

## Introduction

The coda to Carl Nielsen's Fourth Symphony begins with an exultant roar of E major, but barely thirty bars earlier the same theme has been battling against a nightmarish cacophony of bellowing timpani and a stridently insistent octave unison B in the upper winds and strings. The chaos is cut short by a wrenching timpani glissando, and the only other transition between the two passages is a brief and harshly dissonant fugato that has previously ended in disarray. In a programme note for this work, Nielsen wrote:

the structuring of the various sections and the ordering of the musical material are the fruit of deliberation by the composer in the same way as when an engineer sets up dykes and sluices for the water during a flood (cited in Rollum-Larsen 2000: xv-xvi)<sup>1</sup>

This is no calmly calculated diversion of gentle waters; the impression towards the end of the work is that the final sluice gate is slammed down only at the last minute (the timpani glissando at bb. 1108-9?), and even then the torrent is barely contained.

If we want to understand the Nielsen of the Fourth Symphony (subtitled *The Inextinguishable*), it is this way of handling musical material that we need to address. Carl Dahlhaus has argued that 'personal style can no longer be defined in terms of a heterogeneous accumulation of outstanding individual traits, but must be understood as a configuration of formal problems and the varying solutions to them' (1991: 59). The implication of Nielsen's above comments is that the 'formal problems' behind *The Inextinguishable* concern not the solutions to such man-made artistic configurations, but the attempt to summon and control powerful and autonomous forces that, according to

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<sup>1</sup> *Bygningen af de forskellige Afsnit og Ordningen af det musikalske Stof jo er Frugten af en Omtanke fra Komponistens Side paa same Maade, som naar en Ingeniør sætter Diger og Sluser for Vandet under en Oversvømmelse.* Quoted from Gerhardt Lynges programme note on the Aarhus Hall's opening concert on 1 April 1938, cited as CN Prog. Note 1938.

the composer, are those that make ‘the birds cry, the animals roar, bleat, run and fight, and humans moan, groan, exult and shout without any explanation’ (cited in *ibid.* xvi).<sup>2</sup>

Although my study will conclude in this tempestuous arena, it begins with an exploration of specifically tonal forces on a much more modest scale. This, at least, is something of which Nielsen, for all his scepticism of the value of musical analysis, might have approved; he considered knowledge of ‘simple intervals’ a pre-requisite for understanding the art of music:

[intervals are] the elements which first arouse a deeper interest in music ... The interval should be to our art what corn and bread and holy water were to the people of the Old Testament – the stuff of life to fortify and stimulate us in our musical work. (Nielsen 1953: 40-1)<sup>3</sup>

He would probably have been less enamoured of my mode of enquiry: painstaking in its epistemological reflection and drawing on theorists with whom he would, in all likelihood, have had little patience. Nielsen wrote of literary criticism that ‘while real understanding comes swift as lightning ... [the analysis of poetry] stands on the slowly moving staircase of reason. One must wait; and then – it is too late’ (1953: 53). There is no doubting the exhilaration of experience, of direct understanding; I nevertheless find the ‘slowly moving staircase’ a congenial place. Whether reflecting on understanding or attempting to articulate the inexpressible, our capacity for pondering is equally an expression of our humanity as our ability to realize in an unmediated flash.

In her ‘Prelude’ to the *Carl Nielsen Companion*, Mina Miller wrote that ‘we have only just begun to formulate significant questions about how traditional tonal structures are

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<sup>2</sup> *der bringer Fuglene til at skribe, Dyrene til at brøle, bræge, løbe og kæmpe og Menneske til at jamre, stønne, juble of raabe uden al Forklaring.* CN Prog. Note 1938.

<sup>3</sup> *som allerførst vækker dybere musikalsk Interesse ... Intervallet bør være for vor kunst, hvad Korn og Brød og hellige Kilder var for Østerlænderne i det gamle Testamented: det, hvoraf vi skal leve, det, som skal give os kræfter og Lyst til at arbejde med Musiken.* ‘Musikalske Problemer’ (1922) reproduced in Fellow 1999: 264.

transformed [in Nielsen's music]' (1994: 3). The focus of the present study is on how these transformations might be meaningful in a more concrete way than Miller seems to have had in mind, and the addition of this hermeneutic dimension makes her comment all the more true now. One cannot even begin such a study, in fact, without more clarity about how 'traditional tonal structures' can themselves be carriers of meaning in the first place, and that is why I begin with some reflections on Beethoven's symphonic writing. This is no mere benchmarking exercise – the way in which Beethoven monumentalizes and dramatizes the syntax of the Classical style is of direct relevance to Nielsen's own engagement with tonality.<sup>4</sup>

Although Nielsen's Fourth Symphony is understandably overshadowed by the Fifth, the earlier symphony embodies an important part of the composer's aesthetic that deserves further exploration, and this is one of the motivations behind the present study. Whilst the Fifth symphony is already the subject of a substantial analytical monograph (Fanning 1997), the only lengthy study of the Fourth is Tyler White's DMA dissertation (1991), which, although commendably detailed, comes to some questionable conclusions. My own dissertation is not, however, a straightforward addendum to current Nielsen scholarship; it is motivated by an interest in analytical and theoretical issues as much as musicological ones. The analytical work that follows is therefore grounded in epistemological and above all semiotic considerations.

Musical semiotics is not a method so much as an attitude, entailing a self-reflective discourse on how music signifies. I am interested not in generating vast swathes of data in the manner of Jean-Jacques Nattiez's early paradigmatic analyses, but in exploring and refining critical and analytical judgements. In probing the assumptions behind prevailing Nielsen analytical scholarship, and indeed theorizing my own response to this music, I aim to 'revitalise rather than exclude ... those creative and perceptual impulses which have informed musical intuition' (Dunsby and Stopford 1981: 51).

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<sup>4</sup> See Burnham 1995: 40 for discussion of the influence of this aspect of Beethoven's heroic style more generally.

I am keen that the structure of this dissertation should reflect the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice, rather than give the impression that a fixed methodology has been established and then deployed in a series of exemplary analyses. Although the basics of my approach must first be explained and located, it will develop according to the changing priorities of each succeeding chapter.

In Chapter One I consider general issues surrounding the Schenkerian study of Nielsen's tonal language and introduce the foundations of the semiotic component of my study. In Chapter Two, which concentrates on Beethoven's First and Fourth Symphonies, I am particularly interested in how basic tonal progressions in the foreground, as well as those that form deeper middleground and background structures, can be interpreted as narrative in the broadest sense. Central to this narrative interpretation is the notion, taken from Schenker's characterization of the *Urlinie*, that a large part of the signifying potential of tonal music comes from the projection of a desire for closure that is (or is not) fulfilled in various ways. Three distinct developments of this idea are presented in the remaining chapters, and each of these focuses on a different Nielsen symphony: the dramatic interaction of keys is explored in the First; Nielsen's interest in character is examined in relation to the semi-programmatic Second; finally, an analytical study of more extreme musical contrasts focuses on the Fourth.

This final chapter concludes with a discussion of Nielsen's various expressive distortions of tonality, which draws, among other things on the composer's much-quoted comment that in relation to keys he felt a 'great yearning for freedom' (cited in Swanson 1994: 624).<sup>5</sup> Whilst the tension between Nielsen's yearning for freedom and the draw of tonal closure comes to the fore in *The Inextinguishable*, it will be seen that this dichotomy has a part to play also in the two earlier works; it is also in the play of opposing forces more generally that my narrative interpretations of Nielsen's tonal writing originate.

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<sup>5</sup> *en stræben efter Frihed*. Letter to Henrik Knudsen 19 August 1913.

# Chapter One

## Schenkerian and semiotic approaches to tonal signification

### 1.1 – Nielsen, Schenker and the meaning of tonal structure

#### 1.1.1 – Anthropomorphism and narrative

There is much to admire as well as to criticize in Robert Simpson's seminal discussions of Nielsen's tonal language. Although I shall return to the hoary old question of progressive tonality later in this chapter, it is in fact the general tone of Simpson's interpretations that has probably been most influential on Anglo-American Nielsen scholarship. Certainly his vision of the symphonies as battlefields on which victory is dependent on the arrival at (or banishment of) a particular key is a striking one.

In his analysis of the Fourth Symphony, Simpson asserts that at one point 'the key of E strives to survive against a mass of conflicting counterpoints' (1979: 80). Similar writing can of course be found on a wide range of music, but this type of statement has proved to be particularly pervasive in the Nielsen literature. When Harald Krebs, for example, discusses the same work, he also posits the key of E as a protagonist: 'Once E has asserted itself against C, it must still overcome A; this tonal battle is played out in the final movement' (1994: 225). Although David Fanning avoids anthropomorphizing keys quite so baldly, his monograph on the Fifth Symphony is often written in much the same spirit: 'The bass and ostinato have made their heroic bid by stepwise rises. The melody now tries to emulate them by shifting the melodic focus ... up to A' (1997: 32).

Moving away from the field of Nielsen studies, analyses that weave a narrative of musical subjects with desires, successes and failures are familiar from the sort of traditional critical language represented in the following commentary on a passage towards the end of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony by Donald Francis Tovey:

Out bursts the theme, then in F sharp minor. Can we ever find a way home again?  
Well E sharp (or F natural) is the leading note of this new key, and upon E sharp the

trumpets pounce, and hammer away at it until they have thoroughly convinced the orchestra that they mean it for the tonic. (1935: 67)

Although this is somewhat more abstract than Simpson's fantastical descriptions of musical subjects, there is no real theoretical distinction to be drawn between them. Both authors project a narrative understanding onto musical events by implying the actions of an autonomous agent within the discourse. Ernst Kurth suggested, in the 1920s, that it was the rise of Classical periodicity that marked the birth of subjectivism in music (see Tarasti 1994: 105), and it is surely true that although instruments, chords and even single notes are also characterized as musical actors by scholars such as Tovey, it is above all the marking off of melody into themes by way of the symmetrical period that encourages narrative interpretation.

Raymond Monelle expands on this idea when he suggests that periodic phrasing, what he calls 'lyric time' (2000: 99), encourages the identification of musical subjects, and further that it is their embedding within passages of 'progressive time' (or Marx's *Gang*) that leads to such subjects entering the temporal domain of the narrative:

The Classical sonata represented a temporal duality. Within the dance was still to be found the metrical time of the body's movements, active, purposeless and undirectioned, united into lyric periods; the sonata enclosed these within a goal-directed, irreversible chain of cause and effect which creates a past, a memory of past lyric evocations which could be drawn on for reprise and development. (2000: 110)

If the tendency (found in Tovey, Simpson and others) to project narrative agency onto musical events can be understood to stem from this temporal duality, Schenker weaves narrative threads that originate in a much more fantastical understanding of tonality and musical creativity. It is not merely musical subjects that lie at the heart of this understanding, but musical organisms.

### 1.1.2 – Organicism and energetics

The pervasive aesthetic of the organic is deeply important to both Schenker and Nielsen. In an early essay (explaining, somewhat surprisingly, why music cannot in fact be organic), Schenker asserts that the two attributes most important to the concept of organicism are unity and growth (see Pastille 1984: 32), and it is with unity that most scholars associate the Austrian theorist and his disciples. Anne-Marie Reynolds (1998: 191), for example, describes Schenker's conception of the organic as synchronic, contrasting this with Rudolph Reti; Tarasti (2001: 659), in choosing Ernst Kurth as representative of the opposing view, describes Schenker's organicism as paradigmatic. This is understandable given Schenker's overwhelming emphasis on the unifying relationship of everything to the *Ursatz* and the importance he places on parallelisms, but it is not the whole story.

The other type of organicism is diachronic or syntagmatic – concerned with the quality of developmental growth. Although Schenkerian analytical practice often seems to emphasize the paradigmatic, Schenker's own descriptions of parallelisms, for example, actually tend to emphasize the syntagmatic: the growth of musical ideas through time. The following examples are taken from his analysis of the *Eroica* Symphony:

This first upward drive is, so to speak, the initial breath of the movement. Thereafter it continues to be important for the procurement of the content (1996b: 11)  
[the repeated crotchet into the next bar] sows a seed, as if were, which comes to fruition in the rhythmic parallels that now spur on the content (1996b: 12)

This brings us closer to Nielsen's understanding of organicism, when he describes, for example, how in organic contrapuntal writing 'a single, one-part melody can so far contain the germ of polyphonic development that several parts seem of their own accord to grow out of it' (1953: 20)<sup>6</sup> or how organic rhythm 'must develop consequentially and

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<sup>6</sup> *En enkel, eenstemmig Melodi kan i den Grad have Spiren i sig til polyfon Udvikling og Behandling, at flere Stemmer lige som af sig selv træder til og udfra den.* 'Mozart og vor Tid' (1906) reproduced in Fellow 1999: 84.

naturally like the current in a river, snow drifting in the air, or a little feather floating in rhythmical hops right over the chimney' (1953: 44).<sup>7</sup>

There is, however, an important difference between Nielsen and Schenker's descriptions, which can be seen most clearly in the second of each of these pairs of quotes. If Schenker's concept of organic development reflects the divine logic of creation, Nielsen's evokes a natural world that is unpredictable, even capricious. We shall see how important this difference is in later chapters.

There is no need to draw attention to Schenker's well-known views on musical genius, but it is perhaps surprising to find a connection to Nielsen through a shared view of the artwork not only as organic but also as organism. Nielsen writes charmingly of melodies that: 'it's as though I'm not making them myself; they just come into my room like little creatures or birds and ask me to go along with them' (cited in Schousboe 1983: 382),<sup>8</sup> but there is also a faint echo of Schenker's strident elitism in Nielsen's statement that 'so capricious and so cruel music can be to those it has not called' (1953: 32).<sup>9</sup> This ultimately comes from an Idealist conception of music as something that transcends the musician as well as its materials; the artist is 'regarded as a sort of midwife to this immanent life force rather than a maker of things' (Solie 1980: 155).

This aspect of organicism in music closely relates to Nielsen's conception of an 'unbroken musical current', one that David Fanning (2003: 14-15) has equated with Henri Bergson's concepts of *durée* and *élan vital*. Fanning's article makes the point that, although there are no concrete connections between Nielsen and figures such as

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<sup>7</sup> *maa udvikle sig lige saa følgerigtigt og naturligt som Strømmen i Bækken, Snefoget gennem Luften eller den lille Fjer, der i smaa rytmiske Hop sejler helt op over Skorstenen.* 'Musikalske Problemer' (1922) reproduced in Fellow 1999: 264.

<sup>8</sup> *Det er som det ikke er mig der laver dem; men de kommer ligesom smaa Dyr eller Fugle ind i min Stue og beder om at komme med.* Translation by David Fanning.

<sup>9</sup> *saa lunefuld og grusom kan Musiken være mod dem, den ikke hare kaldt paa!* 'Ord, Musik og Programmusik' reproduced in Fellow 1999: 131-2.

Bergson, Boris Asafyev and Ernst Kurth, neither should we ignore obvious affinities. One such affinity is this idea of a unifying force or thread running through music, and whilst the three quotes below – from Nielsen, Kurth and Schenker – are successively more theoretically specific, they all draw on the same basic aesthetic:

Nielsen: I have an idea for a new work, which has no programme but which should express what we understand by the life-urge or life-manifestation ... simply Life and Movement, but varied, very varied, but holding together, and as though always flowing, in one large movement, in a single stream (cited in Fanning 2003: 9)<sup>10</sup>

Kurth: Form is neither the pure streaming of the formation process nor the pure fulfilment of borders, but rather the transition, the active transformation of the former into the latter ... the lively struggle to grasp something flowing by holding onto something firm. (cited in Rothfarb 1991: 30)

Schenker: The phenomenon of form in the foreground can be described ... as an energy transformation – a transformation of forces which flow from the background to the foreground through the structural levels (1979: 162)

This then is the aesthetic backdrop against which the dynamic properties of tonal structures can be investigated, an artistic standpoint that embraces organicism and also energetics – the term proposed by Rudolf Schafke to characterize the emphasis on musical forces found in the work of Schenker, Kurth and August Halm (see Rothfarb 2001: 927). I am not in any way suggesting that these points of aesthetic connection demand the immediate interpretation of *The Inextinguishable* in terms of overarching background linear progressions, but, along with other intriguing parallels, they do provide a further reason to suppose that Schenkerian analysis might have something useful to say about Nielsen's music, and in the spirit of Nielsen's own priorities.

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<sup>10</sup> *og jeg har en Idé til et nyt Arbejde, som intet Program har, men som skal udtrykke det vi forstaar ved Livstrang eller Livstringer ... bare Liv og Bevægelse, dog forskelligt, men i en Sammenhæng, og ligesom bestandigt rindende, i èn stor Sats i èn Strøm.* Torben Schousboe (ed.), *Carl Nielsen: Dagbøger og brevvælsling med Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen*, Copenhagen 1983, 385.

### 1.1.3 – A Schenkerian perspective on tonal music and meaning

The notion that Schenkerian analysis shows how ‘the art of music is much simpler than present-day teachings would have it appear’ might provoke a hollow laugh from some undergraduates. But Schenker’s contention that ‘the fact that the simplicity does not lie on the surface makes it no less simple’ is a reasonable one (1979: xxiii). Although his writings abound in theoretical and practical complexities, the fundamental principles on which Schenkerian analysis is based are genuinely simple and, crucially, are essentially the same at all levels of the musical structure.

Schenkerian analysis relies on two widely accepted properties of tonal music: its hierarchal organization of tonal space and the centripetal organization of its harmonic resources around the tonic. Schenker’s distinctive contribution is his suggestion that not only is tonal music melodically elaborative, but that its linear structures can be explained as elaborations of chords, and, at the deepest level, of a single tonic chord. The epistemological controversies surrounding his theories centre not on these aspects but on the limited range of basic structures that he posits as the basis for all worthwhile tonal music.

Two features represented in Schenker’s *Ursatz* are pervasive influences on this repertoire: the Classical structural emphasis on the dominant; and, as Scott Burnham argues, the ‘perennial conception of the musical work as a one-way process, complete and unequivocally closed, [which] surely finds its *locus classicus* (if not its *locus solus*) in the heroic style [of Beethoven]’ (1995: 90). That Schenker can trace some features of his model backwards and forwards from his early Romantic core repertoire does not necessarily mean that his paradigm is appropriate outside this repertoire; but it is precisely the relevance of these notions of goal-directed motion and tonic-dominant polarity that I wish to explore in Nielsen’s music.

Goal-directed motion recalls also Schenker and Nielsen’s conception of the musical work as an organic entity, interpreted in terms of psychological and other tensions. The

impulse of some of Schenker's early champions to make his work more appealing and less restricted in terms of repertoire by reducing reliance on the *Ursatz* and organic metaphors is understandable, but inappropriate for the present purpose. The abandonment of organicism among theorists, as Robert Snarrenberg has discussed (1994: 45), was in response to an academy that sought to treat the musical work as a scientific object, and this aesthetic is considerably less-well suited to the study of Nielsen symphonies than Schenker's own.

An interest in hermeneutics is common amongst Schenkerian analysts, from the relatively orthodox (e.g. David Beach, John Rothgeb and Carl Schachter), through those who seek to revise and expand (e.g. Charles Smith and David Neumeier), to the many who draw sporadically on Schenkerian methodology whilst attempting to steer clear of its epistemological controversies. But anyone flicking through introductory textbooks on the subject could be forgiven for not realizing that Schenker himself was keenly interested in the signifying potential of the structures he proposed.

Hermeneutic explorations within this highly diverse corpus of analytical work can most easily be divided according to whether they invoke concrete meanings or more abstract narratives. The appeal to 'extramusical' meanings is less common in Schenkerian practice, most often being associated with analysis of songs or programme music, whilst the projection of musical events as a representation of human spiritual or psychological existence can be found, to varying degrees, across the whole literature.

An instance of Schenker himself invoking a specific 'extramusical' meaning can be found in his analysis of Chopin's Berceuse Op. 57, of which he writes 'the [middleground] neighbour-note formation of the theme is of programmatic significance; it comes from the neighbour-note motion f1-gb1-f1 in the accompaniment, which musically illustrates the rocking of a cradle' (1996a: 2). The pictorialism on the surface is projected into the deep structure of the piece by means of a motivic connection across structural levels.

Motivic connection – the paradigmatic attribute of organicism – can become something of an analytical fetish. Forte’s analysis of the *Adagietto* from Mahler’s Fifth Symphony succumbs to this tendency, outlining a plethora of short overlapping motifs that appear, not only inverted and at multiple levels, but also vertically (see Forte 1984: 157). Forte argues that ‘even commonplace musical motions ... acquire a unique structural meaning in each individual art work’ (: 154), and his analysis indeed demonstrates the extent to which the linear patterns at all levels in this piece can be understood to draw on a radically restricted vocabulary. Given that such basic motifs could be found in nearly any tonal piece, it is clear, however, that the significance of any concrete meanings attached to them is questionable.

One could similarly argue that the middleground neighbour-note motions in the Chopin’s Berceuse of Schenker’s example above are too generic to connote such a meaning – do all middleground neighbour notes produce a feeling of rocking? One is perhaps on safer ground in suggesting this sort of vaguely allusive connection in the analysis of song. Carl Schachter, for example, shows how a descending fourth motif at different levels encapsulates one of the main conceits of the first stanza of Schubert’s *Dass sie hier gewesen*:

The perfume – a melodic idea barely perceptible as such, floating in an improbably high register within a tonal context of the utmost ambiguity. The person – the same melodic idea but now with distinct outlines, a definite rhythmic shape, the greatest possible clarity of tonal connection ... only the motivic aspect conveys the *connection* between perfume and person (1983: 67)

To suggest that the motif is both too generic and too concealed to be able to import such meaning is to take too literal a view. The fact that a listener fails to spot an instance of a *leitmotif* in a Wagner opera, for example, does not make it fruitless to draw attention to the connection as an analyst. It is also worth recalling Nielsen’s description of how

music illuminates a text with ‘a continual gliding in and out, up and down, between the words; now away from them, now very close, yet never touching’ (1953: 31).<sup>11</sup>

I am not, however, primarily interested in seeking the sort of narrow extramusical allusions exemplified in the above analyses. Rather I concentrate on meaning arising directly from the musical structures themselves. The whole distinction between intra- and extramusical meaning seems to me to be a suspect one. In describing what a passage of music does (let alone what it means) we unavoidably project onto it metaphors and ideologies that are extramusical in that they are not expressed in (or confined to) the language of music itself; there is no neutral, ‘purely musical’ description of music, as I shall argue in the next section of this chapter.

For Schenker, the unity of a piece of music, as demonstrated in his analyses is itself meaningful in that it has aesthetic, philosophical and even ethical import. Only when the foreground is ‘a single torrent of diminution’ is it comparable with the divinely created world in which ‘man, animal and plant are configurations sprung from the smallest seed’ (Schenker 1996a: 18). Furthermore it is only the genius that ‘rages through the shortest path from the kernel of the *Ursatz* to the ultimate unfolding in the foreground ... creating structural tension’ (ibid.). Unity, whether due to the organic unfolding from the *Ursatz* or subtle parallelisms, is what much Schenkerian analysis still overwhelmingly emphasizes, but there are other more specific ways in Schenker’s own writing in which the musical becomes meaningful.

The way in which music plays with our expectations is a common theme of analysis and criticism, and Schenker’s own writings abound with examples of this approach to musical content. The expectations that he describes reflect the complexity of his analytical models, the following statement – from his analysis of the first movement of Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony – being representative:

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<sup>11</sup> *en bestandig Svæven ud og ind, op og ned mellem Ordene, Snart helt fjernt fra dem og snart tæt ind til dem, dog uden at røre dem.* ‘Ord, Musik og Programmusik’ reproduced in Fellow 1999: 131.

Finally, even the descending fifth-progression in bars 90-1, the third fifth-progression of the movement, remains without any kind of contrapuntal independence having been imparted to the individual notes. Thus, despite the tendency towards expressive and *cantabile* writing conveyed by the repeated notes, there is still an almost programmatic limitation of the bass prolongations at the crucial point. But it is this that moves the argument on. We suspect, indeed we know, that the bass of the descending fifth-progression must finally receive its contrapuntal due, and are therefore all the more curious to know how matters will continue (1996b: 18)

If it seems implausible that many listeners will react in this way, this is not something that would have troubled Schenker. It is part of his aesthetic stance that few are likely to be able to apprehend the full richness of invention contained in those pieces he considered masterworks – Schenker is trying to show how music mirrors the complexity of the ‘human soul in all its metamorphoses and moods’ (1979: xxxiii).

The subject in Schenker’s narrative is the listener, but there is also an implication that the real narrative subject is a purely musical one that we apprehend from without. In the following extract from an analysis of the seventh of Bach’s Twelve Little Preludes (BWV 941), Schenker graphically describes how a musical subject emerges out of the composer’s consciousness:

Somehow, the initial third progression sprang up fully formed in bars 1-3, a creature of flesh and blood that came into being in the deepest recesses of the master’s tonal imagination. Undaunted, as if striding over chords and voices, it moves relentlessly towards its goal. The mysterious implacability of this third-progression is one of the noble hallmarks of Bach’s genius (1994: 60)

Similarly, in an analysis of Mozart’s C-minor Fantasy (K 475), Oswald Jonas discusses how the composer plays with our expectation that a bass descent from the tonic will continue to the dominant:

The [descending] path to the dominant is so strongly rooted in our consciousness that when the bass begins a descent from the fundamental, the maximum opportunity to generate tension by means of expansion is open to the composer. ... [the progression]

is interrupted when it reaches A; the course is changed abruptly to return to B, from which it again descends ... In this way the plan for an entire composition ... grows out of the sense of tonal space, the obligation set up by the composing-out of a fourth-progression.' (Jonas 1982: 73)

Although the emphasis is slightly different in these various commentaries, the basic mode of analysis, from the point of view of hermeneutics, is the same. The communication of meaning from composer to listener is achieved by the creation of a semi-autonomous musical subject onto which is projected various anthropomorphic features: including expectations of 'contrapuntal due'; 'implacability'; and 'obligation'. It is significant that Schenker did not hesitate to describe even his most basic structures in strongly anthropomorphic terms: 'the primal power of this established motion [of the *Ursatz*] must grow and live its own full life: that which is born to life strives to fulfil itself with the power of nature' (Schenker 1979: 25). At best, Schenkerian analysis presents a highly developed narrative model of tonal structures and, at the very least, it cannot be accused of hiding the metaphorical nature of its descriptive procedures.

I shall return to the issue of perceptibility as I unfold the details of my analytical approach, but it is worth making one point at this stage. I have argued that the main strengths of Schenkerian analysis from a hermeneutic point of view are its unashamed anthropomorphic projections and the way in which it models music at all hierarchical levels in the same essentially simple way. But this highlights a potential difficulty: any interpretations offered of foreground structures will theoretically equally apply to similar structures in the middleground and background. Steve Larson offers a practical solution to the problem of hearing large-scale structures by making a distinction between the process of prolongation and the ability to hear it: 'prolongation exists at all structural levels of all tonal pieces but ... structural hearing may not' (1997: 115).

The ability to hear middleground spans in a structural way has been doubted – as I discuss in Chapter Two – but Raymond Monelle points out that in lived time 'the present is as long as it needs to be for the activity we are pursuing (often much longer than the

five seconds psychologists tell us is our limit of conceiving things as a unity)' (2000: 82). In practical terms, although my interpretations are often confined to the relatively shallow middleground, I am confident that deeper structures are different in scale rather than type, and I will not be afraid to speculate about the middleground and background where appropriate.

#### **1.1.4 – Progressive and expanded tonality**

Schenker's dogmatic understanding of music as generated from a single tonic chord raises potential problems for the analysis of those Nielsen symphonies that begin and end in different keys. Although Simpson in the end preferred the term 'emergent tonality' to describe such works, the term 'progressive tonality' (see 1994: 83) – which stems from Dika Newlin's discussion of Mahler (1947) – has proved rather persistent.

The idea that pieces of music can meaningfully be classified according to whether they are concentric or progressive in their overall tonal structure is very problematic, implying, as Christopher Lewis has pointed out (1984: 2), that composers such as Mahler and Nielsen alternate between different tonal languages 'apparently at random'. In fairness to Simpson, what is important to his conception of Nielsen's approach (whatever one calls it) is the way in which a goal key evolves in each piece – the tonal journey creates a unique topography in which keys become desirable or undesirable. They might become unviable because of associations they enter into – for example the 'dangerously blissful' C major in the Fourth Symphony (Simpson 1979: 84) – or they might, like F in the Fifth Symphony, be caught between 'contradictory' keys (A and D) and thus become 'inert and energyless' (: 99).

Daniel Harrison describes a 'fluxive' view of late nineteenth-century tonal space encouraged by Hepokoski and Bailey among others, in which 'keys gain their identity solely according to their place in the musical flow ... we are left to regard keys as the trace of an ineffable process of continual becoming and unfolding' (Harrison 2002: 153). Harrison is arguing for a more Riemannian view of tonal space that extends beyond the

closed circle of equal temperament, but the notion of defining keys according to their place in a journey is broadly similar. Returning to Simpson, the more general idea that musical actors – whether keys, notes or motives – might acquire and transmit values is one that strongly invites semiotic investigation.

I do not wish to pre-empt the extensive discussion in Chapter Three of the impact of non-monotonicity on middleground structure, but it is worth sounding a note of caution about the tendency to explain such structures in terms of intertwined tonics. This recurrent idea, from Graham George's rather crude 'interlocking structures' (1970: 29) to Robert Bailey's more sophisticated 'double-tonic complex' (1985: 121), is problematic. Schenkerian analysis suggests that a key is a network of relationships between pitches that can draw together even highly chromatic musical surfaces. A piece that is genuinely so chromatic or ambiguous that it can only be explained in terms of interlocking middlegrounds begs the question of whether the music is in fact prolongational in any meaningful sense. At the heart of this issue is a crucial methodological choice for any analyst faced with music in which the fundamental tonal principles of centripetal and hierarchical organization are eroded: does one expand the principles of tonality to embrace the changing situation, or measure the extent to which the music is still tonal by the standards of a chosen theoretical model.

Annie Yih's analyses of Debussy (2000) exemplify the first of these choices, showing how the diatonic scale is subject to various transformational processes and thus demonstrating that it remains the 'basic pitch material' – despite the apparently high level of hierarchy-threatening chromaticism. Deborah Stein's work on extended tonality, on the other hand, uses Schenkerian principles as a benchmark for analysing Hugo Wolf's *Lieder*, and Tim Howell has complained that, 'as a result, much of what is exciting and innovative in Wolf's songs tends to be expressed in terms of difficulties and problems when viewed ... from the constraints of a Schenkerian perspective' (Howell 1988: 95). This highlights how important it is to be clear why the non-fulfilment of a theoretical model is important or meaningful in a given situation, otherwise, as Howell

suggests, there is raised ‘a vexed question as to the relative importance of the music and its analysis’ (: 94).

Whether we want to show how a given passage is an extension of or departure from tonal procedures depends on our theoretical and aesthetic standpoint. It is likely that most pieces will submit, at least to some extent, to either approach. Nielsen wrote that ‘we should try at once to get away from keys and yet work convincingly diatonically’ (cited in Swanson 1994: 624).<sup>12</sup> This implies that an integrating analytical approach might be appropriate; one could show that, despite lacking the centripetal force of a tonic, Nielsen’s tonal language is nevertheless homogenous in its hierarchical structures.<sup>13</sup> In the symphonies, however, where harmonic turbulence or stasis is almost invariably crowned by an affirmation of tonic-dominant stability, a different analytical strategy might be more appropriate.<sup>14</sup> I will return to these issues in Chapter Five, where some semiotic tools will help to map out these and other views of tonal deformation.

### **1.1.5 – Analysing the unusual/analysing the ordinary**

The temptation is to presume that the most unusual and innovative features of tonal and harmonic language are those most likely to yield meaning. Recent hermeneutic analysis, particularly of Romantic music, has frequently and knowingly taken precisely this tack. Robert Hatten has warned that while the structuralism of Schenkerian and other formalist theory has focused excessively on coherence and hierarchy, his own approach and that of scholars such as Lawrence Kramer, ‘may lead to an equal if opposite extreme – privileging the idiosyncratic’ (1994: 279). Vera Micznik formulates an important axiom of many modern narrative approaches, as part of her discussion of the differences

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<sup>12</sup> *Vi skulde paa engang se at komme bort fra Tonearterne og alligevel virke diatonisk overbevisende.* Letter to Henrik Knudsen 19 August 1913.

<sup>13</sup> Anne-Marie Reynolds in her analyses of Nielsen’s songs suggests as much: ‘Studying his music, one never doubts that Nielsen was thinking diatonically, but he did so in an unanchored sort of way. He considered tonal context to be a fluctuating phenomenon’ (1998: 28).

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Grimley, for instance, uses the presence of Schenkerian structural levels as ‘an index of harmonic functionality; a measure, in other words, of the extent to which tonal harmonic movement can be located as the primary structural agent’ (1998: 7).

between Beethoven and Mahler: ‘the more the sequence of events and the discourse of the piece contradicts an expected order and makes the listener constantly wonder what unexpected situation will occur next, the more ‘narrative’ the music will be’ (2001: 246). In using Schenkerian analysis to search for musical meaning, I wish to explore both ends of Micznik’s ‘graduated spectrum’ (: 245) – not only unusual sequences of events that highlight the narrativity of music, but also relatively normative tonal structures.

In Chapter Two, I will be concentrating in particular on the possibility of a hermeneutic approach to deeper Schenkerian levels, and again, recent analysis in this area has clearly demonstrated a preoccupation with the unusual. Lawrence Kramer’s analysis of the Prelude to Haydn’s *Creation* (1992) is a good example of this tendency. Kramer inverts the generative course of the Schenkerian model in order to address the perceived problem of a faceless and neutral background. He suggests that understanding the deep structures as generated from the foreground shows how ‘the dynamics between layers ... [can] act both to produce and to transmit qualitative values’ (1992: 6). He interprets, for example, an emerging middleground descent from  $\hat{5}$  as ‘the overcoming of chaos with the coming forth of musical order in what for Haydn would be its quintessential forms: the relationship of dominant to tonic and the primacy of perfect over imperfect consonance’ (: 14).

If Kramer finds meaning in this fifth-progression in relation to an opening that is strikingly lacking in normality, Carl Schachter’s discussion of Schubert’s ‘Ihr Bild’ from *Schwanengesang* (in an article memorably subtitled ‘*das Drama des Ursatzes*’) relies on tensions between a presumed normative model and the actual structure of the music (1999: 300-2). The poet stares at a picture of his beloved to the point of imagining that the canvas has come to life, and Schachter suggests that this illusion is reflected by a suppression of the *Kopftón*. The structural  $\hat{3}$  that one might expect in the home key of B minor appears instead in the parallel major in b. 10. This coincides with the moment in the first stanza where the poet fancies for the first time that his beloved lives in the picture, and this illusory *Kopftón* thus becomes a metaphor for the drama of the poem.

These are extreme examples of a general tendency in Schenkerian analysis to explore tensions between foreground and background, or between ‘unusual’ middleground and background structures and pre-established norms. Richard Cohn has dubbed this paradigm ‘constructive conflict’ (1992: 3), and while he acknowledges that it may be an effective analytical strategy, he warns that any implied attribution to Schenker himself is ill-founded (: 3). Whether or not it is a useful approach, it is surely not the case that deeper structures are only meaningful when they are deformed. The significant potential of normative deep-level structures will be one of the main concerns of Chapter Two, in which it will be seen that relatively common middlegrounds and backgrounds can become pertinent by the way that they are dramatized in the foreground.

## **1.2 – A Schenkerian and semiotic approach to music and meaning**

### **1.2.1 – Exploring musical semiotics**

In his foreword to Monelle’s *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*, Hatten identified in musical semiotics three main phases: the first introduced by Nattiez’s early work; the second represented by a clutch of books published in the nineties reconciling ‘the structuralist with the hermeneutic’ – by Tarasti, David Lidov and Hatten himself; and finally, a ‘third stage, or *staging*, in which semiotic theory confronts post-modernism and emerges as viable, even after relinquishing the hitherto unacknowledged hegemony of its structuralist core’ (Monelle 2000: xi).

Any book that places the confrontation between structuralism and postmodernism centre-stage is in danger of degenerating into epistemological anguish: a text haunted by structuralist ghosts whose ideas still basically appeal but whose authority can no longer be accepted. Monelle’s study avoids this danger largely because he self-consciously abandons the attempt to promote a unified theory or methodology; he presents instead a series of fascinating theoretical and practical encounters that are ‘not necessarily consistent with each other or complementary’ (2000: 13).

A very different (though not necessarily contradictory) ‘staging’ of this confrontation can be found in the recent work of Eero Tarasti. In contrast to Monelle’s postmodern musings, Tarasti is interested in rehabilitating structuralist semiotics within a new paradigm:

I have outlined a model that is based upon the concept of *Dasein* – existence – which constitutes the world in which our “semiotic subject” lives, acts and reacts. In this model, all the operations elucidated by classical semiotics hold true within the limits of the primary *Dasein* ... My model is based on the idea that the subject living in this world glimpses and strives for transcendence, since he or she experiences the world of mere *Dasein* as being insufficient (2000: 18-19)

I shall return to Tarasti’s ‘existential’ semiotics in due course, but Monelle’s book, despite its disavowal of theoretical unity, nevertheless turns on a number of key principles, and the following quotes outline two that are of particular interest:

The notorious difficulty of *segmentation* in music analysis is only to be expected, for segmentation in language ... is based on pertinence, that is, *meaning*. Without a theory of signification, music becomes merely an infinitely ramified continuum, impossible to divide into smaller units. A grasp of signification enables us to find meaningful terms in this continuum and thus to begin the process of analysis (2000: 10-11)

Music moves through its references, whether these are the simple social units of topics or the more fundamental indexicalities of time and authorial voice. Music cannot be translated into language; on the contrary, it chastens language by drawing out its limitlessness. (: 13)

To put it more provocatively, Monelle’s suggestion is that music analysis cannot even properly begin without the notion of musical meaning, which itself stretches beyond the capabilities of language and its associated descriptive and narrative structures. This clearly presents an epistemological challenge for hermeneutics.

The idea that music cannot be analysed without reference to its meaning is in clear and conscious opposition to Nattiez's argument that 'an objective description of the neutral level can always be proposed' (1990: 12). An important part of Nattiez's position is that, having divided signification into 'intrinsic and extrinsic', he reserves 'the term "musical semantics" ... for the exploration of the latter category' (1989: 33). This type of analytical division is familiar from European semiotics in various forms (signifier vs. signified, expression vs. content etc.), and one can find similar dichotomies in many approaches to music, from Wilson Coker's congeneric and extrageneric meaning (1972) to Kofi Agawu's introversive and extroversive semiosis (1991). Gregory Karl is not exaggerating much when he accuses Nattiez (along with Carolyn Abbate and Lawrence Kramer) of regarding musical meaning as 'a product of superfluous metaphor' (1997: 14),<sup>15</sup> and the notion that musical syntax is independent and autonomous (and thus potentially empty of musical meaning) is almost bound to result in this marginalization.

Even Agawu's *Playing with Signs*, in which the author aims 'to provide an account of a piece, in which the domains of expression ... are integrated with those of structure' (1991: 24), implicitly presumes an autonomous musical structure. Agawu uses Schenkerian analysis for introversive semiosis (structure), and Leonard Ratner's topics for extroversive semiosis (expression), explaining that, while 'topics can provide clues to what is being "discussed" ... they do not seem to be able to sustain an independent and self-regulating account of a piece; they point to the expressive domain, but they have no syntax' (1991: 20). The implication is that the domain of musical structure as represented by Schenkerian analysis is 'independent and self-regulating', and that its main signifying purpose is to validate the analysis of otherwise non-structural semantic content.

Agawu's subsequent explorations of the interpenetration of his expressive and structural domains are full of subtle interpretative insights, but his approach is nevertheless part of a wider tendency to bolt semantics onto established modes of music criticism and

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<sup>15</sup> Nattiez uses that exact phrase to describe narrative (1990: 257).

analysis. Both Fred Maus (1991) and Gregory Karl (1997), for example, combine Russian formalist notions of plot with the sort of informal description found in the work of Donald Tovey,<sup>16</sup> and Agawu himself has more recently complained of the ‘new musicology’ that ‘rarely are the perceptual and conceptual foundations of musical analysis openly confronted’ (1997: 302).

The practical problem with separating syntactic and semantic structures in musical analysis is that the semantically empty or neutral description of musical structure is impossible, as Naomi Cumming has pointed out:

The discovery that theoretical systems have hidden metaphorical content in their most conventional terms, acquired in some cases through the transferences of non-musical conceptions of space and motion to the application of these terms in music, must lead the theorist/analyst to eschew holding any dogmatic store about the intrinsic objectivity of these theories (1994: 27)

Even the deliberately mindless mechanism of Nattiez’s early paradigmatic techniques comes with its own baggage of ideology and the potential for subjective decision-making. A semiotic approach that does not bear this in mind is doomed because, as Thomas Sebeok suggests, ‘what a semiotic model depicts is not ‘reality’ as such, but nature as unveiled by our method of questioning’ (1991: 12).

My complaint is, then, that the methodological separation of structure and expression encourages one to take for granted the ‘purely musical’ side of the equation and that this separation is fundamentally un-semiotic; as Herman Parret writes, ‘since semiotics has itself as its object, one cannot imagine a semiotical attitude that excludes epistemological self-reflection’ (1989: xv). This ‘semiotical attitude’ and regard for semantics must permeate the whole analytical process, not be introduced at the end, once musical structure has already been described.

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<sup>16</sup> Explicitly in the case of Maus and implicitly in the case of Karl.

Robert Hatten's discussion of closure in Beethoven is very much closer to this ideal. He suggests that tonal closure is not only syntactic but can also be strategic or dramatic (1987: 197), and, although he makes a distinction between dramatic and syntactic structures, he goes on to argue for 'the importance of what can only be called meaningful syntax, since no other term captures the significance in music of even the lowest levels of note grammar' (1987: 208). Hatten's technical descriptions of the details of syntax are motivated and governed, in other words, by his search for meaning – he does not take their solely musical logic for granted.

In his later full-length book on meaning in Beethoven (1994), Hatten makes this process more explicit, with what he calls the 'structuralist' part of his approach involving 'mapping associations (correlations) of structures and meanings in a manner that reveals their oppositional organization' (Hatten 1994: 2). I shall return to the oppositional nature of this process shortly, but not before confronting the obvious point that mapping meaning onto musical structures is fraught with potential problems.

Deryck Cooke's *The Language of Music* marked the beginning of a revived interest in musical meaning that previous ages had taken more-or-less for granted. His book is pioneering in this sense, but his expectation that there would come a time when 'the language of music is finally deciphered' (1959: 273) always seemed naïve to say the least. Cooke's engagement with the details of tonal structures and what they might signify is admirable, but my difficulty with his approach is precisely in the area that Nattiez finds attractive: 'it seems clear [from Cooke's study] that at the heart of tonal music there exists a stability in the signifier-signified relationship' (1989: 35). The idea that musical signification might be stable encourages the production of the sort of dictionary of musical meanings to which Cooke apparently aspires. Other than on the most simplistic of levels, the sort of semantic stability that would allow for a lexicon of meanings would not be expected in poetry or painting, so why in music?

My own approach, which will become clear during the rest of this and the next chapter, draws on two basic ideas: firstly (and primarily) the oppositional organization of the domains of music and meaning, as mentioned by Hatten above; and secondly, as argued

independently by Candace Brower (2000) and Lawrence Zbikowski (2002),<sup>17</sup> the notion that part of our understanding of music is due to cross-domain mapping, ‘a process through which we structure our understanding of one domain (which is typically unfamiliar or abstract) in terms of another (which is most often familiar and concrete)’ (Zbikowski 2002: 13).<sup>18</sup> Cross-domain mapping is discussed in Chapter Two, so I will not dwell upon it here, but the focus on oppositional structures is an important part of what makes my approach semiotic.

Greimasian semiotics, after Saussure, has at its heart ‘the axiomatic principle that meaning originates from a network of *relations* and that it is constrained by it, or that meaning can be “understood” ... only as a network of dependencies, thus of differences’ (Parret 1989: x-xi). No less than phonetics or semantics, music is describable in terms of relations and differences, and I will explore the ramifications of this over the coming pages. The following quotes exemplify just two ways in which oppositional structures might be important to the description of musical structures in the widest sense:

One of the most basic oppositions in music is between up and down. Another is that between the realization of an implication and its denial, deflection, or deferral ... When arrayed oppositionally, these cultural meanings (or types of expressive states) may be mapped onto structural oppositions that in turn serve to keep them distinct (Hatten 1994: 56)

[A neighbour note] stands in clear oppositional relationship within the paradigms consonance/dissonance and fundamental-structure-continuation/-interruption. The relationships that obtain for a neighbour note are controlled by the way these two states of oppositionality co-function as in second and third species counterpoint’ (Dunsby and Stopford 1981: 52)

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<sup>17</sup> The main sources for this concept, for both Brower and Zbikowski, are Lakoff and Johnson 1980 and Johnson 1987.

<sup>18</sup> John Sloboda (1998: 25) seems to propose a fairly similar idea but, curiously, there is virtually no overlap of citations between Sloboda on the one hand and Brower and Zbikowski on the other.

In describing music in terms of such oppositions, I will not be trying (as Cooke does) to establish a taxonomy of musical meanings, but rather to explore how the play of mapped oppositions may become meaningful. As part of this exploration I will, like Hatten, not employ purely structuralist methodology but also resort to ‘abductive, or hypothetical, “leaps of faith”’ (Hatten 1994: 2); my approach will, in other words, be hermeneutic as well as structuralist.

In terms of Hatten’s various ‘stagings’ of musical semiotics, referred to earlier, this meeting of the structural and the hermeneutic constitutes the second, but what of the third – the confrontation between structuralism and postmodernism? In drawing on Heinrich Schenker’s polemical exposition of the structure of tonal music and A. J. Greimas’s grand theories of signification, I am engaging with exactly the sort of meta-narratives that postmodernism seeks to challenge. And from this perspective one might ask questions both about the confidence with which these two theorists understand the domains of music and meaning and also about the space within their systems for the individual voices of author/composer and reader/listener.

My enquiry into how tonal structures can be meaningful is contextualized and circumscribed, rather than shaped and motivated by such questions. If Monelle’s third staging requires a confrontation, my own study constitutes more of an acknowledgement. Whilst recognizing the importance of the lessons that postmodernism has to offer, it is worth remembering too that postmodernity ‘is itself something of a meta-narrative when it inflates the historical conditions, not only of particular Western nations, but of a social sector within that region, to universal relevance’ (Williams 2001: 119).

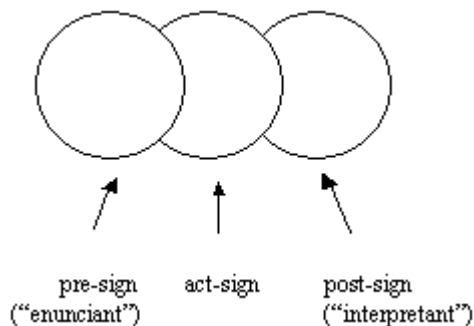
For the purpose of this dissertation, I invoke Tarasti’s concept of ‘existential’ semiotics – an extension and reformulation of his earlier theories – largely in order to understand better the nature of the ‘classical’ semiotics on which I draw so heavily. In this capacity it also perhaps offers a line of defence against the postmodern anxiety about structuralist ideas. Anyone reading Tarasti’s *Existential Semiotics* (2000) and *Signs of Music* (2002)

will see that this nascent phenomenological and philosophical basis for semiotic enquiry has much more to offer and that my own study only engages in a limited way with a theory that proposes many new classifications of signs and semiotic situations. The following brief discussion reflects that level of engagement.

One result of Tarasti's re-orientation of structuralist positions is that semiotic situations are understood in terms of acts. Figure 1 shows how Tarasti's conception of semiotic acts involves three different types of sign, the pre-sign (or enunciant), act-sign and post-sign (or interpretant). He states that 'a semiotic act occurs as the production of an act sign by means of the help of a pre-sign or enunciant/utterant; or the act takes place as the interpretation of the act sign by means of the post-sign or interpretant' (Tarasti 2000: 32)

**Fig. 1 – Tarasti's model of the sign as an act**

(see 2000: 33)



If this seems a little like Nattiez's tripartite model – with the enunciant taking the place of poietic level and the interpretant standing for the aesthetic level – the resemblance is superficial and misleading. Tarasti's model suggests not that the activity of the composer and listener can be related to a stable and neutral level, but that 'the sign itself proves to be a rather ephemeral entity lying between these two "transcendences" [of pre and post signs]' (2000: 32). Structuralist semiotics takes it for granted that the way in which it models the world represents what Tarasti (after Heidegger) calls *Dasein* (: 8), but, according to his existential paradigm, structuralist (and other) models describe an ideal that may or may not be fully realized in a given semiotic situation. Considering the first semiotic act represented on Figure 1, Tarasti suggests that when the pre-sign is brought

into being as an act-sign (becoming a ‘recognizable object of [i.e. within] *Dasein*’ (: 33)), it may be that the transcendental idea represented by the pre-sign is not achieved. In other words, the concretization of the pre-sign as an act-sign may only be approximate. Moving onto the second semiotic act represented on Figure 1, when an act-sign is interpreted with the help of a post-sign the interpretant also represents a transcendental idea.

One could offer a crude analogy with Schenkerian analysis. It may be that unity and coherence on multiple levels are important to a Classical composer in the way that Schenker suggests, but whether this idea of the music (a pre-sign) is concretized into an act-sign, and whether the post-sign presents this same transcendental idea of unity and coherence during the act of interpretation depends on a given semiotic situation and the existential choices of the subjects involved.

In *Signs of Music* (2002), Tarasti discusses how individual situations may can be articulated, not according to linear models, but in terms of Peirce’s categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. Thus a given sign may take shape for a listener in the direct, immediate and unmediated present (Firstness); or the listener might be in a situation of Secondness ‘when we orient ourselves in time and place, when make a decision, or experience a surprise’ (2002: 86); or, finally, it might be that the situation is one of Thirdness where ‘the feeling of continuity and rules of action prevail’ (: 87). Again a crude analogy with Schenker beckons. The perception of the sort of linear coherence and teleological processes that Schenkerian analysis suggests has the distinct quality of Thirdness, and it might be that this phase of engagement with the music is only occasionally, or even never, reached.

In considering these different articulations of musical situations, however, it is vital to understand what sort of listening subject is being discussed. Tarasti has posited a model of the whole musical situation in which the relationships between agents (the acting subject) and patients (the subject being acted upon) within the musical text itself are multiply embedded in relationships between composer/listener and implied

composer/IMPLIED listener (1998: 48). There are, in other words, distinctive differences between discussing a subject within the work (for instance, a theme finds itself in a new context), the actions of an IMPLIED composer (for instance, the composer does something surprising that an IMPLIED listener will presumably recognize as such) and the subjectivity of the actual composer (for instance, Beethoven was considering suicide when he wrote this work). Most discussion of musical structure and meaning, including much of the present study, refers to agent/patient relationships either within the work itself or between an IMPLIED composer and listener. The distinction between IMPLIED and actual is not simply nitpicking, not least because, as Tarasti writes, such IMPLIED interactions are a long way from the ‘real existential situations in which flesh-and-blood composers, performers and listeners live in the social-cultural context of their time’ (2002: 87).

It is in this context that I adopt some of the main principles of Algirdas-Julien Greimas’s semiotics and their adaptation for the purposes of specifically musical semiotics. Three main ideas carry forward from the preceding discussion: firstly, a semiotic attitude should inform all stages of any proposed methodology; secondly, mapping oppositions between musical features and the wider world of meaning offers a way of building semantics into the analytical process; thirdly, it is important to acknowledge that musical subjects, while we may discuss them as if they appeared purely within the musical text itself, are in fact somewhat shadowy and hard to define.

### **1.2.2 – Greimasian semiotics and music analysis**

Algirdas-Julien Greimas is the central and defining figure of what is sometimes called the Paris School of semiotics. Lithuanian by birth he became a French citizen in 1951, building up a large and diverse international research group in various branches of semiotics from his base at the *École pratique des hautes études* in Paris. Although first and foremost a linguist, he developed formal theories about the production of meaning across a wide variety of different sign systems. His concern for the structure of languages, drawing on Saussure and Louis Hjelmslev, is complemented by a keen interest in the comparative study of the myth, following in the footsteps of Vladimir

Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. One of the last significant figures of his generation in French linguistics to have been translated into English, his *Structural Semantics* (1966, translated 1983), the collection of essays *On Meaning* (1970 & 1983, translated 1987) and his dictionary *Semiotics and Language* (1979, translated 1982) have been very influential. The last phase of work, however, culminating in *The Semiotics of Passions* (published in French a year before his death in 1992 and translated in 1993) is considerably less well known.

Greimas states that ‘the world can only be called “human” to the extent that it means something’ (Greimas 1983: 3), and in doing so he places the study of signification at the theoretical heart of the human sciences – from linguistics through sociology to philosophy. Fredric Jameson argues in his foreword to the English translation of *Du Sens*, that Greimas’s work is best understood as a ‘complex dialectic ... between the narrative and the cognitive’ (foreword to Greimas 1987: xiii). Greimas seeks, in other words, to understand the world of meaning through two complementary and inter-related modes of inquiry: the first (narrative) involving the reduction of texts to a series of representative narrative sequences, and the second (cognitive) concerning their interpretation in terms of achronic elementary structures of signification.

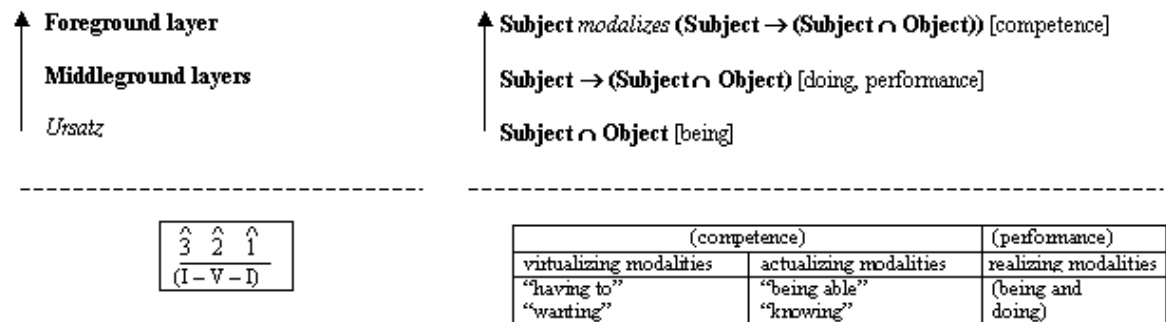
In his *Theory of Musical Semiotics* (1994) Tarasti reformulates Greimas’s ideas considerably, but before introducing my own musical deployment of these concepts, I want to consider some more general similarities and differences between the Schenkerian and Greimasian models. From a Schenkerian point of view, one of the intriguing things about Greimas’s theory is the way in which its various components are linked together ‘along a “trajectory” which goes from the simplest to the most complex, from the abstract to the most concrete’ (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 132). The way in which Greimas suggests that we can understand the generation of texts by means of this trajectory (see Figure 4 below) invites comparison with Schenker’s similarly generative process of *Auskomponierung*. As Richard Littlefield has noted, the Greimasian levels, like the Schenkerian ones, ‘are imbricated [i.e. overlapping in the manner of tiles], not

successive, and hierarchical, each level being generated from a term of the previous level' (2001: 30).

The top half of Figure 2 shows Schenker's generative conception of tonal music alongside the part of Greimas's model which suggests that narratives are generated from the basic state of 'being' (a subject joined with an object) first by being performed, and then by the way in which that performance is coloured by 'modalities' such as desire or obligation. While Schenker, in other words, essentially shows how tonal music is, on multiple levels, the elaboration of a perfect cadence, Greimas's narrative model concerns the notion that discourse is, among other things, an elaboration of conjunctions and disjunctions between subjects and objects. I am not suggesting a close correspondence between the manner of elaboration, but there is nevertheless an interesting relationship on a basic conceptual level, one that will repay the effort of further investigation.

**Fig. 2 – Schenkerian and Greimasian generative models**

(see Schenker 1979 and Greimas 1987: 123-129 & 132)



Moving in the direction of the arrow through the three statements (or utterances), one can see how a junction, or state of being, represents the simplest level – the symbol '∩' in the diagram shows a conjunction between the subject and object – and such a junction is then realized (or performed) by subjects in an act of doing – the transformation is represented by the symbol '→'. These two basic modalities – the 'being' of junction (conjunction or disjunction) and the 'doing' of performance – form the basis of Greimas's semiotics of narrative action. The 'doing' of a particular junction (a narrative utterance) can be elaborated into a modal utterance: it can, in other words, be modalized

by competencies in respect of performing that junction. This involves four further modalities in addition to ‘being’ and ‘doing’, and these are shown in the table below the dotted line.

Two of these modalities, ‘wanting’ and ‘having to’ are virtualizing modalities – they raise the prospect of a particular junction. The other two, ‘being able’ and ‘knowing’, are actualizing modalities – the junction becomes a genuine possibility, even if it has not yet been realized. In the rest of this dissertation, I shall use Greimas’s original French terms to refer to the six modalities listed in Figure 2, partly to highlight and preserve their status as part of a metalanguage and also in order to avoid endless inverted commas. So being and doing are *être* and *faire*; wanting and having-to, *vouloir* and *devoir*; knowing and being-able, *savoir* and *pouvoir*.

Reducing events to narrative utterances that describe the conjunctions and disjunctions between subjects and objects allows Greimas to represent a given text as a series of representative narrative sequences. This narrative aspect of Greimas’s semiotics is complemented, as suggested above, by a cognitive element: the exploration of deep, atemporal structures.

The oppositional relationships underlying a text are mapped onto the ‘semiotic square’, a construct that is used to represent visually the ‘logical articulation of any semantic category’ (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 308).<sup>19</sup> As shown in Figure 3, semiotic squares take an opposition (in this case *être* and *faire* – the being and doing of narrative utterances) and expand it to four positions by incorporating the negations of the original two terms (*non-faire* and *non-être*).<sup>20</sup> These negations come into a relationship of implication or

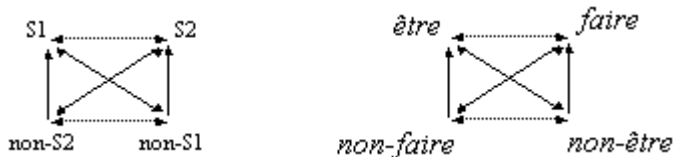
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<sup>19</sup> Networks of oppositional relationships are introduced in *Structural Semantics* (1979: 18 ff.) and later developed in the form of the ‘semiotic square’ in *On Meaning* (1983: 49 ff.)

<sup>20</sup> Although the resemblance to the medieval square of logical oppositions is unmistakable, Greimas notes that the semiotic square ‘deals with the conditions of existence and the production of signification ... In this it is distinguished from logical or mathematical constructions, which are independent, as formulations

‘complementarity’ with the primary terms under which they appear; in other words, *non-faire* implies *être*.<sup>21</sup>

**Fig. 3 – Semiotic square of *être* and *faire***



Like all four scholars who have applied Greimas’s ideas to music in the most detail, my exploration of the hermeneutic potential of Schenker’s understanding of tonality will draw on both the narrative and the cognitive strands of Greimas’s thought. It is striking, however, how, despite their shared starting point, these four have sharply contrasting approaches. One of the most obvious differences is that while Monelle is particularly interested in Greimas’s work on ‘the atomic analysis of meaning on the smallest scale’ (1991: 74), Tarasti (1994), Marta Grabocz (1996 & 1998) and John Ellis (2003) are generally more concerned with Greimas’s larger-scale narrative structures.

It is interesting to compare, for example, Monelle and Grabocz’s approach to semes (the smallest common denominator within a unit of meaning); whilst their vocabulary is very similar, their analytical observations could hardly be more different. Monelle has observed that ‘the constant repetition, varied or otherwise, which forms the basis of musical structure has no counterpart in linguistic syntax or style’ (Monelle 1992: 237),

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of “pure syntax,” from the semantic component. Under these conditions, any hasty identification with the logico-mathematical models can only be hazardous.’ (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 311)

<sup>21</sup> One immediate concern that might be raised at this point is that, if one is interested in the semantic field represented by the semiotic square as a unifying force behind a text, one has to be rigorous about how it is constructed. Paul Ricoeur suggests that this is a tension at the heart of the system because if the square is constructed very strictly ‘all subsequent operations would have to be “predictable and calculable” ... But then nothing would happen. There would be no events ... no surprise. There would be nothing to tell ... [but it is only if these requirements have been met that] we can speak of the “unity of meaning” of the four-term model and of the isotopy of the semantic micro-universe articulated by the constitutive model’ (Ricoeur 1989: 8-9)

and he suggests in an earlier article that ‘the boundary of semantics lies ... much nearer to manifestation than is the case in language’ (1991: 87). When Monelle undertakes semic analysis he therefore concentrates on those aspects of the music that are described by traditional musical categories such as glissandi vs. discrete notes (1991: 76) or chromatic vs. diatonic (1992: 237). Grabocz, on the other hand, has developed an approach based on the organization of the same sort of semes that would be found in a literary text. Her main interest is in how they are structured according to Greimasian principles, and their derivation from the music is unashamedly loose and informal.<sup>22</sup> She identifies, for example, ‘the righteous hero seme’ in a Beethoven piano sonata (1998: 9) or ‘storm’ and ‘macabre’ semes in Liszt (1996: 201).

If I am to attempt to use Greimasian concepts to elucidate Schenkerian insights, Monelle’s engagement with musical detail is far the more attractive of the two approaches; yet it is ultimately Tarasti’s adaptation of Greimas that forms the theoretical foundation of this dissertation. One important reason for this is that Tarasti places particular emphasis on the concept of modality, an aspect of Greimas’s work that seems particularly well suited to an exploration of Schenker but that is not much discussed by either Grabocz or Monelle.

Following Tarasti’s lead, John Ellis (2003) also draws considerably on Greimasian modalities, and he combines this with a focus on Schenkerian structures. Yet it is interesting how the contrasts between our approaches again nearly overwhelm the similarities, despite the common points of origin. Schenkerian analysis fulfils two main roles within Ellis’s analysis of Schumann’s *Kinderszenen*. It firstly assists in dividing the work into three ‘larger narrative units’ (or superisotopies) by classifying the movements in terms of their *Ursatz* forms – the first three, for example, are grouped together as descents from  $\hat{3}$ , whilst the second three ‘extend the tonal space to 8-line *Urlinien*’

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<sup>22</sup> In a footnote, she writes ‘I realize that one could very well propose other adjectives and descriptions of the themes and intonations in question, according to alternate experiences. But I hope that the point of establishing three or four groups of distinct signifiers remains indisputable in the final results of this analysis’ (1998: 9)

(2003: 304). The second main usage of Schenkerian analysis in Ellis's article is to determine the modal content of motifs by putting them in the context of the wider structure. For example:

the first appearance of Motif I [in "Bittendes Kind"] has descending directional power (scale degrees 8 to 7) while the final statement, which comes after the tonicization of V and the *Urlinie* descent to scale degree 5, is now functioning as a prolongation of V, thereby draining the discourse of Will (: 310).

It will become clear that one of the main differences in my own approach is that I attempt to systematize my ascription of modalities to musical features to a greater extent. Although, like Ellis, I wish to avoid 'oppressive formalization' (2003: 318), it is the relative rigour of my methodology that provides material for forays into more speculative territory.

The seeds of my semiotic approach to Schenkerian structure can be found in Tarasti's analysis of Fauré's 'Après un rêve', in which he offers a brief modal interpretation of a descending fifth-progression from  $\hat{5}$  (1994: 202). This progression appears with various harmonizations throughout the song, and Tarasti suggests that the listener will only accept it 'as the definitive solution with the final  $\hat{1}$  (in the original register) accompanied by a tonic chord in root position' (: 202). He uses the modalities of *être* and *paraître* (appearing) to draw a parallel with his analysis of the text in terms of truth (which is *paraître* and *être*) and illusion (which is *paraître* but not *être*).<sup>23</sup> It is from the idea of employing Greimasian modalities to describe a Schenkerian insight that this dissertation develops its principal methodology.

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<sup>23</sup> The four modalities discussed up to this point are concerned with the 'pragmatic competence' of a subject – the 'being-of-the-doing'. The veridictory semiotic square of *paraître* and *être* (modalities pertaining to truth) is concerned with 'cognitive competence' – the 'being-of-the-being' – which empowers a subject 'to bear judgements on the object-utterances of the world' (Greimas 1987: 128). See also the discussion of veridictory modalities in *Semiotics and Language* (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 369).

### 1.2.3 – Generative trajectories and courses

Tarasti’s adaptation of the modalities is part of his much wider musical reconfiguration of Greimas’s theory and in addition draws on the work of, among others, Peirce, Henrik von Wright, Yuri Lotman and Kurth. As with Greimas, the general economy of Tarasti’s theoretical explorations can be explained in terms of a generative trajectory or course that proceeds from the simple and abstract to the complex and concrete. In this dissertation I shall draw both on the Greimasian model and on Tarasti’s considerably altered musical version; it is therefore worth outlining first the main features of the original before moving on to Tarasti’s adaptation.

Although Greimas’s generative trajectory is inspired by the transformational grammars of linguists such as Chomsky, it has a quite different purpose, in that it ‘aims at accounting for all semiotic systems (and not only the semiotics of natural languages) and at constructing models capable of generating discourses (and not only sentences)’ (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 133). This is of course why it has more direct appeal as a means of discussing musical signification, and in the following discussion, I flag up some of the musical possibilities that the rest of this dissertation will go on to develop.

**Fig. 4 – Greimas’s generative trajectory**

(see Greimas & Courtés 1982: 134)

	syntactic component		semantic component
Semiotic and narrative structures	deep level	FUNDAMENTAL SYNTAX	FUNDAMENTAL SEMANTICS
	surface levels	SURFACE NARRATIVE SYNTAX	NARRATIVE SEMANTICS
Discursive structures	DISCOURSIIVE SYNTAX Discoursivization             actorialization       temporalization       spatialization		DISCOURSIIVE SEMANTICS Thematization Figurativization

### 1.2.3.1 – Fundamental syntax and fundamental semantics

The model in Figure 4 is similar to generativist models of language in that it has parallel syntactic and semantic components. The fundamental level of both components can be articulated on the semiotic square: syntax is represented by operations (S1 is negated to become non-S1) and semantics by relationships (S1 and non-S1 are in the relation of contradiction). In terms of semantics, this deep level concerns abstract or conceptual categories that govern the text; it comprises an ‘inventory ... of semic categories which can be used by the subject of enunciation’ (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 276). Categories at this level are not yet in conjunction or disjunction with a narrative subject, they have simply been posited prior to any such relationships being formed; this state of affairs is described in Greimasian semiotics as virtual (see 1982: 371). An example might be Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*: oppositions such as good vs. bad and rich vs. poor are those upon which the tale will draw, but at this hypothetical level of generation, they are abstract categories, unconnected with characters or events.<sup>24</sup> This level of abstraction makes it easy to imagine how purely musical categories might be regarded in the same way. Tension vs. release, coherent vs. incoherent, and (for Schenker) genius vs. commonplace are examples of categories available at the deep level of musical texts, and like *être* vs. *faire* in Figure 3, it is possible to open these oppositions out onto semiotic squares, articulating the semantic fields that might underpin a given musical work. The negation of tension (non-tension), for example, might represent a very different category of musical situation to that of release

The fundamental syntax, at the same deep level as the fundamental semantics on Greimas’s generative trajectory, can also be articulated on a semiotic square. Here, however, the focus is not on the categories themselves so much as the syntactic operations. The fundamental syntax is ‘made up purely of relations and is both conceptual and logical’ but it is important that, unlike the relationships articulated on the semantic level, the operations involved form strings, they become temporal and have what Greimas calls a ‘memorizational’ capacity (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 331).

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<sup>24</sup> The examples from Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* are my own; because it takes the form of a dictionary, *Semiotics and Language* (1982) is sometimes rather short on concrete illustrations.

Greimas's example is that 'denial, for example, is not mere negation, but the negation of previous assertion' (: 331). To return to *A Christmas Carol*, syntactic transformations might include the negation of meanness and the assertion of generosity. As with the deep level semantic component, musical analogies come readily to mind: the negation of (or departure from) a given key through modulation and its consequent re-assertion (through return to the tonic) is the syntactic transformation underlying most Classical sonata form movements.

### **1.2.3.2 – Surface narrative syntax and narrative semantics**

Surface narrative syntax, the next level of the syntactic component of the generative trajectory is where 'actantial' analysis is located, one of the best-known tools of Greimasian semiotics. Greimas divides narrative utterances into actant and predicate (1983: 177), and while the latter is familiar from traditional grammars, 'actant' requires some explanation. Although Greimas considerably develops its usage, the term itself is borrowed from Lucien Tesnière, who defines actants as 'beings or things which in some capacity and in whatsoever manner ... participate in a process' (cited in Manjali 1997). Greimas's refinement of this concept forms a crucial part of his theory of narrative.

The main exposition of Greimas's actantial model as set out in *Structural Semantics* (1983) is coupled with a discussion of Vladimir Propp's study of the folktale (1968). Propp, a Russian Formalist, analysed this body of literature in terms of *dramatis personae* (which roughly correspond to Greimas's actants) and their dramatic functions, eventually establishing an inventory of thirty-one functions and seven 'spheres of action'.<sup>25</sup> Greimas explains how he established his own inventory of actants as follows: first, 'establishment of actors by the description of the functions'; second, 'the reduction of the classifications of actors to actants of the genre' (1983: 201). In other

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<sup>25</sup> One of Propp's functions, for example, is 'one of the members of a family absents himself from home' (1968: 26). Some of his spheres of action, such as helper or hero, are clear predecessors to Greimas's actants, whereas others are more specific to the realm of the folktale, for instance villain or 'sought-for-person and her father' (: 79-80). Like Greimas, he reduces narratives to representative sequences that resemble algebraic strings of functions and spheres of action.

words, individual roles are understood in terms of the functions the characters perform and these roles are then reduced to a smaller number of representative ones.

The actantial model as proposed by Greimas aims beyond Propp’s description of a particular body of literature towards the establishment of a structure relevant to all types of discourse from poetry to law. Within the Russian folktale Propp discovers thirty-one functions that operate within seven spheres of action such as ‘villain,’ ‘hero’ and ‘donor’ (Propp 1975), but Greimas – drawing additionally on the list of dramatic functions in theatrical works proposed by Etienne Souriau (see Greimas 1983: 201) – transforms these into six much more general actantial categories: ‘subject vs. object’, ‘sender vs. receiver,’ (1983: 147) and ‘helper vs. opponent’ (: 205). An important property of the model (which is shown in diagrammatic form in Figure 5), and one it shares with the semiotic square, is that it ‘manipulates the organized contents without becoming identified with them’ (1987: 67). Consequently, more than one actor may represent an actant, and just one actor might be ‘responsible for all of the necessary actants and actantial roles (giving rise to absolute interior dramatization)’ (1987: 112-13). Narratives usually lie somewhere in between these two extremes, with some actantial roles internalized and some externalized; Greimas’s model offers a common grammar for all such situations.

**Fig. 5 – The actantial mythical model**

(adapted from Greimas 1983: 207)



The principal protagonists in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* can be categorized in terms of these actantial roles: Scrooge (the subject) is to be conjoined with ‘generosity’ (the object) and this conjunction is assisted by the ghosts of Christmases past, present and future (the helpers) and hindered by Scrooge’s own proclivity for meanness (the

opponent). The sender within the narrative, the originator of the quest to reform Scrooge, is presumably divine. But Greimas’s model can be extended outside the story itself. A narrative is established as ‘an objectivizing projection, the simulator of a world from which the sender and receiver of a communication are excluded’ (1983: 134) and in this way Dickens’ tale communicates a moral message from its author (a sender outside the text) to his readers (the receivers).

Greimas’s actantial reading of Marxist ideology provides an example of the same model operating completely outside the boundaries of literature, presented in the table reproduced in Figure 6.

**Fig. 6 – Actantial analysis of Marxist ideology**

(see Greimas 1983: 208)

Subject	<i>man</i>
Object	<i>classless society</i>
Sender	<i>history</i>
Receiver	<i>mankind</i>
Opponent	<i>bourgeois class</i>
Helper	<i>working class</i>

It is from the actantial model in Figure 5 that Greimas eventually developed the model of narrative and modal utterances outlined in Figure 2 at the beginning of this section (p. 46 above). As already discussed, the simpler and later model (outlined in Greimas 1987: 105-120) focuses only on the category of subject vs. object, but it is as well to bear the earlier version in mind, because the axes of communication and desire that it entails are implicit in both. The category of subject vs. object appears on the axis of desire and Ronald Schleifer goes so far as to say in his introduction to *Structural Semantics* that, ‘desire creates the space of discourse’ (Greimas 1983: iii). Desire re-appears in fact as one of the four modalities shown in Figure 2 (*vouloir*, along with *pouvoir*, *savoir*, and *devoir*) and we shall see that it can be understood to be inscribed not only in Schenker’s model of tonal music but also in Robert Simpson’s descriptions of Nielsen’s symphonies.

Carolyn Abbate, in an attempt to restrict the description ‘narrative’ only to music that has a clear narrator, complains that:

Music is easily described as a succession of events ... We might well shun any method that enables us to reach the conclusion that every piece at every moment is a narrative (Abbate 1991: 28)

However, Greimas’s actantial model suggests a potential condition for (musical) narrativity other than a discernible narrator, namely the presence of a desiring subject. The location and relevance of such a subject within musical discourse is one of the main lines of inquiry in the present study.

The analyses in the following chapters will initially concentrate on narrative syntax, in particular the modal utterance, represented on Figure 2 as:

Subject *modalizes* (Subject  $\rightarrow$  (Subject  $\cap$  Object))

This sort of modalization is, however, only the syntax through which categories of meaning are communicated and transformed; these categories are located in the parallel *semantic* component of Greimas’s generative trajectory. Whilst semantic categories are found in a virtualized state at the deeper fundamental level discussed above, the level of narrative semantics sees the enunciator of the text hypothetically ‘selecting available values ... and actualizing them by their junction with subjects of the surface narrative syntax’ (1982: 277). In *A Christmas Carol*, for example, generosity is established as a good thing and a subject (Scrooge) is found to be in a state of disjunction from this value. To move to a musical analogy, Nielsen (along with many other post-Romantic symphonists) often establishes diatonicism or tonal stability as desirable values that the work might or might not possess, lose, regain, strive for or even renounce.

### 1.2.3.3 – Discursive syntax and discursive semantics

Discursive syntax is the point of Greimas's generative trajectory at which the narrative structures are inscribed 'within spatio-temporal co-ordinates' and the actants are invested into 'discursive actors' (1982: 330). It is at this level that the miserly subject in *A Christmas Carol* takes the shape of Scrooge (actorialization), and where the location of the story (spatialization) and the to-ing and fro-ing through time (temporalization) are established.

As outlined in footnote 21 above, Paul Ricoeur doubts that, in practice, the relationships between terms on the semiotic square are strict enough to ensure the coherence of the model. He extends this concern to the extent to which the purely logical relationships of the square can be said to generate the anthropomorphic and eventually figurative shape that they assume at the surface and discursive levels (1989: 25). I flag up this epistemological difficulty not because I think it is a fatal flaw – Ricoeur does not suggest that Greimas's model is necessarily invalid as a result (: 27) – but to point out that, if the nature of the model appears to change as the musical generative course progresses to the surface, this is not a problem unique to the present application.

Carolyn Abbate neatly sums up an additional problem for *musical* discursive syntax (although not in a Greimasian context) when she points out that it is very difficult for music to establish a sense of 'pastness'. She represents a musical performance as a 'marking of experienced time that ends without a narrating survivor who could tell the tale in the past tense' (1991: 261).

The parallel component of discursive semantics is the point at which general categories of meaning within the narrative (such as subject or generosity) take thematic or figurative shape: the subject in *A Christmas Carol* takes the form of Scrooge and generosity is represented by something like 'Christmas cheer' (see Greimas & Courtés 1982: 274). In the semantic component of the trajectory we can thus see a virtualized abstract value such as generosity become actualized by being associated with a subject

(on the level of narrative semantics a subject lacks generosity) and then finally realized by being given thematic shape.

As with discursive syntax, it is this final component of the semantic generative trajectory for which it is perhaps hardest to find musical analogues. This is not of course to say that it is not possible to communicate thematic and figurative meaning as part of a musical text, but that it is difficult to show how these emerge out of the purely musical categories to which I have thus far been referring.

We have already seen that Marta Grabocz's solution to this problem is to accord meanings to the musical surface in a relatively informal way and then to explore how they are structured according to Greimas's model. This approach certainly has its merits, but my own is almost the opposite. I am interested in finding musical analogies for the deeper levels of the generative course, and if concrete thematic or figurative meanings emerge at the surface level then I will consider that a bonus. Nicholas Cook's exhortation that the aim of analysing musical meaning 'should not be to translate meaning into words, but rather to attend to the conditions of its emergence' (2001: 190) would not be out of place as an inscription on the title page of this dissertation.

#### **1.2.3.4 – Tarasti's generative course**

Robert Hatten (after Sebastian Shaumgan) criticizes generativism as an exercise in 'devising mechanical rules that convert fictitious linguistic entities into observable linguistic objects' (1990: 154). Although Hatten perhaps has Lerdahl and Jackendoff's attempt to produce a musical version of Chomsky (1983) particularly in mind, this criticism is not without relevance to Greimas. Tarasti has himself pointed out an epistemological contradiction inherent in musical generative courses:

the idea of a surface that is gradually generated from a deep structure is based on hierarchies, and thus on something static and architectonic ... generative models can make explicit the "organic" course of processes of meaning, but at the same time they contain an inorganic and architectonic aspect, which is a strange principle when applied to phenomenal musical experience (2003: 12)

These problems are presumably part of the reason for Tarasti’s unwillingness to be tied too closely to the Greimasian generative trajectory, despite its position at the centre of his own theoretical speculations: ‘I shall use Greimas’s model only as a starting point and source of inspiration, and shall quite freely outline my own model of generation of musical meaning’ (1994: 47). Given this *modus operandi*, it is more fruitful to look at Tarasti’s model (Figure 7) in its own terms rather than to make a painstaking comparison, but it is worth pointing out that the underlying generative processes behind the two models are more similar than the obvious differences might suggest.

**Fig. 7 – Tarasti’s generative course**

(see 1994: 48-9)

<b>Generative Course</b>	<b>Definition (paraphrased from 1994: 48)</b>
<b>Isotopies</b>	Criteria for initial segmentation – the ideas underlying a musical text through which it is possible for it to be understood
<b>Spatiality, temporality, actoriality</b>	Articulation of tonal space, temporal organization, and musical actors (themes and other elements inviting anthropomorphic interpretation)
<b>Modalities</b>	Emerge from the articulations of the previous level. Basic modalities of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ are surmodalised by ‘will’, ‘know’, ‘can’, ‘must’ and ‘believe’.
<b>Phemes/semes; figures</b>	The minimal units of musical signification (phemes and semes), together with modalities, form musical figures

Greimas writes in *Semiotics and Language* that ‘the syntagms joining together at least two semic figures may be considered the minimal context necessary for establishing an isotopy’ (1982: 163) and it is in this sense that Tarasti places isotopies at the beginning of his generative course. For Tarasti, musical narrative (at least in the Classical era) is generated from a tension of some kind between two isotopies, which are defined as the ‘semantic categories whose redundancy ... makes possible the uniform reading of any text’. In his analysis of Beethoven’s Waldstein sonata, for example, the two main isotopies coincide with the first and second thematic areas (1994: 117 & 127). This idea is analogous to Greimas’s deep level, as this sort of relationship might easily be represented on a semiotic square. In placing isotopies at the beginning of his trajectory, Tarasti is also being characteristically pragmatic – the beginning of any musical analysis almost inevitably involves the sort of segmentation that the identification of isotopies implies.

As with Greimas, such relationships only become narrative as the generative course progresses: ‘when the spatial dissonance formed by those isotopies is temporalized ... a relation is transformed into an operation’ (1994: 32). Tensions and oppositions identified as isotopies are narrativized through their articulation in three categories: spatial, temporal and actorial. These are, of course, the same three categories that articulate Greimas’s *final* level of discursive syntax. Their early appearance in Tarasti’s generative course perhaps reflects the immediacy of music, the fact that musical time, for example, ‘has, as its essential quality, the “becoming” ... which no culture can control’ (: 59). At the same time it is also indicative of a deliberate softening that Tarasti brings to musical semiotics. He writes ‘often I have purposely stopped the formalization on some level, because it is assumed that music reveals its true essence better in a “softer”, more philosophical-hermeneutical discourse’ (: 48). Like Greimas, Tarasti is not interested in rigid models that can only describe simplistic situations; his generative course is the result of a dialogue between theory and analytical practice where ‘if the theory has not fit the facts [sic], it has been corrected and changed’ (: xiv).

My Schenkerian orientation inevitably means that, of the three types of articulation that comprise this stage of Tarasti’s generative course, it is the spatial on which I focus particular attention. Tarasti offers various different categories of musical space, including that of inner vs. outer. Outer spatiality is concerned with such relatively concrete parameters as register and the location of musicians on the stage, whereas key relations, for example, would fall within the domain of inner spatiality (1994: 79). Schenkerian analysis tends to concentrate not only on inner spatiality but on what Tarasti would characterize as the ‘fictive’ as opposed to the ‘real’ (: 78). Fictive space concerns the sort of metaphorical understanding of tonal music that this dissertation is primarily concerned with, and these kinetic or energetic explanations lend themselves particularly well to description in terms of the next stage of Tarasti’s generative course, the Greimasian modalities.

Tarasti's treatment of modalities is another example of his comparatively 'soft' and pragmatic approach. In *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* they arise from articulations of space and time and through the establishment of musical actors. This is not a mechanistic process, however, but a rather intuitive one. An example might be in his analysis of Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata, where an actor is described as having a high degree of *pouvoir* due to 'the sudden shift of register that produces a feeling of surprise' (1994: 126). Tarasti has since suggested that modalities might in fact run throughout the entire generative course – that they are fundamental to the way in which music unfolds, its 'becoming'.<sup>26</sup> The table in Figure 8 shows Tarasti's definitions of Greimas's modalities for the purposes of musical analysis. As discussed below, these modalities are understood as 'surmodalizations' of the basic modalities of *être* and *faire* (: 60).

**Fig. 8 – Tarasti's musical adaptation of Greimasian modalities**

(all definitions verbatim from 1994: 49)

<i>vouloir</i>	the so-called kinetic energy of music, the tendency to move towards something, musical direction
<i>savoir</i>	musical information, the cognitive moment of music
<i>pouvoir</i>	the power and efficiency of music, its technical resources, particularly in performance
<i>devoir</i>	the relation of a musical work to stylistic and normative categories

Like all the components of Tarasti's generative course, modality is flexible in that it can operate on almost any scale from a single note to a whole piece, a feature that additionally makes Tarasti's methodology attractive from a Schenkerian point of view. The return of a tonic at a given formal juncture in the same Beethoven sonata, for example, is described as projecting the modality of *devoir être* (1994: 132) – the music is expected to (and in this case does) conform to a formal expectation.

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<sup>26</sup> Private correspondence, 2 June 2003.

The final phase of the Tarastian generative course looks very much like the discursive semantics at the corresponding point in Greimas’s trajectory. It requires the identification of musical figures that recur in a certain corpus, such as struggle and victory in Beethoven sonatas or Sibelius symphonies (: 49). Tarasti suggests that these figures arise out of different configurations of modalities and spatio-temporal-actorial articulations on the previous levels, and Chapter Four of this dissertation will use some of Greimas’s later ideas on the semiotics of passion (1993) to explore this idea in detail.

### 1.2.3.5 – A generative course for tonal meaning

To conclude this discussion of generative courses, I want to return to the table of modalities introduced first in Figure 2 and reproduced in a slightly different in guise Figure 9. This presentation of the Greimasian modalities offers a narrative understanding of the specifically tonal aspect of music, as opposed to Tarasti’s more general formulations.

**Fig. 9 – Table of modalities involved in competence and performance**

(after Greimas and Courtés 1982: 195 and Greimas 1987: 132)

<b>competence</b>	virtualizing	<i>devoir</i>	<i>vouloir</i>
	actualizing	<i>pouvoir</i>	<i>savoir</i>
<b>performance</b>	realizing	<i>faire</i>	<i>être</i>

My use of this metalanguage to describe essentially Schenkerian insights in terms of the six modalities outlined in Figure 9 is described below, so here I simply seek to put this in its theoretical context. Competence and performance (the two main headings in Figure 9) constitute what Greimas calls the ‘pragmatic act’. We shall see in later chapters that modalities such as *paraître* (seeming) and *croire* (believing) can be used to describe how the pragmatic act is judged after the fact, but it is the modalities involved in the description of the act itself that are most immediately relevant to Schenker’s analytical insights into tonal structure.

I have already discussed the changing status of semantic categories through the generative course from virtualized through actualized to realized. In *On Meaning*, Greimas suggests that the same scheme can ‘articulate pragmatic competence as *levels of existence*’ (1987: 132). Schenker himself creates a virtual model of tonal space in which tensions are created and resolved in normative ways, and I shall endeavour to describe the dynamics that this entails, along with his notion of *Tonwille*, in terms of the modalities of *vouloir* and *devoir*.

The process of composing tonal music – from Schenker’s point of view, of setting these models within a compositional context – might be understood in terms of actualization, represented on Figure 9 by the modalities of *pouvoir* and *savoir*. The virtualizing and actualizing modalities that constitute Greimasian competence are presupposed by performance – the modal description in terms of *être* and *faire* of the subject/object junctions themselves. In order to flesh out the ideas outlined in this paragraph, it will be necessary to look at the fundamental question of how musical narratives can be understood in terms of the conjunction of subjects and objects.

#### **1.2.4 – The modal description of Schenkerian tonal space**

To recapitulate the various discussions of narrative and modal utterances, narrative objects are broadly defined to include, for example, the conjunction of a subject and object as an object of desire. The junctions themselves are described in terms of states of being (*être*), while changes from one state to the other are described in terms of acts of doing (*faire*). These basic modalities are ‘surmodalized’ by the further categories of *vouloir*, *savoir*, *pouvoir* and *devoir*, which modify ‘doing’ and ‘being’ with desire, knowledge, ability and obligation.

Directed motion is central to Schenker’s conception of the *Urfinie*:  $\hat{3}$  embodies ‘striving toward a goal’ (1979: 4) and arrival on  $\hat{1}$  means that ‘all tensions in a musical work cease’ (1979: 13). This sort of goal-directed tension is understood to operate right through the Schenkerian generative course, and my suggestion will be that the interplay of these tensions is open to semiotic interpretation. I will allude in later

chapters to some of Schenker's more fantastical descriptions of tonal space, but here I concentrate on the sort of simple narrative arch suggested by an ultimately fulfilled striving towards a goal.

In his *Theory of Musical Semiotics* (1994), Tarasti suggests that the junction between subjects and objects is hard to distinguish in the realm of musical 'being' (*être*) which he equates with consonance:

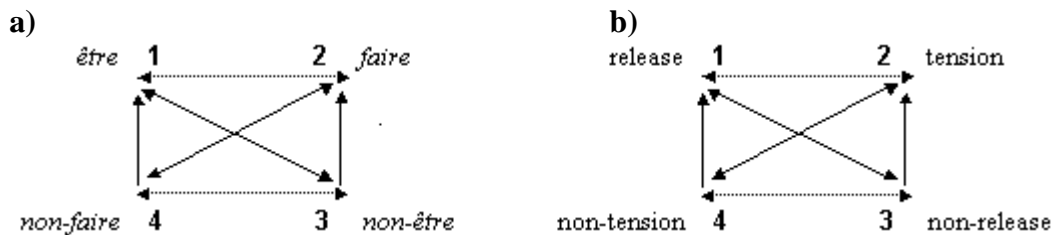
It is rather in dissonance, 'doing' [or *faire*], that we feel music lacking something and that its energy leaves us unsatisfied ... Would it thus not be more appropriate to speak of the way a subject appears in the music's kinetic energy, which from dissonance strives for a state of rest? (1994: 104)

As early as *Harmony*, Schenker suggests that an 'inferior degree of satisfaction' (1954: 217) is offered if the melody finishes on the third or fifth degree constituting an 'imperfect' full close. When he introduces the *Anstieg* or initial ascent to the first note of an *Urlinie*, Schenker stresses that the 'goal tones  $\hat{3}$  and  $\hat{5}$  prevent the effect of a complete close' (1979: 46); only arrival on  $\hat{1}$  – the fundamental note of the tonic – brings tension-releasing closure.  $\hat{3}$  is therefore a relative tension compared to  $\hat{1}$ ; the tension span of the *Urlinie* might even be understood as a move away from relative dissonance in the sense that the movement is from an imperfect consonance to a perfect one.

In Tarasti's terms, a move from relative dissonance to consonance can therefore be described in terms of *être*: a move towards the conjunction between the notional musical subject and its object – the state of rest for which it strives. This sort of background progression is not, however, a fully realized conjunction; it represents only one of many parameters involved in a musical event. If, for Schenker, it inscribes 'striving' into the structure of a work, it could be understood in Greimasian terms as a virtualization: a conjunction (the goal of a tension span) is brought into virtual existence by the desire for such a conjunction. More concisely, *être* is 'surmodalized' by *vouloir*, so the progression projects the modality of *vouloir être*.

In Greimasian semiotics, these sorts of modal descriptions are made with reference to the semiotic square mentioned earlier, which allows analysts both to describe a given situation more precisely and to show how narratives progress from one term of an opposition to another through the negation of the first. Examples of the second strategy can be found in Tarasti (1994: 93) and Grabocz (1998: 18). But my purpose in introducing semiotic squares at this point is to help clarify the semiotic description of tonal tension (dissonance) and resolution (consonance). Figure 10 shows a semiotic square of resolution/tension alongside one of *être/faire*. I have already equated, after Tarasti, the tension of dissonance with *faire*, and the release of consonance with *être*; this idea – the description of tonal forces in terms of Greimas’s modalities – can be clarified and formalized with reference to these two semiotic squares.

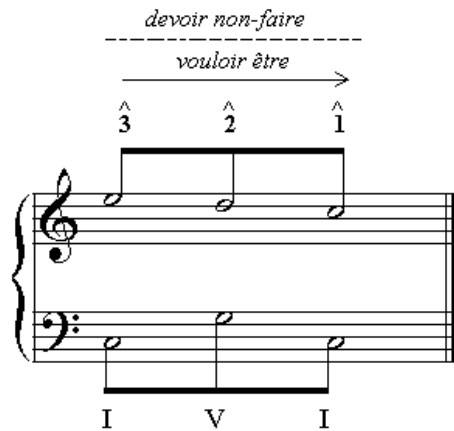
**Fig. 10 – Semiotic squares of *être* and *faire*; release and tension**



These two squares are vital to the semiotic description of Schenkerian progressions at various levels, and an initial example of this sort of description is provided by the way in which Schenker subordinates background structure to the norms of strict counterpoint. There is an obligation to resolve given tensions in particular normative ways, and this can be described in terms of the virtualizing modality of *devoir*. Unlike the *vouloir être* of the *Uralinie*, which, at least for Schenker, strives for the specific resolution of descent to  $\hat{1}$  (shown by the arrow on Figure 11), this *devoir* is not an obligation for movement towards complete consonance (*être*) but for movement away from dissonance (*faire*). This can be expressed by its negation, represented on the semiotic square as *non-faire*. Tonal space in general, and Schenker’s deep-level structures in particular, can thus be said to be governed by *devoir non-faire* – and this more generalized modality is represented on Figure 11 by a dotted line. Figure 11 shows those modalities so far

discussed in relation to the Schenkerian *Ursatz* – we shall add to this modal description in the next chapter.

**Fig. 11 – A partial modal interpretation of the *Ursatz***



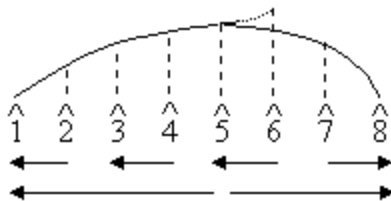
*Devoir* is one general property implicit in tonal music according to a Schenkerian perspective, but even more fundamental is *savoir*. Greimas suggests that the modality of knowing ‘opens up ... the possibility of a cognitive rationalization of the universe of meaning’ (Greimas and Fontanille: 12). As outlined above, Tarasti interprets *savoir* as being concerned with the ‘informational value’ of music, ‘its cognitive moment’ (1994: 90). In this general sense, *savoir* increases in a piece when more (new) information is offered to the listener. As a modalization of *être*, *savoir* ‘signifies that some point of the musical space exists and at the same time offers us new information about the piece’, and Tarasti suggests that an example might be ‘to start a composition with the main theme in its proper register’ (1994: 90). Tarasti is focusing on the listener’s apprehension of formal events, a focus my discussion of *savoir être* changes in two main ways: firstly, by concentrating on tonal structure; and, secondly, by shifting the point of view away from the composer or listener and towards that of a notional narrative subject situated *within* the musical discourse. The most general expression of *savoir être*, therefore, might be the capacity of a musical subject to rationalize material within a tonally closed structure. Closer to the foreground, this capacity might find expression in the ability to assimilate, for example, a high level of chromaticism into a tonally coherent progression.

Given that one of the great strengths of Schenkerian analysis is the recurrence of the same patterns at different levels, it makes sense to attempt more or less the same interpretative strategy in respect of modality. Returning to Figure 11, we might therefore expect descending linear motion from  $\hat{3}$  or  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{1}$  by analogy with the *Urlinie* progressions) to embody the virtualizing modality of *vouloir être*. In order to go beyond this and ascribe surmodalizations of *être* and *faire* with *vouloir* to other basic tonal progressions, we need to consider more fully the tensions and forces that govern tonal space in the middleground and foreground.

Victor Zuckerkandl, one of Schenker's students, has discussed the dynamics of the diatonic scale, and he asserts that the curve shown on Figure 12 is the norm that allows melodic motion to be free, that 'gives it meaning, and thus makes it possible at all' (1969: 99).

**Fig. 12 – Zuckerkandl's model of melodic tension**

(see 1969: 98)



The tension-releasing resolutions of the dissonant degrees of a major scale –  $\hat{2}$ ,  $\hat{4}$ ,  $\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{7}$  – would be recognized as normative by Western classical musicians stretching back some centuries. What is both more interesting and more problematic is Zuckerkandl's characterization of  $\hat{5}$ :

All motion from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{5}$  is motion against the forces in operation ... Tone  $\hat{5}$  points itself in both directions – hence the “knife-edge balance” characteristic of this tone. Beyond  $\hat{5}$  we are already on the way to  $\hat{8}$  (Zuckerkandl 1969: 97).

Locating the apex of tension at  $\hat{5}$  fits well with an orthodox Schenkerian perspective. It suggests that the other main *Ursatz* form – a descent from  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{1}$  – constitutes a graduated release of tension across its span. The most common prolongations of the first note of the *Ursatz* also make sense in Zuckerkandl's model: initial ascents and arpeggiations, whether to  $\hat{3}$  or to  $\hat{5}$ , can be conceptualized as ratcheting up a tension that is then released by the structural descent. If we adopted Zuckerkandl's model, then an ascending progression to  $\hat{3}$  would be represented as motion away from the consonance of  $\hat{1}$  without achieving maximum tension (*vouloir non-être*), while an ascending progression to  $\hat{5}$  would be represented as motion to the tensional highpoint (*vouloir faire*).

This notion of the diatonic scale as a tensional curve with  $\hat{5}$  as its highpoint is not, however, universally shared, and this should at least make us cautious about adopting it wholesale. Kurth, for example, a near contemporary of Schenker, was more interested in the tensional forces within chords, suggesting that 'the repose of the triad is disturbed with the entrance of the third' (Rothfarb: 1988: 8). Kurth's harmonic bias led him to view all major triads as potential dominants, so the instability of the major third consequently strives to resolve upwards by semitone; Zuckerkandl's linear approach rests on the opposite intuition.

A transcription of Zuckerkandl's diagram into modal descriptions of basic tonal progressions would make a distinction, as outlined earlier, between ascending motions from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{3}$  and  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{5}$ , but (partly because his representation of melodic forces is not universally accepted) I will not take it quite so literally. One of several possible objections to such a distinction is that, although  $\hat{5}$  is at the highpoint of Zuckerkandl's tensional curve, it is a perfect consonance against the bass compared to the imperfect consonance of  $\hat{3}$  – the latter might therefore be considered more dissonant and consequently a higher tension. The implicit distinction in Zuckerkandl's diagram is misleadingly precise, so motions to  $\hat{3}$  and  $\hat{5}$  will be described in the same modal terms: as a will to move towards tension – *vouloir faire*.

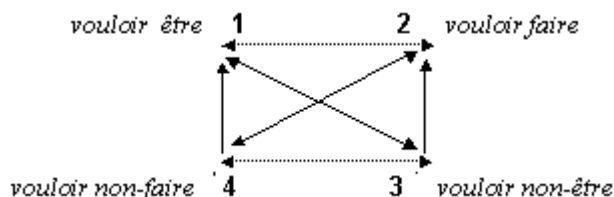
The two main virtualized modalities that I have used to describe melodic motion through tonal space are *vouloir faire* and *vouloir être*, and I conclude this introductory foray into describing tonal progressions in modal terms by exploring this simple opposition by means of the semiotic square. I will be using this tool to open up such musical (and other) oppositions into more complex semantic fields, not only to organize analytical insights but also to suggest new relationships, and even positions, within a semantic field that might not previously have been noticed. It is important to remember, however, as Paul Perron points out in his introduction to *On Meaning*, that the square does not consist of fixed points: '[its] formal characteristics ... are founded on a dynamic topology of places and connections and not upon a static logic of terms' (Greimas 1987: xxix). Unlike Deryck Cooke (1959), I am not trying to establish a catalogue of musical figures and their meanings, but rather to explore the relationships between tonal progressions in different contexts and show that there are some plausible analogies to be drawn with Greimasian narrative structures.

Figure 13 presents *vouloir faire* and *vouloir être* as the 'primitive' opposition on a semiotic square (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 309). This square is the same as that first presented in Figure 10, but with *vouloir* surmodalizing the realizing modalities of *être* and *faire*. As with the original square, it is through the negation of these first two terms that the third and fourth positions are generated. Whilst *vouloir être* describes a will to resolution and *vouloir faire* the contrary situation of a will to tension, their negations (positions three and four) mediate between these two extremes, and in the process open up a wider and more nuanced territory. I will stick with very simple tonal figures in order to demonstrate the types of relationship as clearly as possible, but the same principle can (and will) be applied to complex progressions at multiple levels of a tonal composition.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> There are in fact eight possible modal categories obtainable from the surmodalization of *être* and *faire* by *vouloir* as Greimas sets out in 1987: 130-31, and I will discuss some of these in later chapters. They are obtained by treating *vouloir être/vouloir non-être* and *vouloir faire/vouloir non-faire* as primitives and opening out two separate semiotic squares through the negations of these positions (see Example 18 in Chapter 2).

**Fig. 13 – Semiotic square of *vouloir faire* and *vouloir être***



I have already introduced *vouloir être* and its contrary *vouloir faire* as descriptions of the will to resolution of a descending third progression to  $\hat{1}$  and the will to tension of the reverse progression to  $\hat{3}$ . Different contrapuntal settings, harmonizations and voicings could all have an impact on the modal content of a progression, so to keep things as simple as possible, the figures in the following discussion are imagined as in the foreground and harmonized by a single tonic chord. I am concentrating, in other words on the virtualization of these progressions in the abstract rather than their actualization in compositional settings.

The fourth position on any semiotic square not only contradicts the term of which it is a negation (position two) but is also in a relationship of implication or complementarity with position one (see Greimas and Courtés: 1982: 309). This can be demonstrated by imagining a semiotic square of black vs. white. The position of non-white negates white and includes the possibility of black and in this sense mediates between the two. One would therefore expect a figure described as *vouloir non-faire* on Figure 13 to be in some way contradictory to the dynamics of the ascending third to  $\hat{3}$  (*vouloir faire*) and at the same time to imply a similar dynamic to a descent to  $\hat{1}$  (*vouloir être*).

One progression that could be described as *vouloir non-faire* in this way might be an appoggiatura descending onto either  $\hat{5}$  or  $\hat{3}$ . In both cases, the appoggiatura ( $\hat{6}$  or  $\hat{4}$ ) constitutes a move away from the tension of a dissonant note. This is contrary to the *vouloir faire* (seeking for tension) of an ascent to  $\hat{3}$ , but at the same time it implies the *vouloir être* (seeking resolution) of a descent to  $\hat{1}$  without achieving it to the same extent. An escape note could occupy position three (*vouloir non-être*) on the semiotic

square, which also mediates between the two primitive terms but this time by negating position one (*vouloir être*). An ascending escape note from  $\hat{3}$ , for example, seeks tension (in a contradiction of *vouloir être*) but achieves it only temporarily – implying without actually being the equivalent of *vouloir faire*.

This series of negations and implications, as shown on the semiotic square, exposes the relative nature of meaning; the implication is that a release of musical tension can only be understood as part of a wider network of relationships. Music theory too has come to recognize that there is no such thing, for example, as inherent musical stability. Steve Larson states that ‘to hear a note as unstable also means to hear it as embellishing a more stable pitch ... at a more remote level of pitch structure’ (Larson 1997: 112). Harmonic context is of course implicit in Zuckerkandl’s diagram of musical tension (Figure 12), but Larson is not simply being pedantic. He describes, for example, the situation when a dissonant passing note just below the surface forms a seventh against the bass; it is common for such a passing note to be decorated by an upper neighbour note that – although a consonant octave with the bass – is nevertheless contextually unstable in relation to the middleground passing note (1997: 107).

Larson’s argument that instability is a product of prolongational context leads him to suggest that, because the passage in Example 1 is a prolongation of the stemmed pair crotchets (c2 to b1), the  $\hat{2}$  and  $\hat{1}$  in the first full bar are less stable than the  $\hat{3}$  that they embellish. This is reflected also in the rhythm and also in the fact that the  $\hat{2}$  in b. 8 is an unsupported dissonance.

**Ex. 1 – Schubert, ‘Am Feierabend’ from *Die schöne Müllerin*, bb. 7-9**

(see Larson 1997: 103)

Larson's reading appears to conflict with the modality of *vouloir être* (striving for release of tension) that I have already suggested for the same progression from  $\hat{3}$  to  $\hat{1}$  in the *Ursatz*, and this provides a timely reminder that *vouloir* is a only virtual modality. As suggested in the discussion of Figure 9 the conjunctions and disjunctions represented by *être* and *faire* and virtualized by the modalities of *vouloir* and *devoir* may or may not be actualized by the further modalities of *pouvoir* and *savoir*. A melodic descent to  $\hat{1}$  will always raise the *possibility* of consonant, tension-releasing closure (*être*), but in this case, as in many others, this is denied by the harmonic context. I will later interpret this type of situation in terms of *pouvoir*: although the musical subject projects the virtualizing modality of *vouloir être* (a conjunction between subject and object in Tarastian terms), it is not able to actualize that conjunction (*non-pouvoir être*).

This is where the meeting of Schenkerian and Greimasian ideas starts to become interesting; the attempt to formulate a modal description of musical tensions soon encounters a wealth of productive complications. My starting point is predicated, however, on the very simple assertion that the basic tensions and resolutions of tonal music are at least potentially narrative, a position that Schenker explicitly places at the heart of his own theorizing:

The goal [of the *Urlinie*] and the course to the goal are primary ... In the art of music, as in life, motion towards the goal encounters obstacles, reversals, disappointments [etc.] ... Thus we hear in the middleground and foreground an almost dramatic course of events (1979: 5).

From the initial idea that the closure of the descending *Urlinie* can be described in terms of Greimasian conjunction, my dissertation represents an expansion as I embrace the ‘progressive’ tonal structures of Nielsen’s First Symphony, the more concrete meaning of *The Four Temperaments*, and the heightened expressive tensions of *The Inextinguishable*. This expansion also entailed a retreat from certainties that crumbled as I explored – interpreting Schenkerian structures turned out to be more complex and uncertain than I first imagined.

Rather than abandoning my Schenkerian foundations, however, I have tried to find within them the sort of ‘simple patterns and modest wisdoms’ that Monelle suggests should be characteristic of postmodern thought (2000: 228). But, as Dunsby has written, ‘it would be wasteful if the credibility gained for theorizing in the last few decades were to be lost in another post-Romantic onslaught in the name of pan-cultural freedom and the freedom of individual experience’ (1994: 85). Admitting that structuralist theories of all kinds are culturally loaded and open to many difficult questions need not deter explorations of structure. However Schenker’s theories emerge from their confrontation with hermeneutic exploration and postmodern awareness, I take inspiration from Carl Schachter’s impassioned defence of close analytical work:

There is a gulf ... between musicians who find notes and the sounds they represent worthy objects of close study, and those who do not. Certainly there is more to music than structure, and that something more is also worthy of close study. But to deny the relevance of structure to the intellectual aspects of a composition or to its cultural context is ultimately to diminish one’s conception of music (Schachter 1994: 71).