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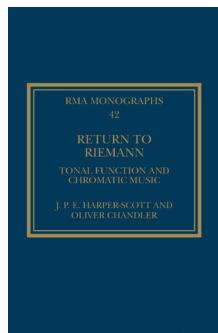
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J.P.E. Harper-Scott and Oliver Chandler

*Return to Riemann: Tonal Function and Chromatic Music*

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A succinct book spanning just 90 pages, *Return to Riemann: Tonal Function and Chromatic Music* by J.P.E. Harper-Scott and Oliver Chandler leaves more food for thought than most of the, usually much longer, music-analytical books I have read. The book is an engaging tour-de-force of the most complex constellations of chromatic music written in a concise, at times rather compact, style. The book's main attraction is a genuinely new and very promising model for the harmonic analysis of late-tonal music.

The authors provide a new answer to a long-standing question of music analysis: How does one analyze late-tonal music – music that often generates a ‘strong double sense that it is tonal, and that it is complex or even weird in its treatment of tonality’ (p. 33)? Since around the turn of the millennium, the diverse approaches collected under the umbrella term *neo-Riemannian theory* (henceforth NRT) seem to have provided the most satisfying answers. It is these answers, however, that the authors grapple with. The ‘return’ to Riemann announced in the title signifies a renewed engagement with aspects of Hugo Riemann’s function theory that NRT approaches threw out with the bathwater in their focus on a transformational, chord-to-chord, and relativistic tonal space.

For Danish and many other European readers, however, this is only partly a ‘return’: After all, Riemann’s function theory has been extremely influential *outside* Anglo-American academia for much of the twentieth century. As such, some of Harper-Scott’s and Chandler’s ideas echo earlier ‘post-Riemannian’ theories. The notion that there is a direct and unmediated relationship between a primary function and its transformations – including multi-step transformations of both major and minor versions of the primary function – resonates with Wilhelm Maler’s *Beitrag zur Harmonielehre*.<sup>1</sup> Harper-Scott’s and Chandler’s approach bears an especially striking resemblance to Jan Maegaard’s distinctive style of function analysis – what I have previously termed *processual function*

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Maler, *Beitrag zur Harmonielehre* (Leipzig: F.E.C. Leuckart, 1931).

analysis.<sup>2</sup> For Harper-Scott and Chandler, as for Maegaard, the central premise is that chords may retain their reference to a governing function (T, S or D), even after several transformations resulting in contorted function symbols such as Tpvpv. For the sake of transparency, I should underline that this is an idea I have also traced in my own research. I might be more inclined than other readers to accept this premise, then – and in my view, *Return to Riemann* convincingly demonstrates its potential to enrich our understanding of late-tonal music.

However, the similarities between twentieth-century post-Riemannian theories and Harper-Scott's and Chandler's new book end here: The authors do return to Riemann's original dualist functional nomenclature, but from here, they develop a truly innovative approach. Their concept of 'lunar tonality' and their model of 'octatonic sub-moons' amount to some of the most intriguing expansions of function theory and NRT I have seen (I said as much already in 2019, when Harper-Scott presented his ideas at *Soton-MAC*; my report from that conference can be read in volume 43 of this journal). The fact that they manage to combine these new analytical tools with Schenkerian ideas in the book's last chapter is even more impressive.

The book consists of an introduction and five chapters. The introduction presents the premise of the book: The authors object to the tendency of NRT to analyze passages in a chord-to-chord perspective with no reference to tonality. Importantly, their reason for objecting to this is not just theoretical or analytical, but cultural. Harper-Scott and Chandler argue that tonality is an *ideology*: 'Were a single passage of a piece to undermine the logic of tonality, then tonality, which is an ideology of *totality*, in which the central idea explains everything, could not be operational in that piece at all; it would be reduced to a surface-level "topic"' (p. 2). Even if some 'tonal' music cannot be reduced to a Schenkerian *Ursatz* or another straightforward emblem of tonality, tonality remained 'the horizon of musical meaning' (p. 2) in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Western music. Hugo Riemann's function theory, they argue, provides a suitable analytical framework to capture how harmony from this period twists, turns, struggles with, but is ultimately still confined to tonality.

Chapter 1 reviews the aspects of Riemann's theory that the authors find to be overlooked. The three functional modifications, *Variante*, *Parallele*, and *Leittonwechsel*, are introduced. Rather than using the NRT symbols P, R, and L (for parallel, relative, and leading-tone change), they return to Riemann's symbols for these modifications: v, p, and

2 Thomas Jul Kirkegaard-Larsen, 'Transformational Attitudes in Scandinavian Function Theories', *Theory and Practice*, 43 (2018), 77–110; for examples of Maegaard's approach to function analysis, see: Teresa Waskowska Larsen and Jan Maegaard, *Indføring i romantisk harmonik* (Copenhagen: Engstrøm & Sødring, 1981); Jan Maegaard, *Indføring i romantisk harmonik, 2: Analyser* (Copenhagen: Engstrøm & Sødring, 1986); Jan Maegaard, 'Harmonisk analyse af det 19. århundredes musik: En teoretisk overvejelse', *Musik & Forskning*, 15 (1989–90), 79–110; Jan Maegaard, 'Zur harmonischen Analyse der Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Musikkulturgeschichte: Festschrift für Constantin Floros zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Peter Petersen (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1990), 61–86.

< or > (depending on the direction of the semitonal movement in the *Leittonwechsel* transformation). The chapter also proposes two new ‘constraints’ that enrich Riemann’s function theory, both drawing on Kenneth Smith’s 2020 book *Desire in Chromatic Harmony*.<sup>3</sup> In constraint no. 1, minor-third related chords *prolong* the same function because they do not contain each other’s leading tones and because they belong to the same octatonic scale. As the authors write: ‘There are three octatonic scales and there are three tonal functions; they map onto one another isomorphically’ (p. 14). In constraint no. 2, they propose that hexatonic progressions, i.e. major-third related chords, *rotate* function because they belong to different octatonic scales. They also add an aspect of hierarchy into the model, distinguishing between harmonic chords and contrapuntal chords, underlining that ‘there are some voice-leading contexts in which hexatonic-style progressions might function prolongationally too’ (p. 17).

In chapter 2, the authors turn to the primary analytical example of the book, Wally Traute’s *Plaint* from Richard Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung*, Act I, Scene 3. It is in this chapter that they introduce their model of ‘lunar tonality’. This model imposes harmonic function on Richard Cohn’s well-known model of four hexatonic cycles.<sup>4</sup> The northern hexatonic cycle is re-interpreted as a *tonic* ‘moon’; the eastern moon is *dominant*, the western is *subdominant*, and the southern moon has a mixed Sp/DD function. On each moon, the simplest form of a function is turning inwards toward the center, and functions become more and more transformed as one moves around a moon to its ‘dark side’. The tonic moon, for example, can be illustrated in the context of a C tonality. At the center are °C (°T) and C<sup>+</sup> (T<sup>+</sup>), with ° indicating a minor chord and + indicating a major chord, following the authors’ Riemann-inspired notation. Moving anticlockwise from T<sup>+</sup>, the tonic moon traces a cycle through the chords C<sup>+</sup>, °E, E<sup>+</sup>, °Ab, Ab<sup>+</sup>, °C, and back to C<sup>+</sup>, with each transformation involving a single semitonal shift (e.g. moving from C<sup>+</sup> to °E involves changing *c* to *b* while the other chord tones, *e* and *g*, remain unchanged). The authors assign functional labels to these chords, reflecting their relationship to the overall tonic function. In the same order as the chords listed above, these labels are T<sup>+</sup>,  $\mathbb{T}$ ,  $\mathbb{T}_v$ ,  $\mathbb{T}_v$ ,  $\mathbb{T}$ , °T, and back to T<sup>+</sup>. All of these stations around the moon potentially hold other functions as well, i.e. °Dp, Sp and more.<sup>5</sup>

In chapter 3, two nineteenth-century examples further showcase the applicability of the lunar system. The transition of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 10, No. 1, first movement, and bb. 264–90 of Brahms’s Concerto for Violin and Cello, Op. 102, first

3 Kenneth Smith, *Desire in Chromatic Harmony: A Psychodynamic Exploration of Fin de Siècle Tonality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

4 Richard Cohn, ‘Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions’, *Music Analysis*, 15/1 (1996), 9–40; Richard Cohn, *Audacious Euphony: Chromatic Harmony and the Triad’s Second Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5  $\mathbb{T}_v$  and  $\mathbb{T}_v$  also receive the alternative labels 3<sup>+</sup> and III<sup>+</sup>, respectively. Riemann proposed these mediant functions in later editions of his *Handbuch der Harmonielehre*; see David Kopp, *Chromatic Transformations in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 99–102.

movement – a *locus classicus* of NRT – are both analyzed. The latter shows how even passages that are textbook-typical of NRT’s chord-to-chord approach can be fruitfully analyzed with an eye to the tonality that anchors such passages. With a few reservations to which I will return, I find these analyses to be very convincing.

In chapter 4, the authors turn to seventh chords. Harper-Scott and Chandler draw on Jack Douthett’s 4-Cube Trio (as presented in Cohn’s *Audacious Euphony*), and develop from this a system of ‘octatonic submoons.’ There are three octatonic submoons, each related to one main function and pointing towards another; for instance, the  $T^{\text{diss}}$  submoon (a tonic submoon where added dissonances make the tonic function unstable) contains the dominant-seventh form of the tonic, making it point towards the subdominant area. It also contains dominant-seventh chords and half-diminished chords rooted a minor third away from each other; i.e.  $C^7$ ,  $A^7$ ,  $F\#^7$  and  $E\flat^7$  are grouped together; as are  $C^{\flat 7}$ ,  $A^{\flat 7}$ ,  $F\#^{\flat 7}$ , and  $E\flat^{\flat 7}$ , based on the 4-Cube Trio.<sup>6</sup> The submoons are connected by mixed-function diminished seventh chords. The analytical usefulness of this system is eloquently demonstrated with an analysis of another *locus classicus* of tonal theory, Chopin’s Prelude in E minor, Op. 28, No. 4, as well as another excerpt of Waltraute’s *Plaint*.

Chapter 5 aims to remedy the tendency for NRT and function analysis alike to engender an overly ‘atomic’ view of harmony. In an amalgamation of their model with Schenkerian theory and employing a new set of graphic symbols, the authors examine prolongation through means of *function* rather than through *Stufen*. Larger excerpts from *Götterdämmerung*’s Prologue and, yet again, Waltraute’s *Plaint* serve as the main analytical examples.

As this overview demonstrates, the book is very ambitious, seeking to bring together function analysis, NRT, and aspects of Schenkerian analytical practice in a large, coherent system. The result is impressively convincing and compelling. Even if it requires a leap of faith to accept composite function symbols such as  $Tpvpv$ , I find that their analyses generally succeed in communicating those intuitions, often inexplicable but definite, of T-ness, S-ness, and D-ness that is characteristic of late-tonal music. Their two new models help understand how such intuitions might arise. Imbuing Cohn’s hexatonic cycles and Douthett’s 4-Cube Trio with functional meaning makes, for me at least, immediate sense and provides an ingenious way to conceptualise function in chromatic music.

Even though I am generally quite convinced by the theory they propose, I do have a few reservations, most of them at the level of analytical details, some of them more general. These are all issues which I hope future research would pick up on and elaborate further. First, the authors seem, for my taste at least, a bit too prone to interpret chords as modifications of already established chords instead of acknowledging the local,

6 Readers not familiar with the 4-Cube Trio and other so-called parsimonious graphs might want to consult Jack Douthett and Peter Steinbach, ‘Parsimonious Graphs: A Study in Parsimony, Contextual Transformations, and Modes of Limited Transposition’, *Journal of Music Theory*, 42/2, special issue on neo-Riemannian theory (1998), 241–263; or Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*.

perhaps secondary, subdominant or dominant function they may have (what Riemann calls intermediate cadences in *Harmony Simplified*).<sup>7</sup> In their analysis of the transition in Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 10, No. 1, they analyze C major (in fact, C<sup>7</sup>) in an E-flat major context as  $\mathfrak{S}_v$ ; i.e. as a double transformation of the subdominant A $\flat$ . They argue that this chord is on the 'dark side' of the subdominant moon – but to me, it would be sufficient to acknowledge that it has a secondary dominant function (pointing towards F minor, Sp), and that it is hierarchically subordinate to the already established subdominant field. In an annotated music example (p. 42), they do label it as (D<sup>7</sup>)S. Their model of octatonic submoons (introduced later in the book), would in fact support the reading that it functions as T<sup>diss</sup>, pointing towards the subdominant field, but it would not support the reading that this seventh chord is already subdominant, i.e.  $\mathfrak{S}_v$ . Expanding on voice-leading and other hierarchies would strengthen the model further.

Another and more serious problem is that the authors only vaguely explain what they mean by function. This is no small issue, seeing as Riemann's term has been interpreted in so many different ways; and when they casually use the term 'pre-dominant' (pp. 43–44), which is decidedly *not* a Riemannian term, but rather an Anglo-American Schenker-influenced term, the question of how they conceive of function becomes even more pressing.<sup>8</sup> This, combined with their willingness to interpret any chord as a representative of a function *just like that*, has the consequence that some readings are very hard to follow. What does it mean that there is a progression from T to ( $\overset{\circ}{D}p_v$ ) of  $\overset{\circ}{F}^7$  (p. 76)? In this connection (from the *Götterdämmerung* prologue, bb. 156–160 and from the tonal viewpoint of B major), the former symbol is given to a D $\flat^+$  chord, the latter to a G<sup>+</sup> chord (again, and somewhat at odds with their Chapter 4-efforts to not reduce seventh chords to triads, this is actually a G<sup>7</sup>). D $\flat^+$ , then, is interpreted as the *Leittonwechsel* of the *Parallelvariante* of the minor dominant of G<sup>+</sup>, itself the *Leittonwechsel* of the minor version of the tonic. Or, to follow the transformational process from the goal chord G<sup>+</sup> (here shown as a local T, but really being B minor's *Leittonwechsel*):

Function	T	D	$\overset{\circ}{D}$	$\overset{\circ}{D}p$	$\overset{\circ}{D}p_v$	$\overset{\circ}{D}p_v$
Chord	G <sup>+</sup>	D <sup>+</sup>	$\overset{\circ}{D}$	F <sup>+</sup>	$\overset{\circ}{F}$	D $\flat^+$

In what way does this D $\flat^+$  chord represent dominant function? Is there a connection to Riemann's Hegelian idea of thetic moments left in this symbol? Or is it dominant in some other sense? Sure, it is possible to posit the transformational connection described above, but when there *is* no such transformational process to be heard in the music, can

7 Hugo Riemann, *Harmony Simplified*, translated by Henry Bewerunge (London: Augener, 1895), 127ff.

8 The origin of the term 'predominant' is examined in: Thomas Jul Kirkegaard-Larsen, *Analytical Practices in Western Music Theory: A Comparison and Mediation of Schenkerian and Post-Riemannian Traditions*, Ph.D. dissertation (Aarhus University, 2020), 99–104; Svend Hvidtfelt Nielsen, *Dansk musikteori og dens ophav* (Copenhagen: Multivers, 2024), vol. I, 353.

$D_b^+$  be dominant just like that? I do not object to the complexity of the symbol itself – late-tonal music is complex, and it is to be expected that analysis of this music will also be complex. However, the authors' readings are most compelling when they trace a process that gradually transforms a function step by step – crucially, and in contrast to NRT, without losing tonal and functional orientation, even in chords far removed from the starting point. The mechanism of functional prolongation that they argue for is convincing in such cases; but then again, not all late-tonal music behaves in this way.

Finally, the brevity of the book is a strength – it is a refreshingly clear and to-the-point examination of highly intricate music – but there is perhaps a bit too much which is left underdeveloped. In the amalgamation of their model with Schenkerian graphing, what are the full consequences of proposing prolongation through function instead of *Stufen*? It would seem to me that the model of tonality that results from this is so radically different from Schenker's that it would necessarily subvert fundamental ideas about the horizontalization of *Klänge*. That is probably the authors' very point, but if this is the case, on what basis does one then propose large-scale connections and hierarchies between the prolonged and the prolonging? Perhaps it is only good that the authors leave this open for further discussions and research (and perhaps I am only projecting concerns I have had in my own attempts to do something similar). In any case, the conciseness with which Harper-Scott and Chandler propose such major changes to well-known analytical models adds to the not just thought-provoking, but also somewhat provocative, aspects of their book.

An important point of the book is its assertion that tonality functions as an ideology, which shapes their interpretation of *Götterdämmerung*. Tonality is likened to 'the great socioeconomic, legal, religious, and scientific systems that have endured into the twenty-first century' (p. 26). In a particularly striking passage, they write: 'One can almost hear Tonality saying: "For where two or three triads are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" [Matthew 18:29]' (p. 12). Their conception of the 'metalogical' (p. 7) relationship between tonal and social hierarchies draws partly on Riemann's own writings – and Alexander Rehding's reading of them<sup>9</sup> – but predominantly on Adorno. In this light, they argue that 'Wagner's tonality is both coercive – one cannot escape its clutches – and emancipatory, insofar as its very elasticity and capaciousness expose the lack of a *ground* for tonality: that is, tonality does not exist as a natural principle, but as a historically contingent ideology to which harmonic monads are subject' (p. 29). I find their cultural-historical framing of tonality and their concomitant readings of Wagner to be astute and perceptive. By emphasizing the ideological rather than purely technical dimensions of tonality, they align with a broader current in music theory and analysis, exemplified by Jason Yust's recent article 'Tonality and Racism' and the many

9 The authors refer specifically to Alexander Rehding, *Hugo Riemann and the Birth of Modern Musical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 63.



responses it elicited in *Journal of Music Theory*.<sup>10</sup> However, the conclusions Harper-Scott and Chandler draw from this cultural-historical framing are likely to divide readers. While Yust argues that the concept of tonality inhibits our understanding of ‘late chromatic and early atonal music’, Harper-Scott and Chandler ground their entire theory on the premise that tonality conditions such music. There seems to be a return not just to Riemann’s theory but also to his problematic universalism. The authors position themselves against theorists who regard functional interpretations of late-tonal music as ‘merely one mode of post-modern “knowing”, rather than (as for us) a necessary horizon of historical meaning’ (p. 39). Yet, the authors acknowledge that tonality is ultimately a ‘fiction of our own creation’ (p. 2). For my part, I appreciate their effort to explore ‘the ways in which musical experience is already mediated by a historically conditioned (intra)subjectivity’ (p. 3), but if this entails a turn away from analytical pluralism and anti-universalist approaches, then I am less enthusiastic. Whether through NRT’s relativistic tonal space, the de-normalizing critiques of disablist music theory, the anti-racist decentering of tonality by Yust, or other critical approaches, there remain good reasons to challenge the fiction of tonality and tonal coherence.

The book is narrow literature in more than one sense: At 90 pages and with a pocket-like format, it could easily be mistaken for a slim collection of poetry. But any book can be 90 pages if you just make the font small enough. Routledge could have spent a dime or two more on making this volume a bit more readable. The cramped font and minimal line spacing strain the eyes, but the real issue lies with the analytical examples, which, in places, are indecipherable. I cannot read the function symbol in the last bar of the Fanny Hensel example on p. 20; not even with a magnifying glass (I checked). The font is so minuscule that it apparently exceeds the capabilities of the printer, leaving the symbol an illegible smudge rather than a readable mark.

Even with this small fly in the ointment, *Return to Riemann* is a seriously stimulating read that I think and hope has great potential to inspire analysts for years to come.

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<sup>10</sup> Jason Yust, ‘Tonality and Racism’, *Journal of Music Theory*, 68/1 (2024), 59–88. Responses from Philip Ewell, Thomas Christensen, Steven Rings, Nicole Biamonte, Dmitri Tymoczko, Psyche Loui, Megan Long, Susan McClary, and Liam Hynes-Tawa feature in the same issue. Other important contributions to this tendency are Philip Ewell, ‘Music Theory and the White Racial Frame’, *Music Theory Online*, 26/2 (2020); Philip Ewell, ‘Music Theory’s White Racial Frame’, *Music Theory Spectrum*, 43/2 (2021), 324–29; Thomas Christensen, *Stories of Tonality in the Age of François-Joseph Fétis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).