establishing a principal key through longer durations of tonic at the beginning and end certainly privileges the view of a single key around which other keys are oriented.

Diminution with Elaborated Harmonies. The other guiding principle that Schenker extracts from his examination of Bach’s free fantasy is diminution as the elaboration of a figured bass ground plan (harmonic expansion). At the asterisk on page 5 of Ian Bent’s edition of *Das Meisterwerk der Musik*, volume 1, Schenker begins to more thoroughly unpack *Versuch*. After the asterisk, he states, “Finally we come to §§12-14, the most important in the chapter, in which diminution will be treated in its essence.”⁵⁸ (Paragraph twelve was discussed earlier under the heading *Affect and Diminution*.)

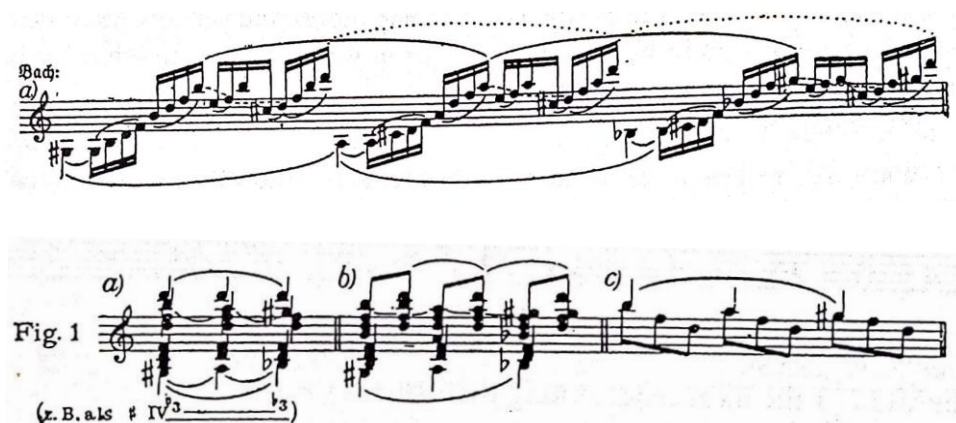
In Paragraph thirteen, Bach provides nine prototypes of diminution: figures that elaborate their harmonic structure through arpeggiation, neighbor notes, and runs that fill the space between chord tones. I will review three salient examples. In each of my figures, I provide Schenker’s annotated Bach examples above and Schenker’s analytical reduction below. Both examples are reproduced from Schenker’s “Die Kunst.”

Bach begins by stating that broken chords can be expressed in different ways. In Figure 7, Schenker annotates the broken chords in Bach’s Example *a* with slurs in the first line and provides three reductions of the passage in the second line (Figure 1*a-c*). This example shows how repeated broken chords are composed out with certain neighbor tones to provide more artful variation than the simple broken chords.

⁵⁷ Schenker, “The Art,” 4.

⁵⁸ Schenker, “The Art,” 5.

Figure 7: Bach and Schenker, Elaborated Harmonic Succession (from “Die Kunst”)



The arpeggios in Bach’s example *a* elaborate the harmonies (G-sharp diminished, D minor, and a German-augmented sixth) shown vertically in Schenker’s reduction at his Figure 1*a*. Notice how Bach inserted neighbor notes (C-sharp and E) to enliven the first two harmonies in progression created by broken chords. This is what Bach refers to as arpeggiating with acciaccature. These diminutions compose out certain pitches within the broken chord.

The solid and dotted slurs in Bach’s example are Schenker’s. They reflect the large-scale motion of the boundary voices shown in the reduction. Notice how an ascending third progression in the lowest voice, G-sharp-A-B-flat, facilitates a voice exchange with the descending third progression in the upper voice, B-A-G-sharp (which appears in an inner voice in Schenker’s Figure 1*a*). From Schenker’s Figure 1*b*, notice how each harmony’s highest register (the last four sixteenth notes of each harmony in Bach’s example) and lowest register (the first four) are interpolated by an arpeggiation in the intermediate register. Lastly, notice how this succession composes out predominant harmony in D minor: G-sharp diminished, passing six-four, German augmented sixth. In Schenker’s Figure 1*c*, the upper voice descent occurs against fixed D and F.

In Bach's Example *d*, shown in Figure 8, runs fill in the space between chord tones and can move in one direction (up or down), but "an agreeable variety arises out of repetitions."⁵⁹

Figure 8: Bach and Schenker, Elaborated Harmony (from "Die Kunst")

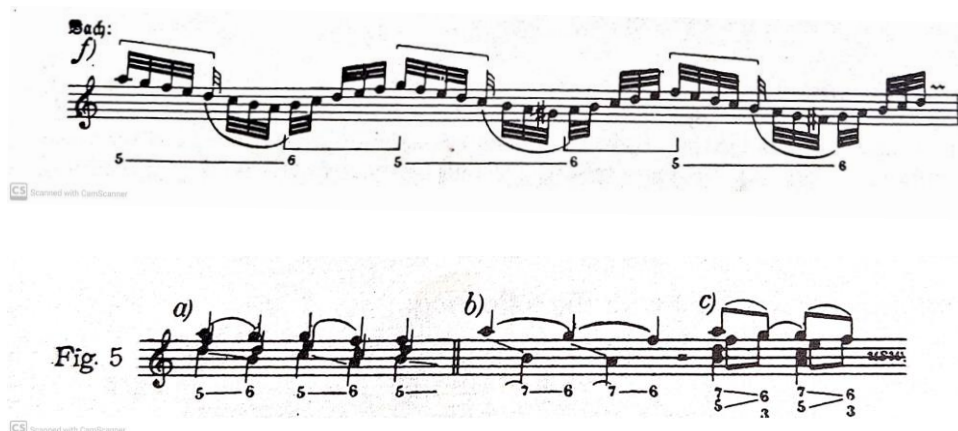


The examples in Figure 8, like those in Figure 7, show Schenker's annotation of Bach's figure *d* with slurs, brackets, and figures on the first line and two levels of reduction on the second line (Figure 3a-c). Instead of a chord succession, this example features an expansion of a single harmony, C dominant seventh. We can understand that Bach's runs in Example *d* fill in the space between the chord tones of that harmony. The pitches that outline the scope of the register and change of contour are slurred by Schenker. The first slur shows an ascending seventh progression (C to B-flat), the second slur shows a descending third progression (B-flat to G), and the third slur shows an ascending sixth progression (G to E). In Schenker's Figure 3a, he reduces out everything except for the first and last pitch of this elaboration. Figure 3b outlines the repetitions that occur in the different registers of the elaboration. Only the pitches at the beginning and ends of slurs in Bach's example appear in Example *b*.

⁵⁹ Bach, *Essay*, 439.

In Figure 9, ascending and descending runs alternate groupings to express a harmonic succession through a series of consonant suspensions.

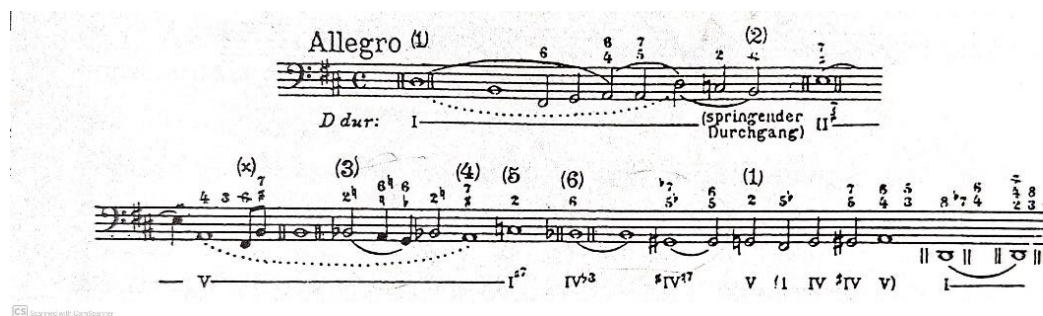
Figure 9: Bach and Schenker, Elaborated Harmonic Succession (from “Die Kunst”)



Schenker annotates Bach's example *f* with brackets, slurs, and figures in the first line and provides three reductions of the excerpt in the second line (Figure 5a-c). Schenker shows the lower voice with slurs and the upper voice with brackets in Bach's example. 5-6 motion (added by Schenker below Bach's example) repeats through staggered descending fifth progressions in the upper and lower voices. The upper voice partakes in its own middleground descending third progression, A-G-F (seen in Schenker's Figure 5a-c). Each of the last pitches bracketed in the upper voice's descending fifth progression partially forms the lower voice. In Bach's example, slurs show that the space between the lower voices is filled in with a third progression and a lower-neighbor tone (D-C-B-A-B and C-B-A-G-sharp-A), connecting two different sonorities (D minor – G major and C major – F major). These are followed by ascending sixth progressions that begin on B5 and A4. Together, the upper and lower voice's motives project the descending sequence clarified in Schenker's Figure 5a. Schenker's Figure 5b-c posit a series of 7-6 suspensions formed by the outer voices of 5a.

Diminution of the Ground Plan. Figure 10 contains Bach's ground plan for his written-out free fantasy with Schenker's annotations. Figure 11 shows Bach's realization with Schenker's annotations. Schenker created a three-tiered graphic representation of the free fantasy (shown in Figure 12). I will discuss some of these examples' features that, in Schenker's interpretation, reinforce how Bach's improvisation uses diminution.

Figure 10: Bach, Free Fantasy Ground Plan (from "Die Kunst")



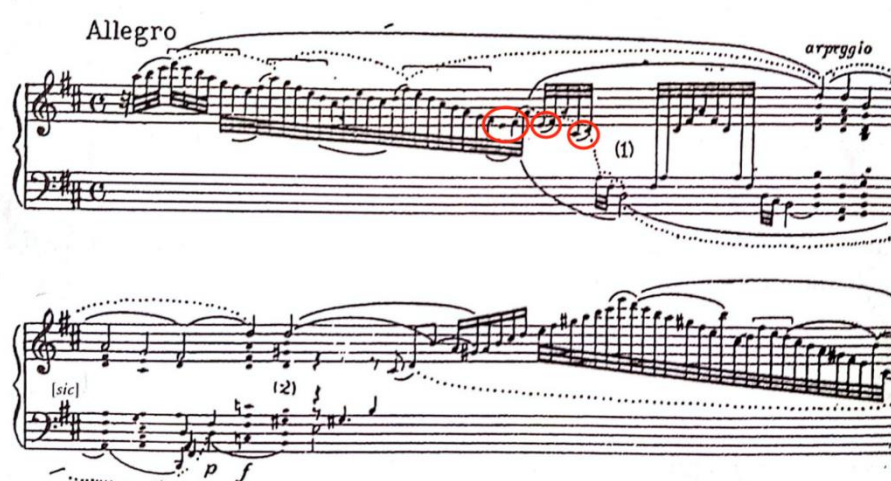
In Paragraph 14, Bach describes the ground plan and each of the moments marked by large Arabic numerals. The framework for it is a figured bass. The Arabic numerals (and an *x*) point to moments that should be carefully accounted for. At 1, there is a long expansion of tonic harmony. At 2, a modulation to V. At *x*, an implied move to E minor. The three tones at 3 (B-flat-A-G) compose out the C2 chord, which regains its position after the descending-third progression. At 4, the A dominant seventh seems to suggest D minor, but this suggestion is thwarted at 5 by a resolution to a D dominant seventh in third inversion. This suggests a move to G major, but the resolution to G minor at 6 ultimately leads back to the principal tonality following 1.

Bach's ground plan in Figure 10 provides the improvisation's harmonic framework. Bach instructs the performer to adhere to the ratios of the harmonies' durations as accurately as possible. Most of the slurs and the harmonic analysis in the ground plan are Schenker's, although Bach includes the slur from B-flat to G (under 3) in his original ground plan. Schenker's slurs

show middleground composing out of the tonic and dominant scale degrees. His harmonic analysis reduces many of the modulations in favor of the large-scale tonal organization. Schenker kept the slurs for his graph (Figure 12). Likewise, he maps Bach's landmark moments—denoted by the same large Arabic numerals—onto his graph and the written-out realization. Three of these moments highlight monotonicity and harmonic expansion: the tonic begins and ends the work (Arabic #1), and the expansion of a third-inversion C dominant seventh (Arabic #3).

Figure 11 is Bach's realization of the ground plan from his Figure 29. Notice how he reinforces the sense of monotonicity with long sections of elaborated tonic harmony at the beginning and end of the work. In the opening, the larger arpeggiations are built by smaller ones. Scalar runs conceal the smaller arpeggiations. Notice Schenker's brackets in the realization. They show how linear progressions of a sixth, fifth, and an octave fill in the space of the chord tones in the smaller arpeggiations. Schenker says that the "precise ordering of events even in the diminution of a free fantasy...hides behind the appearance of disorder: in this is constituted the inimitable quality of his art."⁶⁰

Figure 11: Bach, Free Fantasy (from "Die Kunst" - red ovals mine)



⁶⁰ Schenker, "The Art," 11.

Notice how the neighbor figure, F-sharp-E-F-sharp (first red oval), at the end of the opening scalar passage is repeated as an incomplete neighbor tone, E-F-sharp (second red oval), in the following broken chord. Notice how the C-sharp-D neighbor (third red oval) within the same arpeggiation transposes that same figure. This is another example of Bach's arpeggiating with acciaccature. The E dominant seventh at Bach's 2 is composed out with similar runs, arpeggiation, and the C-sharp-D neighbor motion from before. The brackets and slurs used throughout the realization are Schenker's. They portray harmonic expansion of the scale steps, 5-4-3-2-1, shown above the upper staff. Schenker's slurs also show large-scale linear descents. The slurred bass notes that precede the arrival of Bach's #2, D-C-B exemplify this. Dotted slurs connect pitches of the same value, indicating a larger-scale prolongation. We can observe how

each of the modulations brought out by Bach's numbering use arpeggiation, neighbor tones, and scalar runs to elaborate the harmonic ground plan.

In Figure 12, I provide the three-tiered Schenkerian reduction of the free fantasy. Large-scale expanded harmonies comprise Schenker's graph at all levels.

Figure 12: Schenker, Bach, Free Fantasy Graph (from "Die Kunst")

The figure displays three levels of Schenkerian reduction for a section of Bach's Free Fantasy.
 Staff a) is a bass line reduction showing a 'Quartzug' (quart progression) and a 'Terzzug' (tert progression).
 Staff b) is a bass line reduction showing an 'Oberquintteiler' (upper quint divider) and a 'Terzzug'.
 Staff c) is a full musical score reduction showing a 'spring' (spring) and a 'Dg.' (Dg.) marking.
 The figure includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and harmonic symbols like I, IV, V, and I-IV-V.

In Schenker's Example *b*, notice that descending third progressions in the upper voices compose out each of the prolonged harmonies from the ground plan. The third progression, A-G-F-sharp, services the tonic bass spanning Arabic #1-5, expanding scale-degree 5. The seventh in the bass (C at #5) allows for the tonicization of the subdominant area. There, another third progression, G-F-natural-E (scale-degrees 4, 3, and 2), services the predominant area moving to the dominant. Lastly, E-D-C-sharp services the structural dominant harmony, expanding scale-degree 2. These third progressions represent the opportunity for a larger-level interpretation of diminution (elaboration) through the clear structural distinction between the linear descents and

their supporting harmonies. Schenker's recognition of the small-notation long appoggiatura's ability to preserve the *main storyline* (discussed in Chapter II) is analogous to these third progressions' ability to preserve the *Urlinie*.

With "Die Kunst" Schenker displays the influence that improvisation has on the theory of diminution. At the end of the essay, Schenker writes: "Only the presence of mind with which our geniuses mastered the tonal material in such a way made it possible for them to produce far-reaching syntheses. Their works are in no way pieced together but rather, in the manner of the free fantasy, sketched out spontaneously and brought up from a concealed *Urgrund*."⁶¹ The term *Urgrund* translates to *source* or *primary reason*, which seems to anticipate the concept of the *Ursatz* that came to fruition in *Free Composition*. Furthermore, Schenker's annotations—all the slurs and brackets and especially the 3-level analysis of Bach's fantasia—bridges the gap between diminution as a bottom-up elaboration of a simpler structure (as discussed by Morgan) and a top-down analytical frame (as discussed in *Free Composition*).

Schenker's obsession with the notion of genius is problematic because this genius is used to describe exclusively white, male composers. Somehow, his position in cosmopolitan Europe had no effect on his restricted view of music. However, it is important to separate Schenker's narrow view of the world from his theories of music because of the great effect he has had on our field. As academics, we should appreciate the kinds of relationships that Schenker brings out without ascribing them to this "genius."

In Chapter IV, I will examine my translation of "Von der Diminution" and the diminution section in *Free Composition* (from which the former was partially included) to present diminution in its final stage. C.P.E. Bach's pivotal role in Schenker's evolution is less obvious in

⁶¹ Schenker, "The Art," 19.

Chapter IV. Schenker uses examples from common-practice composers who studied Bach to extend the notion of deep compositional relationships.

CHAPTER IV

DIMINUTION

“Die Kunst” examined diminution (elaboration) through improvisation upon a ground plan using scalar runs, broken chords, and their embellishing tones. However, it was not until the publication of *Free Composition* that Schenker’s ideas on diminution explained the flow of content from the background to the foreground—the fundamental approach of his analyses. “Von der Diminution,” the essay discussed here, bridges the gap between ideas formed in “Die Kunst” and his fully matured perspective in *Free Composition*.

In “Ein Beitrag,” Schenker describes how the small-notation long appoggiatura preserves the *main story line* or, more explicitly, allows the performer to consider the larger melodic line. Salzer’s essay shows how ornaments anticipate and repeat melodic material and underlying voice leading at the phrase level. In *Free Composition*, §252, “Figurations and small notation,” Schenker elaborates on these ideas and ties ornaments to larger-level structure: “Within the foreground, figurations frequently appear which are based on previous statement in the foreground, the occurrence of both statement and variant (figuration) at the foreground level—that is, the presence of two structural levels with the foreground—creates the illusion that the variant belongs only to the foreground statement, but in fact, through this statement it also relates to the background and middleground... The foreground sometimes exhibits merely a simple figuration of the fundamental structure.”⁶²

Later in the same section of *Free Composition*, Schenker describes how the notion of preserving the main story line evolved beyond C.P.E. Bach’s keyboard works: “Composers apparently were conscious of the difference between essential content and mere embellishment,

⁶² Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, ed. and trans. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 96.

for they sometimes wrote embellishments in small notes. This gave rise to the practice of using large and small notation... The small notation in such cases reveals the middleground elements, directing the reader or player more easily to the path which leads to the true sense of the music. Chopin very often made use of small notation in passage work, arpeggiations and other figurations.”⁶³

“*Der Dreiklang*.” Due to my interests in the German language and Schenkerian Analysis, I inquired about the untranslated essays of Schenker’s. In doing so, I was informed by Professor Robert Wason that “Von der Diminution” was one of three untranslated essays by Schenker from the mid-1930s Viennese periodical, *Der Dreiklang*. (The other essays are “Von der Stimmführung im Generalbass” and “Über Anton Brucker.”) *Der Dreiklang* was an Austrian monthly periodical, edited by Oswald Jonas and Felix Salzer, designed “to venerate Schenker’s memory and interpret his work, also to make it accessible to those who need guidance in approaching it.”⁶⁴ Its existence was short-lived—only 9 volumes. The first volume of the magazine was printed in April 1937, two years after the death of Schenker; and publication ceased in April 1938, just after Nazis marched through Vienna. These essays survived through the efforts of Jeannette Schenker, Ernst Oster, Erwin Ratz, and Oswald Jonas, who successfully smuggled the materials out of Nazi-controlled Vienna. The periodical consists mostly of works by Jonas, but also essays by other pupils: Felix Salzer, Carl Bamberger, Otto Vrieslander, Angi Elias, Hans Wolf, and Viktor Zuckerkandl, and six essays by Schenker himself. The essays by

⁶³ Schenker, *Free*, 97.

⁶⁴ Oswald Jonas and Felix Salzer, “OJ 12/6 [45] - Handwritten letter from Jonas and Salzer to Jeanette Schenker, dated June 27, 1935,” accessed March 5, 2020, https://schenkerdocumentsonline.org/documents/correspondence/OJ-12-6_45.html

Schenker consist of theories from his early published critical works, some recently published essays, and some unpublished essays.⁶⁵

The initial difficulty posed by “Von der Diminution” for my thesis—a historical account of the evolution of diminution and Schenker, from editor to theorist—is determining when it was written. Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence. One clue is provided by the fact that part of “Von der Diminution” made it into *Free Composition* under the “Diminution” heading. We can then reasonably assume that “Von der Diminution” was written before or during his drafting of *Free Composition*. In his diary entries from that time, he mentions beginning work on “Diminution” (the chapter in *Free Composition*) on November 9, 1931: “Diminution [for *Free Composition*] begun.”⁶⁶ In another entry on September 3, 1933, Schenker mentions, “Before teatime, the sixth chapter, “Diminution,” is also completed.”⁶⁷ Even though there is no evidence to contest its formulation before the first journal entry, since he included over half of “Von der Diminution” in *Free Composition*, the aforementioned dates and diary entries on the diminution chapter in *Free Composition* suggest that that “Von der Diminution” could have been written between November 1931 and September 1933 or earlier.

Assuming Jonas was familiar with the diminution section of *Free Composition* (1935), it is curious that he included a partial rendering of it in *Der Dreiklang*. Two pieces of evidence suggest an interesting reasoning for its inclusion: First, Schenker’s diary entry on September 15, 1933 (almost two weeks after he mentioned completing his work on Diminution) states “Work

⁶⁵ Ian Bent, William Drabkin, and Hedi Siegl, “Der Dreiklang,” accessed March 4, 2021, <https://schenkerdocumentsonline.org/profiles/journal/entity-006065.html>

⁶⁶ Heinrich Schenker, trans. William Drabkin, “Diary entry by Schenker November, 1931,” accessed March 4, 2021, https://schenkerdocumentsonline.org/documents/diaries/OJ-04-05_1931-11/r0023.html

⁶⁷ Heinrich Schenker, trans. William Drabkin, “Diary entry by Schenker September 3, 1933,” accessed March 4, 2021, https://schenkerdocumentsonline.org/documents/diaries/OJ-04-06_1933-09/r0003.html

on Diminution [for *Free Composition*].”⁶⁸ This suggests that Schenker was revising the discussion on diminution that he had completed on September 3rd. Interestingly, it is possible that these revisions included omitting the paragraphs that would eventually appear in *Der Dreiklang*. Second, as already mentioned in Chapter II, Ernst Oster suggested that “the reader should instead begin [*Free Composition*] with the section on diminution (§§275 ff.), a very good introduction to Schenker’s way of thinking.”⁶⁹ If true, these two propositions would provide a possible suggestion for why it is included in *Der Dreiklang* (volume 4/5, July/August 1937 issue). It seems, therefore, that “Von der Diminution” was intended as an introduction to Schenkerian thinking.

Translation of “Von der Diminution.” In this section of my essay, I will present my translation of “Von der Diminution” from volume 4/5 of *Der Dreiklang* with further discussion (Original German in Appendix).⁷⁰ My commentary examines similarities between earlier ideas on diminution and later ones found in “Von der Diminution” and *Free Composition*. The translation and the headings for Schenker’s examples are in italics. Footnotes in italics are Jonas’s.

Heinrich Schenker: On Diminution

Prolongation is the essence of music. History proves it in the works of the great masters; history will also prove that impotence with respect to prolongation alone was the downfall of music. Emerging from the background, proceeding through the middleground, the layers of prolongation grow into diminutions of the lowest order in the foreground. The motivic foreground only appears to stand on its own; in truth, it has perspective and rests on the narrow

⁶⁸ Heinrich Schenker, trans. William Drabkin, “Diary entry by Schenker Septemebr 15, 1933,” accessed March 4, 2021, https://schenkerdocumentsonline.org/documents/diaries/OJ-04-06_1933-09/r0015.html

⁶⁹ Schenker, *Free*, xiii. (Corroborated by Allen Forte in the “introduction to the English Edition”)

⁷⁰ My sincere thanks go to Professor Robert Wason for his guidance on the translation of “Von der Diminution.”

shoulders of only the few structural intervals of an Ursatz (i.e., the fundamental line and the associated bass arpeggiation that prolong the triad).⁷¹ In fact, the entire work is one overflowing diminution—simply one figure. Where the whole is not the motif in this same sense, the motifs sound as if they were plucked out of thin air, suddenly drawn to attention, tacked on like an ornament such as earrings, a nose ring, etc. Thus, the terms whole, synthesis, the organism, and form are really synonyms.⁷²

The important distinction made here is that diminutions “of the lowest order”—ornaments—come to be through duplication of the background structure at lower levels. The background organically binds the composition. This directly opposes earlier notions of diminution. Morgan described it as “an augmentation of musical content through addition.”⁷³ Furthermore, in “Die Kunst,” Schenker endows diminution with the agency to endow large-scale linear motion in his *Urgrund* reduction. Contrastingly, this paragraph from “Von der Diminution” projects the background as the source for motivic content.

“Von der Diminution continues”:

Just as humans, animals, and plants are figurations of the smallest seed, the compositions of geniuses are figurations of only a few intervals, clearly recognizable through the perspective of voice-leading levels. From the opening kernel of the fundamental structure to the final unfolding in the foreground, the genius rushes headlong down the shortest route, and this provides his mental energy. As much as I have said and still say in praise of geniuses, someday someone will find that I have said far too little in praise of their works.

⁷¹ Compare Heinrich Schenker, “Vom Hintergrund in der Musik” in issue 1 of this journal.

⁷² Compare Oswald Jonas “Mozart's ewige Melodie” in issue 3 of this journal.

⁷³ Robert Morgan, “Schenker and the Theoretical Tradition: The Concept of Musical Reduction,” *College Music Symposium*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 73.

An inner unity even of diminution is possible only through the origin in the same womb of the fundamental line. This unity becomes the shape of the whole, which alone is the organism in music.

Here, Schenker makes an analogy with nature. He is suggesting that all “masterpieces,” like organisms, come about through organic conception, which, for music, is shown through linear progressions in his reductions. Schenker posits that “masterpieces” choose the path of least resistance by using the most primordial of linear patterns in all levels.

An interesting editorial note by Jonas is inserted next in “Von der Diminution”:

(Schenker distinguishes the text-based diminution of Italian music, which in the instrumental realm was an art of mere ornamentation—with the sole exception of the genius Domenic Scarlatti—from the German instrumental (Absolut) diminution, whose figurations flow from a background and middleground, to which even the ornaments are strictly and organically bound.)

Although Jonas attributes a critique of Italian-based diminution to Schenker, Schenker praises 16th century Italian monody in *Harmony*.⁷⁴ He claimed this style of music emancipated the bass voice from its strict dependence on the melody; the bass line becomes melody—through its longer line—and projects an unfolding harmony. (As we will observe later in “Von der Diminution,” Schenker eventually rebukes this style of music.)

⁷⁴ “The task was, above all, to get rid of the overabundance in the vertical direction and to advance, for a change, the horizontal line, which has been the primal element. The melody had to be unfolded and to become richer; it was to gain a fresher tempo, uninhibited by any vertical overburdening; it was to learn how to run. All this was achieved by the Italian monody (at the end of the sixteenth century).” Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, ed. Oswald Jonas and trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1954), 72.

It is almost impossible to express in words the great amount of imagination (Geist) that the masters revealed in diminutions of this kind. One has to have experienced the struggle to decipher them! Even then, the true understanding of the profundity provides challenges when, as in the case of the "Air" in Handel's Suite in D minor, even the opening statement can be taken [i.e., understood] from the master's hand without recourse to any embellishment.

In Figure 13, I have included the opening phrase of two versions of the Air from Handel's Suite III in D minor from two different volumes of Handel's *Gesamtausgabe* published by Breitkopf and Härtel. The decorated version appears in volume 2: *Klavierstücke* (printed in 1858), and the undecorated version appears in volume 48: *Sammlung verschiedener Instrumental-Werke für Orgel und Klavier* (printed in 1894). Neither of these examples appear in *Free Composition* or "Von der Diminution."

Figure 13: Handel, Air, Decorated (Volume 2: *Klavierstücke*) and Undecorated (Volume 48: *Sammlung*)

Versions



Schenker suggests that Handel's creative "genius" afforded him with the sense to organically elaborate the undecorated version while maintaining its background structure (m. 2, beat four, to m. 3, beat two notwithstanding). Although the decorated version is not an improvisation, standard techniques of diminution (broken chords, scalar runs, and neighboring tones) are used. Therefore, Figure 13 similarly conveys the relationship between the ground plan and the free fantasy relationship described in Chapter III. Notice the differences between the two versions at m. 2, beat four, to m. 3, beat two. These three beats in the undecorated version contain leaps to and from dissonances that could be smoothed with figuration. However, Handel recomposes these three beats in the decorated version by replacing the bass G with a repetition of the previous bass pitch, F, and replacing the bass skip from A to F with the descending bassline D to C. Schenker's proposes that the undecorated version of the opening statement makes sense without the embellishments found in the decorated version.

"Von der Diminution" continues:

*One particularly fine example from Handel comes to mind: the Sarabande from Suite VII in B-flat major, from which an undecorated version from his hand has also been preserved.*⁷⁵

The footnote that accompanies the previous translated sentence prompted my search for the undecorated, early version of the Sarabande from Suite VII in B-flat major. It appears in the same Breitkopf and Härtel edition as the 1894 version of the Aria (shown in Figure 14). Below

⁷⁵ Schenker's sheet music example is missing. At least the first part of the score should be added, as well as the following short, explanatory note: The whole diminution serves to condense the tonal space, so to speak - the rising, erratic intervals are made more supple and motivated. Trills before and after a tone appear in measure 1, they prepare the ascent to the secondary note G, which itself leads to A; then the ornamentation on the last eighth of measure 3, which so delightfully forms the bridge to the pickup to the trill in measure 4. This trill also illustrates much more clearly the parallelism from the turn in measures 1 and 2 to the turn in measures 4 and 5. In measure 5, Handel goes to B-flat on the second eighth note, not C as in the unornamented version - how much more clearly he summarizes the B-flat octave ascent in this way. Finally, we should mention the eighth note D-B-flat at the beginning of measure 7 as holding on to B-flat in the melodic line until the end of the phrase.

the undecorated version is the decorated version that appears in “Von der Diminution” (but not *Free Composition*).

Figure 14: Handel, *Sarabande*, Undecorated (Volume 48: *Sammlung*) and *Decorated Versions* (from “*Von der Diminution*”)



Fig. 1



Similar to the permutations of the *Air in D minor*, the decorated version elaborates the simpler version. Jonas’s commentary (in the previous footnote) points out how Handel’s ornaments in the decorated version help to bring out important aspects of the melodic line. He also mentions the difference of moving to B-flat on the second eighth note of measure five instead of the C in the undecorated version in order to complete the octave ascent that is completed on the downbeat of measure six (instead of a seventh ascent). This implies that the

undecorated version does not project the important voice-leading lines as clearly as the decorated version, despite their similarities. This suggests that ornaments help to bind the work into a coherent structure—one that reflects the *Ursatz*.

About both Handel examples, Schenker then remarks:

But what difficulties await the performer in such cases! The dynamic shading according to the authoritative version, the inner shading of the ornaments, especially chromatic nuances, neighbor notes, ties, suspensions, etc. To reproduce all this in light and shade surely surpasses the powers of a musician who is not directly gifted with creativity! It is obvious that a thorough study of the art of such ornamentation must also lead to the knowledge of improvisation.

The footnote from Jonas that accompanies Oster's translation of this paragraph in *Free Composition* suggests that the reader compare these ideas to what was written in the essay from *The Masterwork in Music*, I, "The Art of Improvisation" (described here as a second stage in the evolution of Schenker's theory of diminution). Oster suggests that improvising a free fantasy in the style of Bach's *Versuch* naturally projects the organicism promoted in *Free Composition*.

The following translated excerpts from "Von der Diminution" appear in *Free Composition* under §253, "The achievement of organic relationship in genuine diminution through the whole" in *Free Composition*:

It is impossible to bring all forms of the organic bonds of true diminution into a complete list. I present only the most essential ones here. All diminution must be fixed in a definite, organically supported and precisely demonstrable affiliation to the whole, all compelled by voice leading. In every diminution, even of the lowest order, the whole lives and moves within it [to the extent that] not the slightest particle is without the whole. Binding the diminution through the

whole forms the main difficulty in deriving it both from a background and a middle ground, and vice versa: to understand this binding in reference to the middle and background.

The domain of diminution is the whole.

Schenker implies that there are endless ways in which levels of music bind to one another. The terms “bonds” and “binding” describe the core purpose of his approach to analysis. His reductive technique intends to capture the interrelations between local levels and the global structural.

True song is given to diminution! If it enhances its existence with the step progressions of the fundamental line, if it develops its life further through the steps of subordinate progressions, then it sings it from all these steps, which are the bearers of the melodic, on and on into the foreground. The special experiences of these step progressions, which are none other than our own, are transformed into song. What is the point of words that [are supposed to] generate and give meaning to music if the music, itself, organically lives, sings and speaks?⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The following example is added by the editor and is taken from the essay in volume 3, "Mozart's ewige Melodie". In the same essay, also compare the example from the Rondo in A minor.

Figure 15: Mozart, Sonata in D major, K.311, mm.16-39 (from “Von der Diminution”)

Fig. 2 (Jonas)

The musical score for Mozart's Sonata in D major, K.311, measures 16-39, is presented in four systems. The first system shows measures 16-23, with a piano introduction marked 'p' and a forte section marked 'f'. The second system shows measures 24-31, with a forte section marked 'f' and a piano section marked 'p'. The third system shows measures 32-39, with a piano section marked 'p'. The fourth system shows measures 40-47, with a piano section marked 'p'. The score is annotated with 'T. 16', 'T. 24', 'T. 36', and 'T. 17' to indicate measures. Dynamics include 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). The score is divided into four systems, with the final system showing measures 28 and 36.

Schenker describes descending linear progressions as “true song.” The examples reproduced in Figure 15 were added by Jonas in “Von der Diminution” and are not included in *Free Composition*. Jonas’s Figure 2a features the secondary theme from the exposition of the first movement of Mozart’s Sonata in D major. The measures are marked “T” for Takt, and blank measures imply a repetition of the previous measure’s material. Jonas’s upper voice middleground sketch in Figure 2b explains how “true song is given to diminution” in this excerpt. The melody of the opening eight measures elaborates an interrupted fifth progression outlined by Jonas’s middle ground (E-D-C-sharp-B-A). A third progression (E-D-C-sharp) reduces the material in mm. 24-25. This third descent is repeated until the cadential figure at the end of the excerpt.

“Von der Diminution” continues:

*And so the performance sings as a whole, whether the piece moves slow or fast. Everything of the true masterpiece is vocal, not only the passages that appear "cantabile" at first impression. C.P.E. Bach may be hailed as the creator of this great German instrumental singing, whose path Haydn then followed. C.P.E. Bach tirelessly demanded this singing instrumental style; he expresses this through virtually every line of his immortal masterpiece, "Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments"! Alas, the great German inner song is gone, in composition as well as in performance!*⁷⁷

Schenker has come full circle, again drawing inspiration from C.P.E. Bach. Schenker connects his earlier ideas on diminution with those here, giving the highest accolades to C.P.E. Bach for his ability to make instrumental music sing through diminution (linear progression).

“Von der Diminution” continues (§254, “Through repetition” in *Free Composition*):

It took music an immeasurable amount of time to adopt the law of repetition as its own. It felt relieved of the duty to interpret and develop itself as long as the word interpreted it, setting its measure and limit. This was the case in the epoch of [musical] irrationality. Even the first melismas, the first decorations of individual syllables, in which the human throat reveled rapturously, still lacked repetition; those melismas too remained irrational for centuries. Only counterpoint, which brought about clarification of the vertical dimension (the intervals) and of particular rhythmic designs, also promoted via these means the precision of the horizontal as follows: supported by certain intervals and determined by the various durations of the individual

⁷⁷ Oster translates Schenker’s “groß singenden, absoluten deutschen” as “deeply songful absolute” (leaving out “German”), and at the end of the paragraph he translates “deutsche” as “noble.” I have translated them more literally as “great German instrumental singing” and “German,” respectively.

tones, a succession of tones could advance into a kind of union of [temporal] limit and [tonal] meaning; only this kind of unity could and must then also compel a repetition. The repetition manifested itself as a sign of organic life in the world of sounds, as if tied by blood, connecting the prototype and copy. The gradually strengthened urge of music to be more and more self-sufficient, to strive for increasing content, met with the first joy of repetition as the joy of recognition in general. And so for centuries, music passed through the school of the canon, the fugue and related imitations: repetition positioned always on top, also immediately understandable with the eye and ear in the form of inversion, augmentation or diminution. These first experiences of Western mankind remained decisive in the course of time. Even now, they approach music most assuredly via an immediately recognizable repetition; [for] in addition to the joy of recognizing a sequence of tones, there is also the effortlessness of this joy (since what is easier than to recognize a short sequence of tones—it is called a "motif"—in repetition?).

Here Schenker conveys the importance of repetition and discusses its historical precedents. Melismatic vocal music, with its dependency on words, tended to avoid repetition. Only counterpoint, which unified all the components of music, possessed the necessary substance for repetition. Repetition in contrapuntal contexts allowed the composer to explore the “world of sounds” within a small unit of music (e.g., Rule of the Octave or ground plan). Furthermore, composers began preferring overtly repetitive genres because their thematic fragments—motifs—were easily recognizable by their audiences.

Schenker’s opinions here somewhat oppose his view of monody in *Harmony* (discussed earlier). Previously, in *Harmony*, Schenker felt that a rapturous reveling in the bass voice in Italian monody projected an unfolding harmony. These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, but here, Schenker seems to agree with Jonas’s earlier comment about Italian monody. Perhaps

the development of the *Ursatz*, and by extension, his ideas of German cultural superiority compelled Schenker to consider the voices' unified roles in his analyses.

The triviality in the creation of increased tonal material and its enjoyment, plus the exposure and misuse by less talented composers, weakened interest of these forms of imitation in the long run. New types of repetition now opened up to the genius of unique artists. Although they were just as clear to the eye and ear as the first repetitions of the imitating forms, they remained less accessible than the former, because they did not offer the same comfort to the creator and the listener. They, too, produced the fullest extent of the effects inherent in simple repetitions; they, too, were born out of the blood ties between the prototype and copy, taken from the artist's knowledge and will. Yet they remained hidden. But it was precisely the hidden repetitions that freed music from the narrowness of imitative forms and enabled it to achieve the greatest possible tensions and goals so that even the most extensive tonal structures could rely on repetitions!

In these hidden repetitions lie the essence and flowering of art of the German genius. The technique of motivic repetitions in German musical drama, in program music, even in the sonata forms of the non-genius etc. signifies a relapse into the initial state, a decay...

Schenker states that composers of “German genius” progressed past the monotony of imitative forms and easily recognizable repetitions, instead creating hidden repetitions. These hidden repetitions are not as recognizable as motives, but they connect different structural levels using related linear progressions. They permeate all parts of the form. With this newfound medium, composer’s spirits flourished.

Examples 1 to 21 given in Fig. 119⁷⁸ confirm that these hidden repetitions are by no means a figment of the ear's imagination or an insinuation of fantasy. In fact, they could also be grasped by the eyes, if in music the eye were able to see without guidance from the ear ...

It is high time to learn to recognize such repetitions as the main vehicles of synthesis in order to be able to express them in a performance. Since the masters primarily base their syntheses on such bonds, the importance of their reproduction is beyond question; the only thing that is necessary to investigate is by what means this goal can be realized.

Figure 16: Brahms and Schenker, 4th Symphony, 2nd movement (from “Von der Diminution” - Fig. 119, Ex. 15 from *Free Composition*)

Fig. 3
a) T. 3
E-dur $\sharp VI$
(Nöhm.)
Hörner

b) T. 5
Vl. I. Klar.

c) T. 8 ff
Klar.

As the previous footnote explains, only these two examples from *Free Composition* made it into “Von der Diminution.” Was it a choice made by Jonas or were these the first two of Schenker’s diminution examples? In any case, the excerpts from Brahms’ 4th Symphony, 2nd movement with Schenker’s reductions (reproduced in Figure 16) convey diminution by augmentation. That is, in Schenker’s Fig. 3a-b, ascending and descending third progressions

⁷⁸ We quote examples 15 and 9. (From *Der Freie Satz*)

begin on the same pitch occur at the foreground level (within a measure), but similar design of third progressions operate at the middleground level (over five measures) in Schenker's Fig. 3c.

For Schenker, these same linear progressions create synthetic bonds "freed music from the narrowness of imitative forms."⁷⁹ Notice that each example from Schenker's Fig. 3 shows pairs of linear progressions beginning on a different pitch. In fact, the excerpt in Fig. 3a is in C major instead of E major and the last excerpt ends in G-sharp minor. Since the purpose of these reductions is to find duplications of simple voice-leading structures—not necessarily motivic connections—from different excerpts in the same work, the relationship between the excerpted motives in Fig. 3a-b and the expanded motive in Fig. 3c is more difficult to recognize than the repetition in earlier imitative forms.

Now, whoever absorbs these bonds into the blood will be able to reproduce them in synthesis. In terms of effect, it is something completely different than performing a repetition instead as something new, which the new diminution in m. 8ff (in the Brahms example) so easily misleads [us to do]. How different, to give another example, the supposedly well-known Midsummer Night's Dream Overture would sound if the conductor were to express the repetitions.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Heinrich Schenker, "Von der Diminution," *Der Dreiklang*, Heft 4/5, (July/August 1937), 96.

⁸⁰ "In the mind of a 17-year-old musician a miracle takes place: the actual 'Midsummer Night's Dream Miracle' motif arises!" (From a letter by Schenker).

Figure 17: Mendelssohn and Schenker, “Overture” *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (from “*Von der Diminution*” - Fig. 119, Ex. 9 from *Free Composition*)



In Figure 17 (Schenker’s Fig. 4a-e) Schenker annotates five moments from Felix Mendelssohn’s “Overture” to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, showing hidden repetitions through augmentation. The brackets in the first example, Fig. 4a, provide the prototype (mm. 8-9): descending motion from E to B through passing tones D and C or D-sharp and C-sharp, a descending third progression B-A-G (or G-sharp), and the conjoining of the two, creating the boundary pitches, E and G (or G-sharp). In Fig. 4b, Schenker shows how these same progressions are enlarged in mm. 62-66. In Fig. 4c, the term *Vergrößerung* (augmentation) appears abbreviated above a linear descent that outlines E to G-sharp in mm. 78-81 (Schenker’s measure numbers in this example from “*Von der Diminution*” appear corrected in *Free Composition*). The second bracket appearing below the staff and the incomplete bracket before it show how repetitions of this E to G-sharp descent overlap one another in this excerpt. In Fig. 4d (mm. 138-150), the first connecting beam displays an inversion of the E-D-sharp-C-sharp-B (from Fig. 4b) progression transposed to B major (B-A-sharp-G-sharp-F-sharp). This reduction shows an interruption at its fifth measure. The second connecting beam in the final nine measures (mm. 142-150) outlines the completion of a descending octave progression in B major.

The open-faced note heads that are stemmed to this bracket (all but the final pitch, B) transpose the descent from E to B, this time starting on F-sharp and finishing on C-sharp. Schenker's Fig. 4e (mm. 168-174) lacks any annotations, but slurs from the string parts highlight the same fourth descent from the second half of Fig. 4d, F-sharp to C-sharp.⁸¹ Schenker suggests that the repetitions of these fourth progressions are not easily perceived by a conductor and that their recognition would increase the quality of performance.

Schenker emphasizes the influence recognizing these repetitions has on performance. In doing so, he extends some of the performative ideas he discussed in "Ein Beitrag." Similar to how the small-note long appoggiatura preserved the *main storyline*, large-scale linear descents, for Schenker, provide the summary and trajectory of a passage. Through recognizing the main line in both circumstances, the performer can appropriately bring out different levels of content. His insistence on this recognition alludes to the assertion made in "The Art of Improvisation," that the *overall affect* of a musical work requires diminution. The awareness of the ground plan in an improvised free fantasy influences how an improviser elaborates it with appropriate scalar runs, broken chords, and embellishing tones.

"Von der Diminution" ends abruptly. Unfortunately, no other contents from *Der Dreiklang* include commentary on Schenkerian diminution or its development. The chapter on diminution in *Free Composition* continues by examining the other ways in which diminution builds relationships between structural levels. Although the exact origin and production of this essay remain a mystery, its importance to *Free Composition* is obvious.

⁸¹ Only the first three measures from this example appear in *Free Composition*.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned in the introduction, organicism is brought out through Schenkerian Analysis. Diminution's role in the compositional process does not necessarily have any bearing on my conclusions drawn. Learning to hear Schenkerian diminution is simply another way to appreciate artistry. As is often the case, a composer may be unaware of their work's organicism or of the bonds between their works' structural levels. Somewhat obviously, this kind of analysis happens after a work has been composed. Although the meaning of diminution is different in each stage of its evolution, the examples from all three stages of this essay portray organicism through diminution. The "German genius" is only one account of musical organicism for which diminution is the foundation. In future studies, I hope to unveil Schenkerian diminution as the motivator behind the works of under-represented Classical and Jazz composers and improvisers.

The role performance had on Schenker's thought process should also be recognized. Written twenty years earlier than "Die Kunst," "Ein Beitrag" portrays Schenker's obsession with preserving the historically practical approach to ornaments in Bach's keyboard music. For the sake of performance, Schenker inadvertently laid the groundwork for his theory of diminution. Along the way, diminution's meaning switched from elaboration of a ground plan to analysis of music through a background-to-foreground lens for Schenker. I have suggested that the parallel relationships between elaborations and their harmonic ground plan influenced the motivic parallelisms between linear progressions through varying structural levels in Schenkerian Analysis.

Even though diminution is one motivation for Schenkerian Analysis, it is only discussed directly a few times in Schenker's essays. Drawing out moments that allude to future concrete

discussions, I traced Schenkerian diminution's development from his early essay, "Ein Beitrag zur Ornamentik," through "Die Kunst der Improvisation," to his finalized theories in "Von der Diminution" (and *Free Composition*). Differing levels of ornamentation seemed to have stimulated the transformation of diminution observed throughout Schenker's life—from elaboration to background-to-foreground flow of content.

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APPENDIX

“VON DER DIMINUTION” (ORIGINAL GERMAN)

Heinrich Schenker: von der Diminution

Die Auskomponierung ist die Musik. Die Geschichte erweist es in den Werken der großen Meister, die Geschichte wird auch erweisen, daß nur die Ohnmacht zur Auskomponierung ihr Untergang gewesen ist. Aus dem Hintergrunde kommend, durch den Mittelgrund schreitend, wachsen die Schichten der Auskomponierung an bis zu den Diminutionen niederster Ordnung im Vordergrund. Was der Vordergrund an Motiven bietet, steht nur scheinbar für sich; er hat in Wahrheit eine Perspektive und ruht auf den schmalen Schultern von nur wenigen ersten Intervallen eines Ursatzes, d.i. der Urlinie und der ihr zugehörigen Baßbrechung als Auskomponierung des Grundklanges.⁸² Also ist das Ganze eine einzige überströmende Diminution, nur eine Figur. Wo nicht das Ganze in diesem Sinne Figur ist, klingen die Motive wie aus der Luft gegriffen, plötzlich aufgepappt, wie ein Anfall von einem Ornament, wie Ohrschmuck, Nasenring usw. Somit sind: das Ganze, Synthese, Organisches, Figur, wirklich Synonima.⁸³

Wie Mensch, Tier, und Pflanze Figurierungen von kleinstem Samen sind, so sind auch die Kompositionen der Genies Figurierungen von nur wenigen Intervallen, die durch die Perspektive der Stimmführungsschichten deutlich zu erkennen sind. Vom Kern des Ursatzes zur letzten Ausfaltung im Vordergrund stürmt das Genie auf kürzestem Wege, und das macht seine geistige Spannkraft aus. Soviel ich auch zum Preise der Genies gesagt habe und sage, man wird einmal finden, daß ich noch viel zu wenig zum Preis ihrer Werke gesagt habe.

⁸² Vergleiche Heinrich Schenker, "Vom Hintergrund in der Musik" in Heft 1 der Zeitschrift.

⁸³ Vergleiche Oswald Jonas "Mozarts ewige Melodie" in Heft 3 der Zeitschrift.

Nur durch die Herkunft aus dem gleichen Mutterschoß der Urlinie ist eine innere Einheit auch der Diminution möglich, diese Einheit wird zur Figur des Ganzen, sie allein ist das Organische in der Musik.⁸⁴

(Schenker unterscheidet die wortgezeugte Diminution der italienischen Musik, die auch im Instrumentalen sich in einer bloßen Verzierungskunst auslebte - mit der einzigen Ausnahme des Genies Domenic Scarlatti - von der absoluten deutschen Diminution, deren Figurierungen aus einem Hinter- und Mittelgrund fließen, und bei der sogar die Verzierungen streng organisch gebunden sind.)

Beinahe ist mit Worten der hohe Aufwand an Geist nicht wiederzugeben, den die Meister in Diminutionen solcher Art offenbaren. Man muß das Ringen um ihre Entzifferung erlebt haben! Sogar noch dann bereitet die Erkenntnis der Tiefe Schwierigkeiten, wenn, wie im Falle der "Air" in Händels Suite d-Moll, aus des Meisters Hand auch die erste Fassung ohne jede Verzierung zuhelfe genommen werden kann. Noch sei aus Händels Bereich eines besonders schönen Beispiels gedacht, der Sarabande aus der Suite VII, B-dur, von der eine unverzierte Fassung aus seiner Hand sich ebenfalls erhalten hat.⁸⁵

Figur 1 - (Handel)

Welche Schwierigkeiten harren aber erst des Vortragenden in solchen Fällen! Die dynamische Schattierung gemäß der Grundfassung, die Innenschattierung der Verzierungen im

⁸⁴ Bis hierher stammen die Ausführungen aus dem zweiten Jahrbuch "Das Meisterwerk in der Musik"; die weiteren sind dem "Freien Satz" entnommen.

⁸⁵ Das Notenbeispiel fehlt bei Schenker. Es sei wenigstens der erste Teil von der Schriftleitung hinzugefügt, ebenso folgender kurzer, erläuternder Hinweis: Die ganze Diminution dient dazu, den Tonraum sozusagen zu verdichten - das Ansteigen, die sprunghaften Intervalle werden geschmeidiger gemacht und motiviert. Gleich der Triller- Vor- und Nachschlag, sowie überhaupt der Triller im Takt 1, bereitet das Ansteigen zur Nebennote g vor, die selbst schon wieder den Vorhalt a bekommt; dann die Verzierung am letzten Achtel de T. 3, die so entzückend die Brücke zu dem Schleifer vor dem Triller in T. 4 bildet. Dieser Triller verdeutlicht auch viel stärker den Parallelismus von der Wende T.1/2 zu der Wende T. 4/5. Im Takt 5 geht Händel am zweiten Achtel zu b, nicht c wie in der unverzierten Fassung - wieviel deutlicher faßt er so die Oktave b1-b2 zusammen. Endlich sei noch auf die Achtelbrechung d-b am Beginn des T. 7 hingewiesen - also Festhalten von b1 melodischer Form bis zum Schluß.

besonderen, Chromen, Nebennoten, Bindungen u.a., alles das in Licht und Schatten wiederzugeben, übersteigt fürwahr die Kräfte eines Musikers, der nicht gerade mit Genie begnadet ist! Daß ein gründliches Studium solcher Verzierungskunst auch zur Erkenntnis der Improvisation führen muß, leuchtet ohne weiteres ein...

Es ist unmöglich, alle Formen organischer Bindungen der wahren Diminution in abgeschlossener Reihe zu bringen, nur die wesentlichsten stelle ich hier dar. Alle Diminution muß in einer bestimmten, durch Stimmführungszwang organisch beglaubigten und genau nachweisbaren Zugehörigkeit zum Ganzen festgelegt sein. In jeder Diminution, auch der niedersten Ordnung, lebt und webt das Ganze mit, nicht das geringste Teilchen ohne das Ganze. Die Bindung der Diminution durch ein Ganzes bildet die Hauptschwierigkeit, sie sowohl aus einem Hinter- und Mittelgrund zu erschaffen, wie umgekehrt, sie auf ihren Mittel- und Hintergrund auch nur nachschaffend zu verstehen.

Das Ganze ist die Atmosphäre der Diminution.

Der Diminution ist wahrhafter Gesang gegeben! Hebt sie ihr Dasein mit den Sekundsritten der Urlinie an, entwickelt sie ihr weiteres Leben durch die Sekundsritte der abgeleiteten Züge, so singt sie es aus allen diesen Sekundsritten, die ja Träger des Melodischen sind, bis hinein in den Vordergrund und in diesem weiter und weiter. In Gesang verwandeln sich auch alle besonderen Erlebnisse der Züge, die nicht andere sind als unsere eigene - wozu dann noch Worte, die Musik zeugen, deuten sollen, wenn sie aus sich selbst heraus organisch lebt, singt und redet? ⁸⁶

Figur 2 - (Mozart)

⁸⁶ Das folgende Beispiel ist von der Schriftleitung hinzugefügt und stammt aus dem Aufsatz in Heft 3, "Mozarts ewige Melodie". Vergleiche in demselben Aufsatz auch das Beispiel aus dem Rondo in a-moll.

Und so singe denn auch der Vortrag aus dem Ganzen, sei das Stück in langsamer oder rascher Bewegung, alles im wahren Meisterwerk ist gesangsmäßig, nicht nur die Stellen, die schon dem ersten Eindruck sich "kantabel" darbieten. Als Schöpfer dieser groß singenden, absoluten deutschen Diminution mag Ph. Em. Bach gepriesen werden, dessen Weg dann auch Haydn ging. Deshalb konnte sich Em. Bach nicht genug tun in der Forderung nach einem singenden Vortrag, geradezu Gesang singt auch jede Zeile seines unsterblichen Meisterwerkes, des "Versuch über die wahre Art, das Klavier zu spielen!" Ach, der große deutsche Innensang ist hin, in der Komposition sowohl wie im Vortrag!

*

Unermeßlich lange Zeit brauchte die Musik, ehe sie das Gesetz der Wiederholung sich zu eigen machte. Der Pflicht, sich selbst zu deuten und zu entwickeln fühlte sie sich enthoben, so lange das Wort sie deutete, ihr Maß und Grenze setzte. So war es in der Epoche der Irrationalität. Sogar den ersten Melismen, den ersten Verzierungen einzelner Silben, in denen die menschliche Kehle verzückt schwelgte, ging die Wiederholung noch ab, auch sie blieben durch Jahrhunderte irrational. Erst der Kontrapunkt, der eine Klärung der Vertikalen (der Intervalle) und der besonderen Rhythmik brachte, förderte mit diesen Mitteln auch die Bestimmtheit der Horizontalen: auf bestimmte Intervalle gestützt und bestimmt auch in den mannigfaltigen Zeitwerten der einzelnen Töne, konnte eine Tonfolge zu einer bestimmten Bindung in Grenze und Sinn vordringen, nur eine solche Einheit konnte und mußte dann auch zu einer Wiederholung drängen. Die Wiederholung fand sich von selbst ein als Zeichen organischen Lebens in der Welt der Töne, wie durch Blutsbande waren Vorund Nachbild verbunden. Der allmählich gestärkte Drang der Musik, mehr und mehr sich selbst stattzugeben, Inhaltsmehrung anzustreben, begegnete sich mit der ersten Freude an der Wiederholung als der Freude an einem

Wiedererkennen überhaupt, und so ging die Musik Jahrhunderte lang durch die Schule des Canons, der Fuge und verwandter Nachahmungen: stets lag die Wiederholung obenauf, sie war auch in Form einer Umkehrung, einer Vergrößerung oder Verkleinerung mit Aug' und Ohr jederzeit und sofort begreifbar. Diese ersten Erfahrungen der abendländischen Menschheit blieben bestimmend auch in der Folge der Zeiten. Noch bis zur Stunde geht sie zur Musik am sichersten über eine sofort erkennbare Wiederholung; tritt doch zur Freude am Wiedererkennen eine Tonfolge noch die Mühelosigkeit ebendieser Freude hinzu, denn was ist einfacher, als eine ohnehin knappe Folge von Tönen - sie wird als "Motiv" bezeichnet - in der Wiederholung wiederzuerkennen?

Die Billigkeit in der Beschaffung vermehrten Tonmaterials und seines Genusses, dazu die Bloßstellung und Abnutzung durch minder begabte Tonsetzer schwächten aber auf die Dauer die Teilnahme an jenen Formen der Nachahmung. Dem Genius einzigartiger Künstler erschlossen sich nun neue Arten von Wiederholungen. Lagen diese vor Aug' und Ohr zwar ebenso deutlich wie jene ersten Wiederholungen der nachahmenden Formen, so blieben sie dennoch weniger zugänglich als jene, weil sie dem Schaffenden und dem Hörer nicht die gleiche Bequemlichkeit boten. Auch sie gaben die Wirkung im vollsten Ausmaße her, wie sie den einfachen Wiederholungen eigen ist, auch sie wurden dem Künstler nur aus der Blutsverwandtschaft von Vor- und Nachbild geboren, seinem Wissen und Wollen entrückt, dennoch blieben diese Wiederholungen verborgen. Gerade aber die verborgenen Wiederholungen haben die Musik aus der Enge der nachahmenden befreit und ihr weiteste Spannungen und Ziele gewiesen: also konnten auch umfangreichste Tongebilde sich auf Wiederholungen stützen!

In den mehr verborgenen Wiederholungen liegt Wesen und Blüte deutschen Genie-Kunst. Die Technik der "Motiv"-Wiederholungen im deutschen Musikdrama, in der Programmmusik,

auch in den Sonatenformen der Nichtgenies usw. bedeutet demnach einen Rückfall in den anfänglichen Stand, also einen Verfall...

Die in Fig. 119 angeführten Beispiele 1 bis 21⁸⁷ bestätigen, daß bei den mehr verborgenen Wiederholungen die Träger durchaus nicht eine Einbildung des Ohres, eine Unterstellung der Fantasie sind, daß sie wohl auch augenmäßig zu erfassen wären, wenn in der Musik das Auge ohne Leitung durch das Ohr zu sehen vermöchte...

Es wäre höchste Zeit, zu solchen Wiederholungen als den Hauptträgern der Synthese vordringen zu lernen, um sie auch im Vortrag ausdrücken zu können. Angesichts dessen, daß die Meister ihre Synthesen hauptsächlich auf solche Bindungen stützen, steht die Wichtigkeit ihrer Wiedergabe außer Frage, geboten ist nur, darnach zu forschen, mit welchen Mitteln sich das Ziel erreichen lasse. Nun, wer jene Bindungen einmal in sein Blut aufgenommen hat, wird sie auch der Synthese wiederzugeben wissen: Es ist der Wirkung nach etwas völlig anderes, z. B. 15c) (Brahms, 4. Symphonie, 2. Satz),

Figur 3 - (Brahms)

als eine Wiederholung denn als ein Neues vorzutragen, wozu die neue Diminution der T. 8ff so leicht verleitet. Wie anders klänge, um noch ein Beispiel anzuführen, die angeblich bekannte Sommernachtstraum-Ouvertüre, wenn der Dirigent die Wiederholungen zum Ausdruck brächte.⁸⁸

Figur 4 - (Mendelssohn)

⁸⁷ Wir zitieren davon Beispiel 15 und 9.

⁸⁸ "Im Kopf eines 17jährigen Musikers begibt sich das Wunder, das eigentliche "Sommernachtstraum-Wunder" einer solchen Motivwerdung!" (Aus einem Brief Schenkers).