Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale

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Formenlehre in *Der freie Satz*: A Transformational Theory

Abstract

In *Der freie Satz*, Schenker stresses the innovational character of his description of forms. Yet his *Formenlehre* does not appear so different from more traditional ones. My claim is that the novelty resides in Schenker's description of the growth of forms through the levels of prolongation, in a truly transformational process. The forms in the foreground are not different from those of more traditional descriptions. Schenker however does not describe them as mere successions of formal parts, but as the result of a progressive transformation through the levels, from their utter unity in the background to their diversity in the foreground. Such a description is analogous to the later transformational theory of Noam Chomsky, which it prefigures, and is a striking expression of Schenker's theory as a whole.

In *Der freie Satz* (§ 306) Schenker claims that «all forms […] have their origin in, and derive from, the background»; this, he adds, «is the innovative aspect of my explanation of forms».[1] That this aspect is indeed innovative cannot be doubted: it is the very reason why Schenker's theory of forms still deserves our

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1. The word "transformational" in the subtitle of this article may lead to misunderstanding with English-speaking readers more familiar with David Lewin's usage than with Chomsky's. The obvious alternative would have been the word "generative", which however would have suggested a closer connection with the theory of Lerdahl and Jackendoff [1983] – a connection I am reluctant to make for reasons that will appear in the text (see also note 7). Lewin alludes to the point at stake here when, after stressing that his theory is only loosely inspired by Schenker, he writes: «My large-scale networks […] are not 'Ur' structures. They do not generate lower-level structure in a Chomskian sense; they do not synthetize the dialectic progressions of lower-level processes in an ultimate Hegelian *Einheit*» [Lewin 2007, XIII]. The main difference between Schenker's and Lewin's transformational theories is that Schenker describes transformations through the structural levels, from background to foreground, while Lewin discusses transformations in the temporal unfolding of music. This difference emerges in the shift of meaning from Schenker's use of the German *Prolongation* to the use of "prolongation" in English-speaking Schenkerism further discussed below. A closer examination of the matter, which I will have to leave for another occasion, would probably reveal that Schenker's and Lewin's transformations are not as remote from each other as they might seem at first sight.

attention. What must be questioned, however, is whether Schenker's somewhat formidable claim can be sustained and whether forms truly have their origin in the background. But did Schenker really claim that? The excellence of Oster's translation cannot be doubted, but at times it suffers from over-interpretation, from a projection of the translator's own conceptions upon those of Schenker. Recent Schenkerian exegesis shows how careful one has to be when reading Schenker's convoluted German.[2]

Let us consider what Schenker exactly claimed. I begin with § 306:[3]

Oster's translation	Schenker	A more literal translation
All forms appear in the ultimate foreground; but all of them have their origin in, and derive from, the background. This is the innovational aspect of my explanation of form.	*Das* Neue *in der nachfolgenden* Darstellung der Formen *liegt in der Ableitung aller Formen als eines äußersten Vordergrundes von dem Hinter- und Mittelgrund.*	What is *new* in the following *description of forms* resides in the derivation of all forms as an outermost foreground from the background and the middleground.

Oster's translation may seem superficially correct, but it is problematic in that, while Schenker underlines the novel aspect of the *description of the forms* (stressing *Darstellung der Formen* with *Sperrdruck*) as an operation of *derivation* (*Ableitung*), Oster stresses the origin of the forms themselves. Oster's translation makes use of the verb "derive" as intransitive, but *ableiten* (*Ableitung*) is transitive. Oster says that forms «derive», as this were an essential property of the forms themselves, while Schenker probably means that they "are derived", making it clear that this is a matter of description – today we would say a matter of analysis. Above all, Oster says that forms «have their origin», which goes beyond the meaning of *Ableitung* and is nowhere found in Schenker's text. And, because of this mention of the origin, which he wants to situate in the background, Oster is compelled to leave the middleground out. The two statements could be summarised as follows: «forms are derived [in their description] from the background and middleground» (Schenker);[4] «forms have their origin in the background» (Oster).[5]

2. «Most English-speaking Schenkerians who also have a working knowledge of German will probably admit that Schenker's prose is difficult to translate» [Drabkin et al. 1994, XIII].
3. My quotations from Schenker's *Der freie Satz* are taken from the first edition [1935]. Oster's translations are from *Free Composition* [Schenker 1979]. My own literal translations are not meant so much to make good English as to help reading Schenker's German. Words in spaced type (*Sperrdruck*) appear in roman in the original and in italic in the translation.
4. Schenker repeats this at the end of § 306: «Precisely from the fact that I derive the forms from the background and middleground, I gain the advantage of brevity in their description» (*Gerade daraus, daß ich die Formen aus dem Hinter- und Mittelgrunde ableite, ziehe ich für ihre Darstellung den Vorteil der Kürze*). He does not say that "forms derive", but that *he* derives them.
5. Eric Laufer [1981, 162] goes further, rewording Oster's phrase in the singular: «form derives from the background», as if it were the formal principle itself, rather than the individual forms, that were

The matter of the generation of forms had already been dealt with in § 301. Oster's translation conveys the idea that voice-leading phenomena are "form-generative"; but, once again, this is not exactly what Schenker says:

Oster's translation	Schenker	A more literal translation
In the music of the early contrapuntal epoch, […] the basic voice-leading events […] had not yet come to fruition, like flowers in bud. Who would have suspected, at that time, that these phenomena, through the process of diminution, were to become form-generative and would give rise to entire sections and large forms!	*In der vertikal-kontra-punktischen Epoche, […] lagen die Stimmführungserscheinungen […] noch knospenhaft da – wer hätte damals geahnt, daß sie je formenträchtig werden und durch Diminuierung ganze Formteile und große Formen erstehen lassen können!*	In the vertical-contrapuntal epoch, […] the manifestations of voice leading […] remained in bud. Who would then have suspected that they were gradually to become bearers of forms and that, through the process of diminution, they could let entire form sections and large forms arise!

The translation of *formenträchtig* as «form-generative» is problematic – the German word, strictly speaking, means "pregnant with form", "form-bearing". There are also more subtle nuances: Schenker distinguishes two distinct facts: the first, that "manifestations of voice leading become bearers of forms"; and the second, that they "allow forms to arise through diminutions". Oster, on the other hand, somehow conflates these two, saying that diminutions make the voice-leading events both «become form-generative» and «give rise to […] forms». I understand Schenker's statement as saying that (1) the manifestations of voice leading contain a potentiality, a possibility of forms, and that (2) they will let forms arise (from this latent possibility) through the process of diminution. Oster, on the other hand, claims that the manifestations of voice leading become "form-generative" through the process of diminution.

Charles Smith, who wrote the most thorough study of Schenker's *Formenlehre*, quotes Jonas' translation of § 301 and, like Jonas, stresses the "form-generating" power of the basic voice-leading events. He writes: «In other words, form

concerned. Oster's translation is quoted also by Nicholas Cook [2007, 285]. Cook apparently believes that to Schenker forms exist in themselves but as «epiphenomena, simply the outcomes of deeper processes, the projection of background and middleground on the foreground: you cannot theorise them in their own right». At a most abstract level, Cook appears to believe that Schenker's position may be considered idealist: forms, for him, can be viewed from different angles or at different stages of "projection on the foreground", but cannot be fully theorised. Schenker's conception, however, appears to me more clearly nominalist: forms exist mainly in their descriptions. His new *Formenlehre* does not aim at proposing novel forms, but only a novel way of describing them – and as such he does theorise them, as he actually claims (see the quotation from § 306 in note 6 below). Such abstract considerations, however, go beyond my present purposes. In the long footnote in *Free Composition* [Schenker 1979, 139], Oster mentions the middleground when he writes that in § 306 Schenker shows «how the forms, as they appear in the foreground, derive from background and middleground», though neglecting to specify, on this occasion, that they "have their origin" there, as he had done in the translation of § 306.

finds its origins in the harmonic-contrapuntal prolongations of a single coherent background shape – as indeed does every aspect of a tonal piece», and adds – quoting Neumeyer and Tepping [1992, 102] – that this concept of generative form is intended to produce «a uniquely organic, consequential form» [Smith 1996, 200]. Yet Smith does not draw all the consequences of his statement. Later in his article he keeps discussing formal categories: these, he writes, can be deduced from different types of «fundamental structures» that justify different «sectionalisations» of the form [*ibid.*, 201].[6] One of the main features of many of the "fundamental structures" illustrated, however, is that they are interrupted: Smith overlooks the fact that interruption, in Schenker's theory, is a deep-middleground and not a background feature. This may seem an unnecessary distinction, but it shows that formal "sectionalisation" arises only as the result of a transformation of the background at a later level. In other words, interruption is a first step of differentiation in a process of form generation that is by essence transformational.

Whether Oster's translation of § 301 is acceptable depends on what he meant by "form-generative". Certainly, forms cannot originate in the background – all the more so because all Schenkerian backgrounds are the same. Diminutions, which by nature belong to later levels, can "let entire form sections and large forms arise", but in a manner that remains to be clarified. What I intend to show in this article is that the idea that the background *generates* form(s) can only rest on a wrong conception of what a transformational theory is. I will indicate how Schenker's theory of form may be considered to anticipate on the generative theory of Noam Chomsky and I will show that its novelty does not reside in the forms themselves, but in the description of their generation as the result of transformations. I will conclude that transformation is not only "the novel aspect" of Schenker's *Formenlehre*, but also the essence of his theory considered as a whole.

What is a transformational theory? Certainly it is not a theory meant to *generate* all phrases of a language, nor all compositions or forms of a musical system; it is a theory that reveals rules (it is a *grammar*) of the production of linguistic phrases or musical statements. It is a theory that expresses the idea that, behind the processes by which specific utterances of language or music are produced, there exists a limited set of rules that can transform a deep structure in an individual utterance.

6.   Smith further argues that in Schenker the meaning of formal "part" is not clear. There is no a priori reason, however, to believe that Schenker had a different conception of formal parts than his contemporaries. Schenker's analyses in *Der Tonwille* and in *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik* remain conventional in their description of musical forms; and despite having announced at least twice a forthcoming «Essay of a new theory of form» (*Entwurf einer neuen Formenlehre*) [Schenker 1912, vii; 1922, xvi], he did not really come to it before *Der freie Satz*. At the end of § 306 he writes: «However short I make it, I consider myself happy to be able to offer, at least in this form, the 'Essay of a new theory of form' that I promised for decades». Nothing in all this indicates that the forms described in Schenker's new theory would be different from the traditional ones: it is their theorisation that is new, not the forms themselves.

A transformational, generative theory does not *generate* utterances, it merely explains how they are generated, by an «infinite use of finite means» [Humboldt 1836, 106; see Chomsky, 1965, 8].[7] One way of understanding this generation is to conceive the hypothesis of an abstract deep structure, an *Ursatz*, from which the transformational rules can produce concrete individual surface manifestations.

Schenker was utterly aware of the transformational character (in the most general meaning of the term) of his theory of form – and of his theory at large, as the continuation of § 301 clarifies:[8]

Schenker	Rothgeb's translation, slightly modified
Das Ereignis der Form im Vordergrund läßt sich geradezu physisch-mechanisch als eine Kraftverwandlung ansprechen, als eine Verwandlung der vom Hintergrund zum Vordergrund durch die Schichten zuströmenden Kräfte (s. S. 19).	The occurrence of form in the foreground can be explained almost physically-mechanically as an energy transformation, as a transformation of the forces that flow from background to foreground through the levels.

The reference to page 19 in the German text must refer to this passage:[9]

7. As hinted to in note 1 above, transformations may also be considered to apply to elements other than a deep structure, mainly to evolutions through the temporal unfolding of the utterance. The question remains whether the transformed element, in such a case, can be considered to somehow represent a "fundamental structure", a *Grundgestalt*, or the like. It must be added that a transformational theory needs not necessarily be a theory of musical competence or cognition. The fact that Chomsky later developed his own theory as a cognitive theory, and that Lerdahl and Jackendoff [1983] followed him on this point, encouraged the idea that a theory can be defined as "transformational" only if grounded in psychology or cognition. The parallelism between Schenker's and Chomsky's theories is rejected precisely on this ground (see, for instance, Sloboda 1986, 11 ff.). As David Lightfood explains in his Introduction to Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* [2002, vi], the theory at first «contains nothing on cognitive representations». A transformational grammar describes complex grammatical structures as transformations of simpler ones. The fact that these transformations may model cognitive processes is an important but secondary feature. Cognitive processes are not without importance in Schenker (see Snarrenberg 1997 and Temperley 2011) but they do not come to the fore in the presentation of his *Formenlehre* in *Der freie Satz*. Moreover, Chomsky presented his generative theory as a formal theory, which also is not a necessary condition for a transformational theory in general. Lerdahl [2009, 187-188] recognises the transformational character of Schenker's theory, but explains that he cannot retain it as a model for the Generative Theory of Tonal Music for many reasons: the arbitrariness of the *Ursatz* and its non-rhythmic character, the inapplicability of Schenker's theory to music of other times and cultures, its lack of formalism and, above all, the fact that «it was not clear how generating a piece could reveal much about mental structures and their principles of organization». On Schenkerian theory as a generative theory, see also Meeùs [1993, 80-85].
8. This text, although present in the second edition of *Der freie Satz* [Schenker 1956], where the reference to p. 19 is replaced by a reference to § 83, is omitted from Oster's translation. It appears in *Free Composition* as Appendix 4, text P (with the reference to § 83 as in Schenker 1956).
9. The second paragraph is omitted from Oster's translation and published as Appendix F by Rothgeb [Schenker 1979, 5-6 and Appendix 4, text F].

Schenker	Oster's and Rothgeb's translations, modified
Die Gesetze der Stimmführung, *organisch verankert, bleiben in Hinter-, Mittel- und Vordergrund immer dieselben, auch wenn sie Verwandlungen erfahren. In ihnen drückt sich das* semper idem sed non eodem modo *aus* […].	The laws of *voice-leading*, organically anchored, remain always the same in background, middleground and foreground, even when they undergo transformations. In them, the *semper idem sed non eodem modo* expresses itself […].
Wie das Leben eine ununterbrochene Energie-Verwandlung ist, ebenso stellen Stimmführungsschichten eine Energie-Verwandlung des Lebens vor, das im Ursatz seinen Ursprung hat.	Much as life is an uninterrupted transformation of energy, so the levels of voice-leading present a transformation of life energy that has its origin in the *Ursatz*.

Schenker's list of forms, even as late as in *Der freie Satz*, is not in itself essentially different from more traditional ones: it is certainly not in this list that one can find the originality of his *Formenlehre*. What is new in his description is precisely what he himself claimed: that the derivation of forms is deduced from the background and the middleground. In referring all forms to the utter unity of the background, in presenting them not as concatenations of more or less independent parts but as the result of an organic, progressive, transformational growth through the levels of prolongation, Schenker is able to provide a functional description of form, in which each part ensures its own dynamic function within a unified whole. He writes (§ 308):

Oster's translation	Schenker	A more literal translation
[…] the fundamental significance of the particular prolongation is always of paramount importance; at the outset, the prolongation assigns to each part its task with great exactness.	[…] über alles erhebt sich die grundlegende Bedeutung der Prolongation, die jedem einzelnen Teil seine Aufgabe von vornherein auf das bestimmteste zuweist.	[…] above everything stands the fundamental significance of prolongation, which from the outset assigns to each individual part its function with utmost certainty.

A word is called for at this point about the meaning of the German word *Prolongation*,[10] by which Schenker clearly refers to the passing from one level to the next: he describes the levels as *Prolongationsschichten* ("levels of prolongation"). His first usage of the term is in *Harmonielehre*, when he speaks of «the original and inalienable meaning of this or that rule of voice-leading in strict writing; and how the prolongation of such rule presents itself in free composition» [Schenker 1906, 228].[11] The term is ubiquitous in his later publications, but is not explicitly put in

10.   *Prolongation* is somewhat uncommon in German and may originate in legal vocabulary. Adele T. Katz [1935, 315] appears responsible for the shift in the meaning of the English "prolongation", which she defines as «the extension of the simple form of Horizontalization [the arpeggiation] by filling in the Space».

11.   E. Mann Borgese, the translator of Schenker [1954, 177], realised the ambiguity of the word *Prolongation* and felt compelled to add «the prolongation *or extension* of such rule» (my emphasis).

relation with his *Formenlehre* before *Der freie Satz.* It is in the sense of passing from one level to the next that it is used in § 308: the «fundamental meaning of the prolongation» is the meaning of the process by which one passes from background to middleground and from middleground to foreground, the transformation that gives rise to the form. What is usually called "prolongation" in Schenkerian English, on the other hand, is the inscription in time of an element, usually a harmonic degree. A process which Schenker calls *Auskomponierung* ("elaboration").[12] When Oster mentions the "particular prolongation" in the text above (nothing in Schenker's German suggests a "particular" prolongation), he probably refers to the American meaning of the word. But his translation indirectly conveys the idea that each part of the form may belong to, or consist in, a "particular elaboration", and that the form itself may result from a concatenation of such elaborations, while Schenker means that the global transformations of the work assign to each part its particular function within an organic whole.

Schenker's indications on the origin and growth of forms must be understood in this transformational context: forms have their origin in the transformations, and the extent to which the utter unity of the background will be modified in the process cannot be predicted before the form somehow freezes at the surface. For instance, when he writes as follows (§ 307):

Oster's translation	Schenker	A more literal translation
The undivided progression of the fundamental line generates undivided form.	*Der ungeteilte Ablauf des Urlinie-Zuges wird zur* ungeteilten Form.	The undivided development of the *Urlinie* results in (*wird zur*) *undivided form.*

he cannot mean that the "undivided progression of the fundamental line" is that of the background, for the *Urlinie* there *always* is undivided. Only if the *Urlinie* remains undivided through all the subsequent prolongation levels, it may result in an undivided form – *Ablauf* probably refers here to the process of transformations from background to foreground, not to a linear progression in time of the *Urlinie* itself at the foreground level.

Schenker further explains that repetitions of the *Urlinie* do not mean division and do not affect the undivided form. Nevertheless, he adds (§ 310):

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12.   In *Free Composition*, the English "prolongation" is more than once used to translate *Auskomponierung* (and "prolonged" for *auskomponiert*): see, e.g., § 32, 165, 177, 206, 227, 247, 248, 249, 297, 311, 313, 320, etc. Differently, Oster translates *Auskomponierung* as "composing out", while others use "compositional elaboration" or, short, "elaboration".

Oster's translation	Schenker	A more literal translation
Occasionally the bass arpeggiation I–V–I alone suffices to establish a ternary form, even when an undivided fundamental line is repeated, as in Fig. 75.	Unter Umständen genügt auch bei Wiederholung eines noch ungeteilten Urlinie-Zuges schon die Baß-brechung I–V–I allein, um eine Dreiteiligkeit zu begründen (s. Fig. 75)	In some circumstances, even with the repetition of an undivided *Urlinie*, the bass arpeggiation I–V–I alone suffices to establish a ternary form (see Fig. 75).

What Schenker does mean here is slightly ambiguous. The form indicated by his Fig. 75 (see my Fig. 1) actually develops through three levels of prolongation:

- The repetition of the *Urlinie* [A_1 A_2], at a deep middleground level, does not suffice to create a two-part form. Most probably it is this repetition that Schenker has in mind when he writes of "a repetition of an undivided *Urlinie*".
- The elaboration of V, at the same level or at a later one, pulling apart the repetitions of the *Urlinie*, creates the ternary form A_1–B–A_2, even although the repetition of the *Urlinie* had not sufficed to split the form.
- New repetitions of the undivided *Urlinie*, at a more superficial level, divide both A_1 and A_2 into two parts, labelled in lower case letters, a_1 and a_2.

Fig. 1. *Der freie Satz*, Fig. 75 (simplified) – Chopin, Mazurka op. 41 n. 2.

Schenker justifies two- and three-part forms on the basis of articulation (*Gliederung*), but immediately adds that subsequent prolongations can further divide the form, either articulating its parts, for instance when one of the parts of a three-part form subdivides into a two-part form (§ 309):

Oster's translation	Schenker	A more literal translation
Two-part form evolves most naturally from the division $\hat{3}$ $\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{3}$ $\hat{2}$ $\hat{1}$, $\hat{5}$–$\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$, $\hat{8}$–$\hat{5}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$. […] Even within larger forms which derive from the first or the second level, a two-part form may appear at a later level.	*Zur zweiteiligen Form führt am natürlichsten die Gliederung* $\hat{3}$ $\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{3}$ $\hat{2}$ $\hat{1}$, $\hat{5}$–$\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$, $\hat{8}$–$\hat{5}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$. *[…] Doch kann auch innerhalb größerer Formen, die sich von der ersten oder zweiten Schicht herleiten, in einer späteren Schicht eine zweiteilige Liedform auftreten.*	The articulation $\hat{3}$ $\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{3}$ $\hat{2}$ $\hat{1}$, $\hat{5}$–$\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$, $\hat{8}$–$\hat{5}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$ leads most naturally to *two-part form*. […] Yet within larger forms, deduced from the first or the second level, a two-part Lied form [a_1–a_2] may appear at a later level.

or when subsequent levels of prolongation further divide a form already made binary by an interruption (§ 310 b):

Oster's translation	Schenker	A more literal translation
Division plays the most important role in three-part form also, even though at the first level it brings binary characteristics to the fore, as a consequence of $\hat{3}\,\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{3}\,\hat{2}\,\hat{1}$ or $\hat{5}$–$\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$.	*Die Gliederung hat den meisten Anteil auch an der Dreiteiligkeit, obwohl sie zufolge von $\hat{3}\,\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{3}\,\hat{2}\,\hat{1}$ oder $\hat{5}$–$\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$ der ersten Schicht zunächst die Zwei-teiligkeit hervorkehrt.*	The articulation has the most important share in three-part form also, even if because of $\hat{3}\,\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{3}\,\hat{2}\,\hat{1}$ or $\hat{5}$–$\hat{2}$ ‖ $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$ at the first level the binary character comes first.

In both § 309 and § 310 b, the examples discussed by Schenker concern forms that develop at different levels. In § 309, the first part of large three-part forms arising at the first or second prolongation level is divided and becomes a two-part Lied form at a later level.[13] In § 310 b, an interruption at the first level, even although it first produces a binary character, is transformed at a later level either by some elaboration of the V of the interruption, or by a retransition. In all of these cases, forms are multi-layered and undergo transformations in the process of "prolongation".

Other elaborations described in § 310, such as a mixture (Figs. 30a and b; 40.6) or a neighbour note (Figs. 7b; 40.1; 42.1 and 2; 85), can produce three-part forms too, but these obviously are produced at a rather superficial level and their *Urlinie* remains rather undivided.
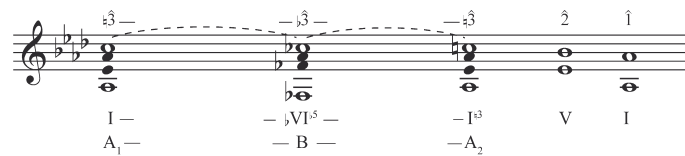

Fig. 2. *Der freie Satz*, Fig. 30a (first level) – Chopin, Mazurka op. 17 n. 3.

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13. This usually happens by an interruption in the first part. Schenker refers in both editions of *Der freie Satz* to his Fig. 110 e3, the second movement of Beethoven's Sonata op. 26, but the reference disappears from *Free Composition*: the reason probably is that in this case the two-part form of the first section results from an unusual interruption, on V/VI instead of V; in addition, repetitions of the theme blur the form.

Fig. 3. *Der freie Satz*, Fig. 42.1 (simplified) – Chopin, Étude op. 10 n. 2.

Schenker's claim, in all this, is not that forms derive from the background, for all *Ursätze* have the same form: forms cannot be individualised at that level. To him, on the contrary, individual forms arise during the transformations from background to foreground. At each step, at each prolongational or transformational level, the form acquires more of its individuality, which will fully bloom only in the foreground. What is new in Schenker's *Formenlehre* is by no means the nature of the forms described, nor their nomenclature, nor their inventory, as other contributions hereby evidence (see Hooper and Rigaudière in this volume). The innovational aspect resides in the description of forms as resulting from progressive transformations from the absolute unity of the background to the individuality of the foreground. Schenker writes in 1930:[14]

14.   Schenker [1930, 20-21]; translation by Ian Bent [Schenker 1994, 8] modified. The translation of this text is difficult; my suggested modifications to Bent's translation must be justified. *Aufblätterung*, which Bent translates as "proliferating", in my opinion conveys an idea of "splitting" (or, more technically, of "delamination") of superposed layers (*Blätter*, "sheets"), confirmed by the mention of "ever new layers of voice-leading" in the continuation of the phrase. I think also that "gathering" may render *sammelnd* better than "moulding", because it stresses the active role of elements giving rise, rather than adapting themselves, to a form. Bent's mention of prolongations (rather than layers of voice-leading) "expanding across ever greater spans" probably reflects the modern American Schenkerian view of prolongations as temporal spans (see above). The important question of *Hintergrund-Tiefe* and *Vordergrund-Breite* will be commented in my main text. See also Schenker [1930, 20] and its translation by Bent [Schenker 1994, 7], which expresses similar ideas and leads to Schenker's first complete description of the *Ursatz* in its canonic form.

Bent's translation	Schenker	My translation
I trace the proliferating of the first horizontal by means of *Prolongations* […], and the way in which they blossom into ever newly-forming layers of voice-leading, expanding across ever greater spans and moulding themselves into various forms, until they culminate in the final unfolding *at the foreground as the highest stage of intensification* […] With all of this the *cohesiveness of the total content of a piece is provided and established as a unity between the depths of the background and the breadth of the foreground.*	*Ich verfolge sodann die Aufblätterung der ersten Horizontale in Prolongationen* […], *wie sie in immer neuen Stimmführungsschichten sich immer mehr dehnend und in verschiedenen Formen sammelnd bis zur letzten Ausfaltung im Vordergrund als der höchsten Steigerung gedeihen* […] *Mit all dem ist der* Zusammenhang des ganzen Inhaltes eines Tonstückes als eine Einheit der Hintergrund-Tiefe und Vordergrund-Breite gegeben und begründet.	I trace the splitting of the primal horizontal [the backround's *Urlinie*] in *prolongations* […], as they blossom in ever new levels of voice-leading, always expanding and gathering themselves into various forms, until their last unfolding at the *foreground as the highest intensification* […] With all this the *cohesiveness of the total content of a piece is given and established as a unity of the background-depth and of the foreground-breadth.*

The "unity of the background-depth and of the foreground-breadth" is an essential concept in Schenker's *Formenlehre*. The "foreground-breadth" is that in which the various parts of the form follow each other, forming the linear, temporal development which we usually associate with the very idea of form. The "background-depth", on the other hand, denotes the link that even the most individualised forms maintain with the primal unity of the *Ursatz*. It is this depth that determines the function of the parts at the surface level and their hierarchy.[15] But the text quoted above also indicates that the transformational aspect of Schenker's theory does not concern form exclusively, but also the overall "cohesiveness" (*Zusammenhang*) of musical works and their "content" (*Inhalt*). It then appears that "form" is only one aspect in which the cohesiveness of a work expresses itself, and that "content" – an elusive but important term in Schenker's vocabulary – is another aspect. The study of Schenker's "content", however, will have to be left for another occasion. The whole idea, in any case, is repeated on more than one occasion in *Der freie Satz*, for instance:[16]

Schenker	Oster's translation, slightly modified
Der musikalische Zusammenhang ist aber nur zu erreichen durch einen Ursatz im Hintergrund und dessen Verwandlungen im Mittelgrund und Vordergrund.	Musical coherence can be achieved only through a fundamental structure in the background and its transformations in the middleground and foreground

15. Cook [2007, 70-72] notes that Schenker already had mentioned two causal dimensions in the second volume of *Kontrapunkt*, when he considered «the prescription of fluent melody (causality in the horizontal dimension) with that of completeness of triads (causality in the vertical dimension)» [Schenker 1922, 31], but added a third dimension – depth – in the text from *Das Meisterwerk* quoted here.
16. Schenker [1935, 20; 1979, 6; see also 1935, 17; 1979, 5; 1930, 21].

The *Ursatz*, Leslie Blasius explains, as «the originating musical statement or utterance, bears record of that moment when the vocal sound or noise is first shaped, first distinguished as an extraordinary human activity, as music» [1996, 79]. This «vocal sound or noise» is the primal *Klang*, the idea offered by nature and transformed by man into the primal triad. The *Ursatz* is that which first "shapes" (i.e., "gives *form* to") the tonal space of the triad, making it perceptible to human ears in both horizontal and vertical dimensions, that is, in both the temporal succession of the parts of the form and the organic transformations which allow it to arise. The *Ursatz* gives a first impetus to a series of transformations that lead to the foreground and to the fully grown individual form and content of the work – *semper idem sed non eodem modo*. This not only is Schenker's *Formenlehre*, it is the essence of his whole theory.

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Sintesi dell'articolo

Anche se nella sua ultima opera *Der freie Satz* (Universal, Wien 1935) Schenker rivendica con forza il carattere innovativo della sua concezione della forma musicale, in realtà la sua descrizione delle tipologie formali non si discosta in modo rilevante da quella della *Formenlehre* tradizionale. In questo articolo si dimostra che la novità della prospettiva di Schenker non va cercata nella descrizione delle forme del livello esterno, ma piuttosto nell'idea che le forme musicali si sviluppino attraverso diversi livelli di elaborazione e di "prolungamento" (*Prolongation*) secondo un percorso che si configura, a tutti gli effetti, come un processo trasformazionale. Schenker non concentra la sua attenzione sulla dimensione architettonica della forma intesa come successione di parti, sezioni e unità musicali, ma piuttosto sulla forma intesa come risultato di una progressiva trasformazione attraverso i vari livelli della struttura musicale, a partire da uno stadio di massima unitarietà nel livello profondo fino alla massima diversificazione nel livello esterno.

Schenker utilizza il termine tedesco *Prolongation* per descrivere una particolare applicazione delle regole del contrappunto rigoroso, che vengono interpretate in modo progressivamente più libero man mano che si procede dal livello profondo verso i livelli più esterni. Lo slittamento semantico che ha caratterizzato l'uso del termine *prolongation* in lingua inglese, adottato da gran parte dei teorici schenkeriani anglofoni, ha portato ad associare questo termine all'idea di un dispiegarsi nella dimensione del tempo, di uno svolgimento attraverso la temporalità dell'opera.

Questo uso semantico presuppone tuttavia una concezione della forma intesa – in modo piuttosto tradizionale – come una successione di sezioni formali. Schenker, al contrario, concepisce la forma come il risultato di una crescita organica nel corso della quale l'unità e l'identità del livello profondo si dissolvono gradualmente, e man mano che ci si avvicina al livello esterno subentrano forme più diversificate e

individualizzate. È questo il significato del motto latino che Schenker pone in epigrafe alle sue opere teoriche: *semper idem sed non eodem modo* ("sempre identico, ma non nello stesso modo"). Ad esempio, una tecnica di prolungamento come l'interruzione permette di trasformare un livello profondo di per sé unitario in una forma binaria che a sua volta, nei successivi livelli della struttura musicale, può essere ulteriormente suddivisa per dar luogo a forme tripartite o quadripartite.

Questa concezione della forma manifesta importanti punti di contatto con la teoria trasformazionale di Noam Chomsky (*Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1965), che nel corso dell'articolo vengono evidenziati e approfonditi per dimostrare come la teoria della forma di Schenker possa essere interpretata, nel suo complesso, come una teoria trasformazionale.