Music and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century

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I

It seems probable that Western culture has from its beginnings been characterized by a tension between the claims of Apollonian classicism and those of Dionysian romanticism. Classicism has been distinguished by a valuing of shared conventions and established constraints, the coherence of closed forms and the clarity of explicit meanings. Romanticism, on the other hand, has been defined by a valuing of individual innovation and the yearning arising from potentiality, by the informality of open structures and the suggestiveness of implicit significance. And countless critics and historians of the arts have remarked upon these traits and upon the continuing oscillation from one of these general outlooks to the other.

Each romantic phase, like each classic one is, of course, different from all the others. Each romanticism has its specific stylistic constraints; each has a different history. But the Romanticism that we will be concerned with — the movement begun in the last part of the eighteenth century and continued into our own time — was not merely different in its constraints and its immediate past. Rather it constituted a radical departure. It differed from all the preceding romanticisms in this: instead of being but a phase within a periodic swing in the beliefs and attitudes of the artistic/intellectuaI community, this Romanticism formed part of a profound revolution in political, social, and ideological outlook. At its core was an unequivocal and uncompromising repudiation and rejection of a hierarchic social order based upon arbitrary, inherited class distinctions.

Although its roots extended back to the Renaissance and Reformation — for instance, to the growing emphasis upon the worth of the individual, the widening perspective fostered by the dis-

covery of new lands and cultures, and the remarkable achievements of the natural sciences — the prime driving force of the latest Romanticism was political and social. As Rousseau, its most polemical and influential spokesman, explicitly avowed: "I had attained the insight that everything is at bottom dependent on political arrangements, that no matter what position one takes, a people will never be otherwise than what its form of government makes it." [1]

Rousseau's views are familiar — indeed, they have become part of cultural scuttlebutt. But they so profoundly affected the choices made by Romantic composers that a capsule summary is warranted. The one I give is by Allan Bloom, a political scientist:

> Man was born free, equal, selfsufficient, unprejudiced, and whole; now, at the end of history, he is in chains (ruled by other men or by laws he did not make), defined by relations of inequality (rich or poor, noble or commoner, master or slave), dependent, full of false opinions or superstitions, and divided between his inclinations and his duties.[2]

The repudiation of the *ancien régime* was by no means confined to social, political, and economic realms. Whatever was deemed arbitrary or artificial, grounded in convention or the basis for distinction and privilege was called into question.

In no realm of culture, however, was the repudiation of the artificial and the conventional more vehement and thoroughgoing than in the arts — as a brief sampling amply indicates.

> Anton Thibaut: ". . . how easy it is for art to become unnatural . . . and how often do we find music, laboriously composed by mere artifice, uninspired by any real spontaneous emotion. . . ."[3]

[1] *Confessions,* quoted in Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe* (Princeton, 1945), p. 27.

[2] "The Education of Democratic Man: Emile," *Rousseau in Our Time,* S. R. Graubard, ed., *Daedalus* (Summer 1978), p. 135.

[3] Anton F. J. Thibaut, *On Purity in Music,* W. H. Gladstone, trans. (London, 1877), p. 67.

> Victor Hugo observes that whatever is systematic becomes "false, trivial and conventional"; and he condemns "petty conventional rules."[4]
>
> According to Franz Liszt, Chopin "did violence to the peculiar nature of his genius when he endeavored to subject it to rules, to classifications and to regulations not of his own making. . . ."[5]
>
> And Wagner writes that "The most perfect form of art. . . is that wherein all vestiges of conventionality are completely removed from the drama as well as from the music."[6]

Ideologically, the conventions of syntax and form — common cadential patterns and harmonic progressions, and familiar melodic or formal schemata — were anathema to Romantic composers. (A single speculation here speaks volumes: namely, one can scarcely imagine Berlioz, Wagner, or Mahler constructing dice games for the "composition" of music — as C.P.E. Bach, Haydn, and Mozart did!) Yet from a practical point of view, those who composed tonal music could no more dispense with the norms of grammar, syntax, and form than could poets and novelists. Such conventions were, after all, their "native language" —the way in which they had learned to "hear" and tocomprehend the relationships among sounds.

The problems involved in reconciling the ideological rejection of conventions with the practical need for them were intensified by another dilemma. Two of the prime values of Romanticism were originality and individuality. Thus Liszt tells — and his view is thoroughly "Romantic" —that "the merit of perfecting a process can never equal the merit of inventing it";[7] while according to the musicologist Leon Plantinga, Schumann believed the characteris-

[4] "Preface to *Cromwell,"* in *European Theories of the Drama,* B. H. Clark, ed. (New York, 1965), pp. 357 and 363.

[5] *The Life of Chopin,* J. Broadhouse, trans. (London, n.d.), p. 13.

[6] *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen* (IX/112); quoted in Jack M. Stein, *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* (Westport, Conn., 1973), p. 167.

[7] *The Life of Chopin,* p. 139.

tics of Romantic music to be "an emphasis on originality rather than the normative."[8] But the existence of "originality" and the expression of individuality are invariably dependent upon — are defined and comprehended in terms of — existing norms of behavior, whether in life or in art. (Appropriately, the distinctive dress and demeanor of some of the artists of the period seems striking evidence that the delineation of individuality depends upon deviation from established norms and conventions.) Since especially for Romanticism, originality and individuality are virtually inseparable, I will treat them as more or less interchangeable notions.

The valuing of originality and individuality is correlative to the denigration and repudiation of convention because conventions, by definition, belong not to any individual, but to the compositional community. More important still, the repudiation of convention was, as I have suggested, a result of deep doubts about *all* social authority. For all authority — the state, the church, the community — seemed based upon apparently artificial rules and regulations. The only legitimate authority was the "natural authority" of the individual — preferably that of the inspired, but naïve, genius. The personal insight of the individual takes precedence over the shared norms of convention. The new "psychological man" of Romanticism was concerned not with social values and goals as much as with the realization of the potential latent in the individual ego. Thus Freud — one of the late-late Romantics — transforms the Oedipus story from one concerned with social morality and authority into one concerned with the inner development of the individual ego. As Philip Rieff so neatly puts it: "Oedipus Rex becomes Oedipus complex"[9] — which is the fate of every man.

[8] *Schumann as Critic* (New Haven, 1967), p. 108.

[9] *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (Chicago, 1979), p. 354.

It is interesting that both the type of change that occurred during the nineteenth century and its considerable force can be attributed to the claims of musical conventions on the one hand, and to those of the ideology of Romanticism on the other. The situation seems somewhat as follows. Because the constraints of tonality were indispensable for the organization of music, for the expression of feeling, and for the delineation of individuality, the kinds of innovation possible were quite limited. Changes were almost necessarily matters of degree — that is, what I have called "trended changes."[10] The ideological valuing of originality, however, put a premium on the invention and use of novelty. The result was evidently something comparable to what political scientists call "outbidding." That is, if a composer (or a group of composers) employed some musical means — say, an unusual harmony — in a relatively modest way, subsequent composers who wanted to use the same relationship were virtually compelled, in order to affirm their individuality, to increase the prevalence or the intensity of the means.

Even within the constraints of tonality, however, a multitude of alternatives were available or could have been devised.[11] Many of those actually chosen by composers can be interpreted and understood in terms of the model most favored by Romanticism: namely, that of the living, developing organism. Here is August Wilhelm Schlegel's characterization of two kinds of art:

> Form is mechanical when it is imparted to any material through an external force, merely as an accidental addition, without reference to its character. . . . Organic form, on the contrary, is innate; it unfolds itself from within, and reaches its deter-

[10] I have discussed the distinctions among different kinds of change in *Music, the Arts, and Ideas* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 99–101.

[11] One of the strategies devised to mediate between the antipathy toward, and the need for, conventions was the *disguise* of convention. This strategy is discussed in my "Exploiting Limits: Creation, Archetypes and Change," *Daedalus* (Spring 1980), pp. 177–205.

> mination simultaneously with the fullest development of the seed. . . . In the fine arts, just as in the province of nature — the supreme artist — all genuine forms are Organic.[12]

Although many of its tenets had been present in Western thought since ancient Greece, organicism was "politicized" and received its most forceful and thoroughgoing formulation as part of the ideology of Romanticism.[13] Organicism was crucial for the history of music; it furnished its central metaphors. The influence of organicism was so profound and persuasive that it has persisted, with occasional and minor remissions, throughout the twentieth century — not only in such "high-culture" manifestations as formalism, abstract painting, and avant-garde music, but in more mundane realms such as organic food and the back-to-nature subculture.

Despite its long history, the organic model had *not* been the main basis for conceptualizing musical relationships during the preceding century. Rather, as Leonard Ratner has shown us, language had been the favored model.[14] Musical structure was described in terms of phrases, sentences, and periods; expression, in terms of rhetoric and characteristic figures; and unity was understood to be a function of both expression and tonal structure. As was the case with language, grammar and syntax, rhetoric and gestural expression, and even formal organization seemed learned and conventional. And, as with language, such learned typologies, rules, and procedures tended to be associated with lineage, class, and hierarchic authority. Thus the shift from the language model to the organic model constitutes both a symptom and a conse-

[12] *On Dramatic Art and Literature;* quoted in M. L. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (London, 1976), p. 213.

[13] For a discussion of the influence of organicism on music theory, see Ruth A. Solie, "The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis," *19th-Century Music* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1980), pp. 147–56.

[14] "Eighteenth-Century Theories of Musical Period Structure," *Musical Quarterly* 42 (1956), pp. 439–54.

quence of the repudiation of convention and class. To exaggerate somewhat: the language model represents a prizing of societal constraints; the organic model celebrates the felicities of natural constraints.

The core metaphor of organicism likens a work of art to a living thing — usually a flowering plant — whose germination, growth, and coherence result, in Coleridge's words, from "an antecedent Power or Principle in the Seed." [15] Just as a seed gives rise to the diverse parts of a plant (to roots and stems, leaves and flowers), so in a composition the diverse themes, harmonic relationships, etc., are taken to be manifestations of a single basic principle — be it a melodic motive, a fundamental chord, a rhythmic germ, or even a sonority. That this metaphor was part of the thinking of composers, as well as aestheticians, is evident in Wagner's account of the composition of *The Flying Dutchman* and, more particularly, of Senta's second-act ballad.

> . . . in this piece I unwittingly *planted the thematic seed* of all the music of the opera. . . . When I came eventually to the composition, the thematic image I had already conceived quite involuntarily spread over the entire drama in a complete unbroken web; all that was left for me to do was to allow the various *thematic germs* contained in the ballad *to develop to the fall, each in its own direction.* . . . [16]

As Wagner's description indicates, organic growth is gradual. Nor is the way that the seed develops arbitrary or capricious; rather the process of growth is determined by the presence of some underlying principle.

In addition to being gradual, organic processes were conceived as being goal-directed. The goal, as Lovejoy has shown, was

[15] *Aids to Reflection;* quoted in Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, p. 271.

[16] A *Communication to my Friends;* quoted in Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas,* Mary Whittall, trans. (Cambridge, 1979), p. 18.

emergent self-realization on all levels of the natural order.[17] Instead of a fixed hierarchy of kinds and classes, established once and for all by God's creation, there is a continuing process in which the innate potential of nature is realized gradually. (The political implications of this shift are unmistakable.) The goal of the individual, too, is self-realization. And it is from this point of view that Schumann criticizes Chopin:

> Now Chopin could publish everything anonymously; everyone would recognize him anyway. 'In this there is both praise and blame — praise for his talent, blame for his effort. . . . Always new and inventive in externals, in the shape of his compositions, in his special instrumental effects, yet he remains in essence the same. Because of this we fear he will never achieve a higher level than he has already reached. . . .With his abilities he could have achieved far more, influencing the progress of our art as a whole.''

In short, to realize oneself is to become differentiated from others — to be original — and to continue such "progress." And the almost mystic valuing of self-realization (and its counterpart self-expression) in our own culture is evidence, once again, of the continued power of Romantic ideology.

But complete self-realization is an unachievable goal. For Romanticism, man's true nature is one of restless striving after a perfection that can never be his. Just as the world is forever in a state of Becoming, so man is — and so his art should be. What Friederich van Schlegel says of poetry holds for the other arts as well:

> . . .Romantic poetry is constantly developing. That in fact is its true nature; it can forever only *become,* it can never achieve definitive form. . . . Its overriding principle is that the poet's fantasy is subject to no agreed principles. Romantic poetry is

[17] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain* of *Being* (New York, 1960), ch. 9.

[18] Quoted in Leon Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic,* p. 321.

> the only poetry that is more than a poetic genre. It is, so to speak, the very art of poetry itself. Indeed, in a certain sense, all poetry is — or should be — romantic.[19]

The emphasis on *becoming* — on continuous growth and unfolding — finds musical expression not only in the sense of "yearning" associated with unfulfilled striving, but also in a valuing of open forms and unrealized implications.

I shall consider the nature of form in Romantic music toward the end of this essay. But first I shall discuss some of the ways in which the values connected with organicism were translated into smaller-scale compositional strategies. More specifically, I shall focus on Romantic melody, not only because other facets of Romantic music have been much more extensively discussed, but because both composers and theorists of the period considered melody to be the heart and soul of musical expression. In the words of Schopenhauer, perhaps the philosopher who best represented Romantic thinking about music:

> . . . in melody . . . which dominates the whole and progresses freely in a single uninterrupted, coherent and meaningful idea from start to finish, I recognize the highest stage of the objectification of the Will, the conscious life and strife of man. . . . [Melody] tells the story of the Will as illuminated by self-awareness. . . . But melody expresses still more: it reveals the Will's secret history, portrays its every movement, its every endeavor, everything that reason comprehends under the broad pejorative concept of emotion, being incapable of further abstraction.[20]

Melody receives prime place in the pantheon of musical parameters because it was consonant with the ideals most highly prized by the ideology of Romanticism. Harmony and counterpoint could

[19] *Kritische Schriften;* excerpted in P. le Huray and J. Day, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 246–47.

[20] *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung;* excerpted in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics,* p. 327.

be taught and learned — their rules could be found in treatises; forms could be classified and analyzed into hierarchies of parts and subparts. But, to quote Schopenhauer once again, "The composition of melody . . . is the work of genius, whose action . . . lies far from all reflection and conscious intention, and may be called inspiration." [21]

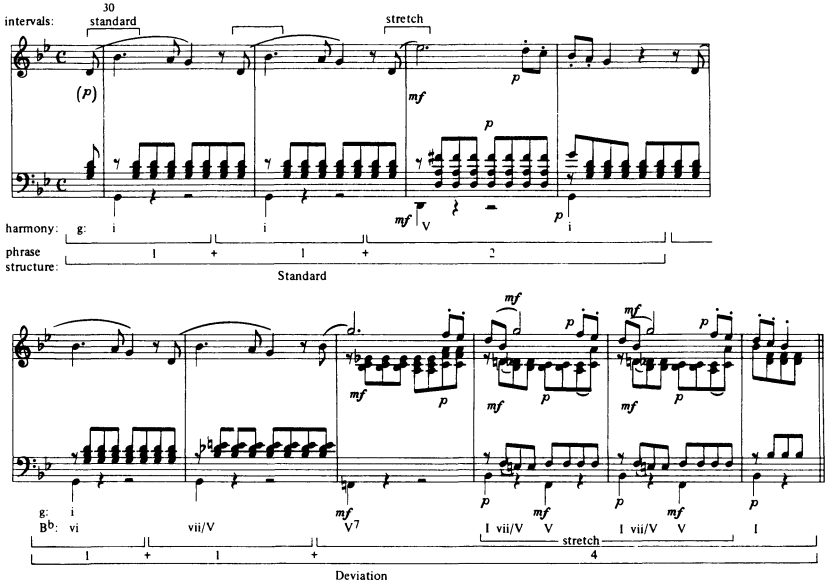
II

Many of the values of organicism — gradual growth and emergence, goal-directed motion, openness and continual becoming — are realized in a strategy that I call "stretching." Stretching is also, and importantly, related to other values of Romanticism — especially to the reliance upon natural, as opposed to conventional, means. For stretching is one way of reconciling the claims of nature with those of intense expression.

Basically, melodic stretching involves an increase either in the size of a melodic interval or in the length of a rhythmic unit in relation to a *standard* previously established in the particular piece. The difference between Classic and Romantic music is one of emphasis. Composers of the Classic period wrote stretch melodies, but they did so less often than did composers in the nineteenth century. Even more important, the use made of stretching tends to change. I will illustrate this with an example from the Classic period and with several from the Romantic period.

The transition passage from the first movement of Mozart's String Quintet in G Minor (K. 516) contains a clear example of stretching (Example 1). A motive that begins with a skip (or gap), which establishes the *standard,* occurs twice. Then at the start of the second part of the phrase-group (m. 32), the skip is stretched to a larger interval and the duration of the accented tone is doubled. The second phrase-group (mm. *34-39)* begins like the first, but its second part is stretched in time (see the "phrase

[21] Ibid.

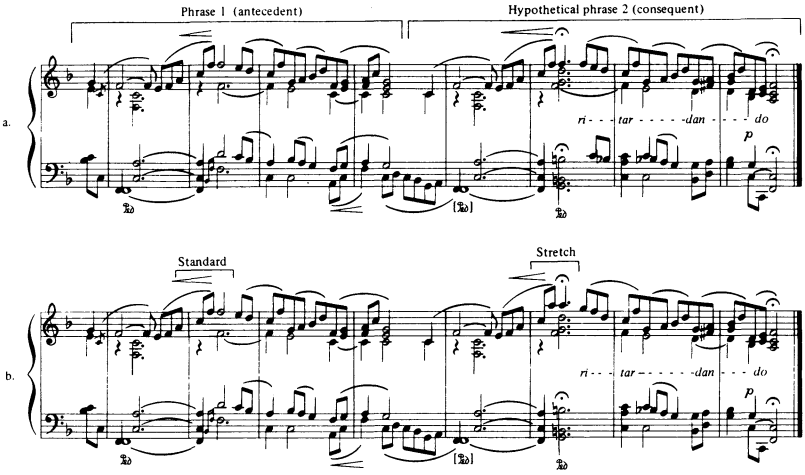


Example 1

structure" analysis below Example 1), becoming twice as long as it was before (four measures instead of two).

The expressive tension of these stretches needs no comment. As is usually the case, the upper note of the stretched interval is a discordant, accented nonharmonic tone called an appoggiatura. The discordance, calling for resolution, produces a sense of goal-directed motion — motion that will create a sense of relative completeness by presenting the tones omitted by the skip. What needs to be noticed is that the stretching in this passage is part of a syntactic process: that is, the stretching is part of a change of key (a modulatory, harmonic process) and by the end of the passage the new key (B^b) is established.

In the famous melody of Schumann's "Träumerei," however, stretching has no syntactic function. Rather it essentially serves the end of expression. The music consists of two phrases (Example 2). The second begins like the first and could have continued



Example 2

like the first, except for the closing cadence. That is, the melody *might* have been as shown in Example 2a.

Instead of this repetition, for the second half of the period, Schumann stretches the interval at the end of the first melodic gesture (Example 2b). The expressive tension of the stretch is heightened both by the harmony (the high note is a discord, where in the first phrase it was a concord) and by the fact that the resolution of this discord is delayed by a fermata (𝄐), lengthening the high note. These intensifications are, however, largely local. The basic harmonic relationships of the passage are not significantly affected by the size of the skip. Instead, what the stretch does — in addition to heightening expressive tension — is to give the melody a point of culmination; and such "high points" are, as we shall see, very characteristic of Romantic form. The close of the period is, in typical Romantic fashion, characterized by *abatement* [22] — a gradual cessation of activity and tension, a dying-away

[22] I have borrowed the term "abatement" from Robert G. Hopkins. See his "Secondary Parameters and Closure in the Symphonies of Gustav Mahler" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981), p. 3f. and *passim.*

created by descending pitches, softer dynamics, and a slowing down ("ritardando") to the final note, which is prolonged by a fermata.

As the Mozart and Schumann examples suggest, melodic stretching usually occurs as an aspect of what I call a gap-fill schema.[23] The schema has two parts. In the first, and generally shorter part, a skip (almost always rising) creates an incompleteness: the gap. In the second part, or fill, the notes skipped over in the first part are presented in more or less linear scale-like order. Especially in stretch melodies it is typical that the top note of the gap is an appoggiatura — that is, a tensive discord that gives direction and impetus to the ensuing fill.

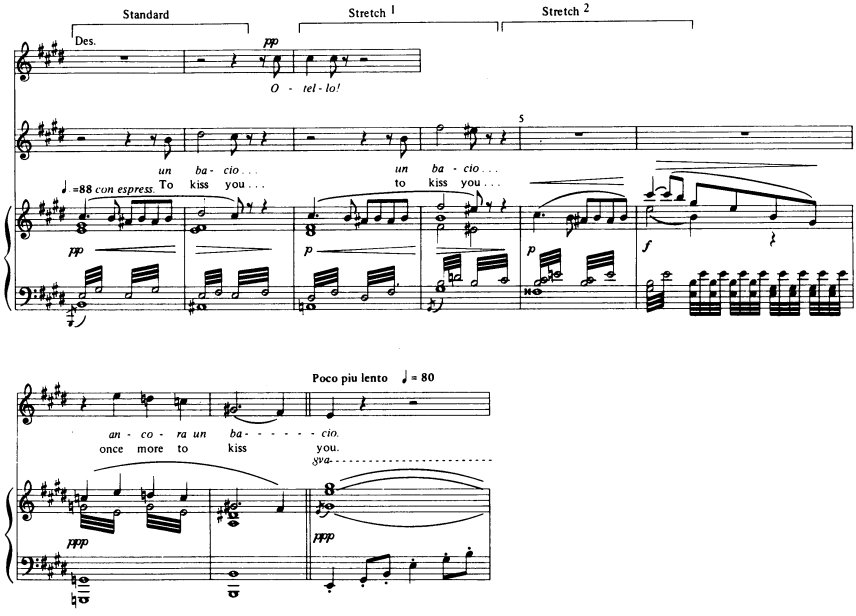
Stretching is a favored strategy of nineteenth-century composers not only because of its expressive power, but also because that power arises from a direct comparison that is not dependent upon syntactic convention. That is, stretching is a "natural" kind of relationship. And it seems obvious that the closer in time the patterns being compared are to one another, the more patent and effective modifications, such as stretching, will be. For this reason, as the nineteenth century moves on, and as composers choose weaker syntactic constraints, the *standard* pattern and the *stretch* are directly juxtaposed instead of being separated by intervening material, as in Schumann's melody. Furthermore, I suspect that there is a tendency for both the relative frequency of stretch melodies and the size of the stretches to increase.

These traits are evident in many of the melodies of the Romantic period. One well-known passage will serve as illustration. It is the "Kiss" theme from Verdi's *Otello* (Example 3). Verdi's melody is intense. This is not only the result of melodic relationships, but also of harmonic ones which create an atmosphere of ambiguity and instability. The ambience of tension is both

[23] The nature of "gap-fill" melodies is discussed in my *Explaining Music; Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley, 1973), pp. 145–57.

heightened and characterized by the manifest, yet tender, ardor of the melody. For the stretching that expresses desire is compounded: not only does the second presentation of the "Kiss motive stretch the interval of the first (the standard), but the third presentation of the motive stretches the preceding one — reaching the upper octave ($C^{\sharp}$), which serves to signify completion of the rising motion. Contributing to this tension is the prevalence of appoggiaturas, which occur on the first beat of each measure.

The prevalence of appoggiaturas in the music of Romanticism can scarcely be exaggerated. And it can readily be related to the ideology of Romanticism. To the extent that sonic tension and melodic tendency are generated by discord, the expressive and processive power of appoggiaturas is "natural" — that is, independent of explicitly syntactic convention. The sense of downward



Example 3

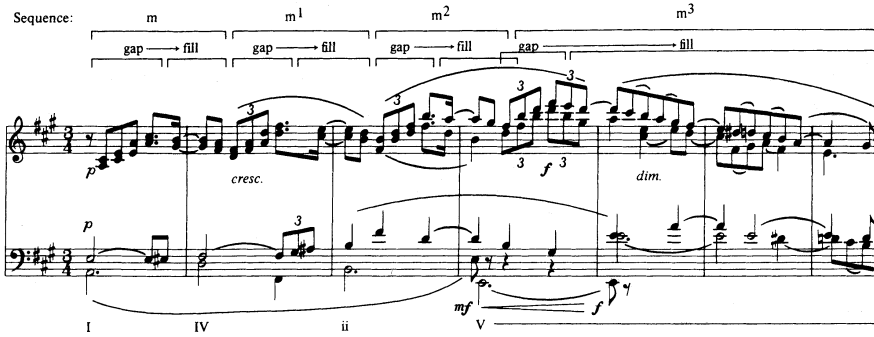
pull toward a note of greater concordance gives such figures a strong affective character — a character that, generally speaking, becomes more pronounced as the relative duration of appoggiaturas increases over the course of the nineteenth century. From a rhythmic point of view, appoggiaturas create mobile, on-going rhythms that are associated with the Romantic valuing of openness, becoming, and continual growth. Harmonically, extended appoggiaturas give rise to ambiguity by generating doubts about relative functional importance and, in so doing, they often obscure the nature of syntactic processes.

Though stretching is a strategy characteristic of much Romantic music, not all composers chose to use it. Indeed, two of the most important composers of the period, Wagner and Debussy, seem expressly to avoid it. But they do so for very different reasons.

Wagner's avoidance is, as I see it, related to the development and use of the leitmotive as a narrative and symbolic device. Leitmotives are musical ideas that have referential, narrative significance — symbolizing people, concepts, and objects.[24] Because of their referential role, leitmotives must be readily recognizable in a variety of musical and dramatic contexts. And to be recognizable, they must be relatively constant. Stretching is avoided, I suggest, because it tends to disturb such constancy.

I am not asserting that melodic stretching never occurs in Wagner's music. But I suspect that when it does, it is in connection with lyric passages; for instance, there are unequivocal stretches in the "Prize Song" from Die Meistersinger. Nor do I wish to imply that Wagner did not employ the kinds of schemata typical of Romantic music. Gap-fill melodies, for instance, abound in his works — especially at points of fervent lyricism, as in Example 4,

[24]As far as I can see, the tendency of contemporary scholars to denigrate the semantic function of leitmotives is simply continuing evidence of formalist snobbery. Serious criticism of Wagner's music must concern itself with the relationship between form and process on the one hand and symbolic/semantic function on the other.



a passage from the first act of Die Walkure. Though the passage consists of a succession — a rising sequence — of octave gaps, there are no stretched intervals. Nevertheless, the music is strongly goal-directed, not only in melodic plan (emphasized, again, by strong appoggiaturas), but also in harmony which moves to a prolonged dominant chord.

Debussy, too, chooses motivic constancy rather than stretching. He does so, however, not because his motives have a semantic function, but in order to emphasize the sensuous qualities of sound per se. Only by expressly weakening the processive, goal-directed aspects of experience can we be forced, as it were, to attend 'primarily to the qualities of sense experience — to the timbre of a particular instrument, the sound of a specific harmony, and so on?[25] For this reason, Debussy avoids not only stretching but other relationships that are patently processive as well. In his music there are few clearly syntactic harmonic progressions, such as that from the subdominant to the dominant, and almost no goal-directed melodic schemata such as gap-fill patterns.

III

I now want to consider a broad and fundamental difference in the kinds of schemata that tend to be chosen by eighteenth- versus

[25] For further discussion of this point see my *Music, the Arts, and Ideas,* p. 73f.

nineteenth-century composers. This difference corresponds in many respects to the distinction that psychologists have made between scripts and plans, and I shall use their terminology. The changing-note schema (to be discussed shortly) and the gap-fill patterning already described will serve to exemplify the distinction between scripts and plans.[26] According to Roger Schank and Robert Abelson, "A script is a structure. . . made up of slots and requirements about what can fill those slots. The structure is an interconnected whole, and what is in one slot affects what can be in another."[27] Melodies based on the changing-note schema fill this prescription. That schema, and others like it, stipulate specific melodic, harmonic, and formal possibilities and probabilities. In other words, they are inextricably linked to syntactic constraints. Melodies based on the gap-fill schema, on the other hand, involve more general relationships. Very little is stipulated about particular pitches, harmonies, and formal relationships. Any skip-pattern can act as a gap, while a wide variety of different, but more or less conjunct, pitch successions can function as a fill — and harmony and form will vary accordingly. Schemata of this sort are akin to plans. As described by Schank and Abelson, plans are repositories "for general information that will connect events that cannot be connected by use of an available script. . . . A plan explains how a given state or event was prerequisite for, or derived from, another state or event."[28]

This distinction suggests a broad hypothesis that warrants more careful confirmation than can be attempted here. The hy-

[20] Changing-note melodies are discussed in my *Explaining Music,* pp. 191–96, and in Burton Rosner and Leonard B. Meyer, "Melodic Processes and the Perception of Music," in Diana Deutsch, ed., *The Psychology* of *Music* (New York, 1982), pp. 317–41.

[27] *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (Hillsdale, N.J., 1977), p. 41. I am grateful to Robert Gjerdingen for calling this distinction and the work of Schank and Abelson to my attention.

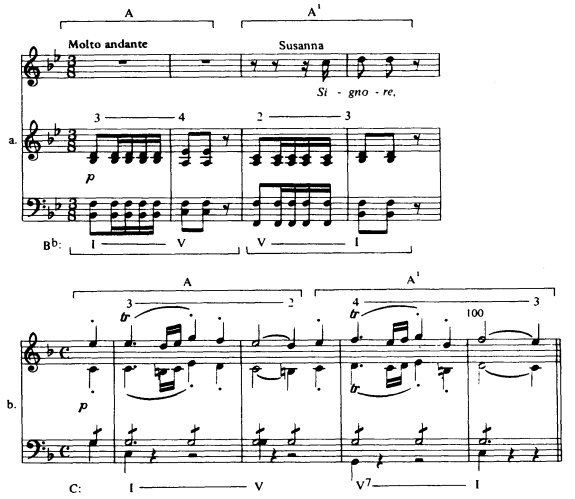
[28] Ibid., pp. 70 and 77.

pothesis is this: music of the Classic period is dominated by syntactic scripts; music of the Romantic period, on the other hand, tends to favor the use of general plans. To illustrate this point, I shall begin by describing the shift from the use of changing-note melodies, which are script-based, to what have been called "axial" melodies, which are less stipulative—that is, more plan-like.[29] Again, it is important to recognize that the shift being considered is a matter of emphasis.

The changing-note schema can occur on different steps of the scale. The one I shall discuss is on the third of the scale. It is defined by the following features: a melodic pattern that begins on the third of the scale, moves a step above and a step below the third of the scale, and then returns to the third; a harmonic progression from the tonic (I) to the dominant (V), and then back from the dominant to the tonic; and a balanced formal structure composed of two similar parts (A-Á). Two unadorned realizations will illustrate this schema. The first is from the Finale of Act II of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* (Example 5a); the second is the closing theme of the last movement of Schubert's Octet in F Major, Opus 166 (Example 5b). In both instances the successive pitches of the melody (3-4//2-3, in the Mozart; and 3-2//4-3, in the Schubert) fill their assigned slots; the harmonic progression (I-V//V-I) is as stipulated; and the formal plan (A-Á) complies with the requirements of the script.

The beginning of the second key-area tune from the first movement of Schubert's String Quintet in C Major (Opus 163) is much less script-like (Example 6). Though the pitches (3-4//2-3) characteristic of the schema are present, harmony combines with rhythm and phrase structure to obscure formal parallelism. Instead of a script, consisting of a statement and a balanced response, the effect is that of a central tone (the third of the scale over tonic

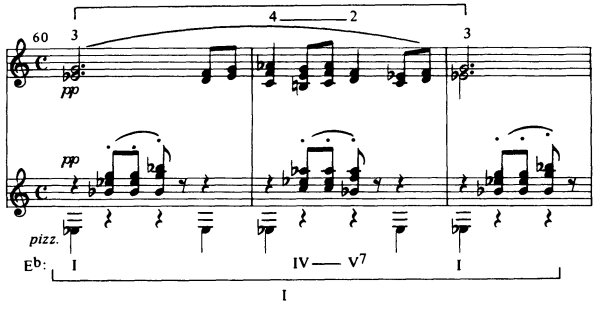
[29] The term "axial" is borrowed from Eugene Narmour, *Beyond Schenkerism* (Chicago, 1977), p. 22f. I have discussed axial patterns in *Explaining Music,* pp. 183–91.



Example 5

harmony) which functions as an axis around which upper and lower neighboring tones revolve and toward which they tend to gravitate. Put differently: as the script stipulations of the changing-note schema become partially weakened, the general axial plan — that is, move away from and return to a central tone — becomes relatively more important.

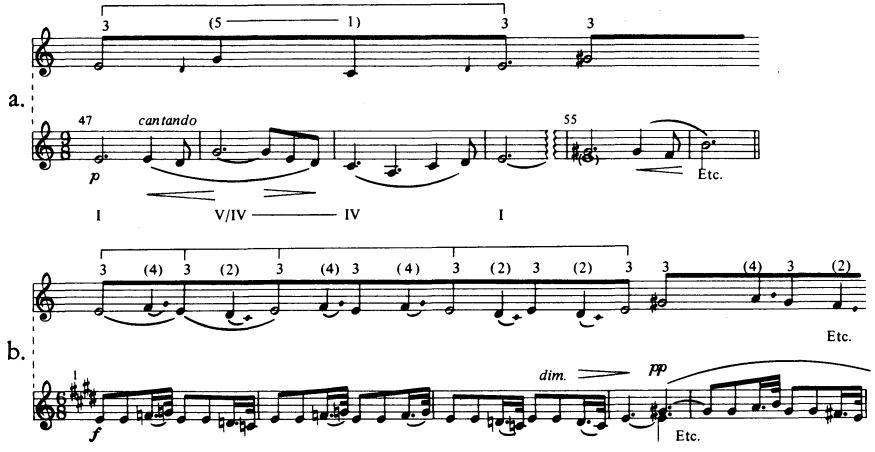
Two more examples will serve to emphasize the points being made. Both the lyric melody from Liszt's *Les Preludes* (Exam-



Example 6

ple 7a) and the somber theme that opens the slow movement of Brahms' Fourth Symphony (Example 7b) are plainly axial — moving around, and returning to, a focal center, without necessary reference to a clear syntactic script. And, after less than decisive closure, both themes repeat their axial patterns a major third higher (on G#).

Changing-note melodies continued to be written throughout the nineteenth century, though usually disguised in some way. But the proportion of axial melodies increased dramatically. Composers chose them because they were consonant with the ideas of Romanticism. For instance, the generally weak closure of axial patterns accords with the Romantic valuing of the continuousness of open forms. Absence of strong syntactic closure also facilitated the composition of large musical structures; and magnitude was prized by Romantics as an aspect of the sublime. That is, because axial patterns are open, they can easily be repeated either at the same or a different pitch-level. In this way, as in Liszt's *Les Preludes,* four measures could be extended to sixteen — and perhaps even more. (For composers who chose to rely upon convention as little as possible and, consequently, had to make many time-

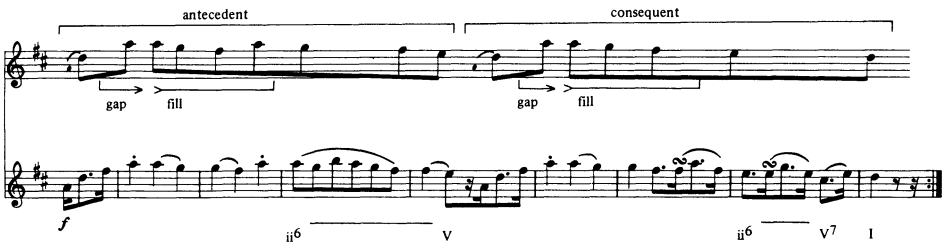


Example 7

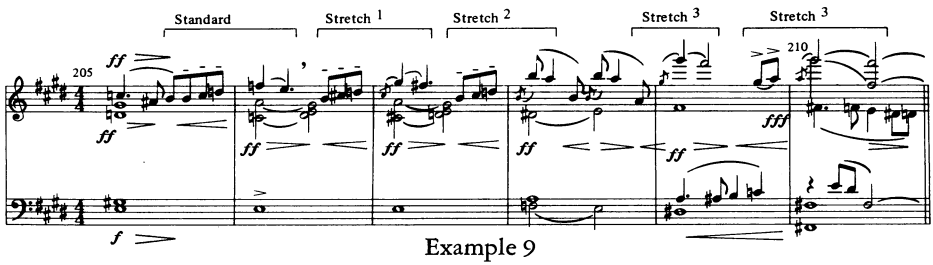
consuming compositional choices, such economy was not a trivial consideration.)

Most important of all, axial melodies are understandable in the absence of syntactic conventions. A comparison of the constraints governing axial and changing-note melodies will help to make this clear, In axial melodies, the prime process generating tonal tension is that of departure from a central pitch, followed by the satisfaction of return to that pitch. Our experience of this can be attributed to innate (i.e., natural) cognitive proclivities. Changing-note melodies also depart from and return to a central tone. But when *they* do so, the process is to a considerable extent understood as being governed by the learned constraints of tonal syntax. Put differently: a listener who understood nothing of tonality would perceive a changing-note melody as being axial. In short, in changing-note melodies nurture dominates nature, while in axial melodies it is the other way around.

A comparable shift in emphasis characterizes the history of gap-fill melodies. Although the schema is plan-like, eighteenth-century realizations of it tend to be dominated by syntactic scripts such as antecedent-consequent relationships. That is, each phrase of the melody contains a gap that is followed by a fill; but the first phrase reaches only partial closure (normally on some note of the dominant triad), while the second reaches greater closure (on one of the tones of the tonic triad). In other words, the phrase



Example *8*



Example 9

relationships are stipulated by a script. For instance, and typically in eighteenth-century music, both the antecedent and consequent phrases of the Minuetto of Mozart's Flute Quartet in A (Example 8) begin with a gap pattern. But instead of returning to the tonic, the first fill ends with a half cadence (V) just before reaching the tonic. The syntactic script, as it were, prevents the gap-fill plan from reaching completion. Then, in the second phrase, the fill is complete and is coordinate with syntactic closure.

In the music of Romanticism, script constraints tend to be attenuated and, late in the period, virtually disappear. Often, as though to compensate for the weakening of syntactic relationships, the generating force of an initial gap is reinforced through reiteration. A melody from the third movement of Mahler's Fourth Symphony provides a clear instance of gap reiteration coupled with forceful melodic stretching (Example 9). Though the nature of the plan is emphatic and unequivocal, the syntactic goal seems ambiguous until the very end. Instead of resolving, the dominant harmony is dissipated when the highest note is not only repeated but prolonged.

Despite the intensity of the successively stretched gaps and discordant appoggiaturas, the implied fill does not follow until some hundred measures later.[30] There, following a monumental affirmation of the local tonic (mm. 315—320), the melody gradually de-

[30] Because of its length, no example is given. The reader is asked to consult Mahler's score.

scends through a fill (mm. 320–353) — but one that is only weakly syntactic because it first avoids the leading-tone of the scale and then the fourth step of the scale. The whole end of the movement consists of a process of gradual subsidence in which the music dies away without decisive melodic, rhythmic or harmonic closure. As the final harmony, the dominant, makes evident, the end is open — leading to the last movement of the Symphony.

Taken by itself, this final fill seems a somewhat feeble response to the forceful tensions of the many stretched intervals and discordant appoggiaturas that went before. Moreover, though the nature of the gap-fill schema is not in doubt, the myriad different gaps — none adequately or proximately filled — makes it difficult to know which, if any, is the gap that establishes criteria for a satisfactory fill and, consequently, what, if anything, would constitute an adequate fill. Nevertheless, the end seems satisfying. For tension has been more than merely dissipated in subsidence — the gradual dying-away. Particular fills, specific resolutions are unnecessary, I believe, because the magnitude and power of the apotheosis-like affirmation serve to absolve prior implicative and syntactic obligations. That is, the unrealized implications of melodic and harmonic relationships, the unresolved tensions of syntactic processes, and the ambiguous formal juxtapositions are absorbed or dissolved through the sheer intensity of what I call the statistical climax.

IV

Reference to apotheosis, statistical climax, and subsidence — all terms that will be explained shortly — brings me to the final topic to be discussed: namely, musical form.[31] Once again, the differences between Classic and Romantic music, though matters of emphasis, are clear. Classic music tends to employ script-

[31] Many of the matters considered in this section are discussed in somewhat greater detail in two earlier articles: "Toward a Theory of Style," in Berel Lang, ed., *The Concept of Style* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 3 — 44, and "Exploiting Limits."

dominated forms; Romantic music tends to employ plan-dominated ones. To understand the relationship between the ideology of Romanticism and the shift from script- to plan-domination, it is necessary to consider some of the differences between the primary and secondary parameters of music.

Melody, harmony, and rhythm are understood to be the primary parameters of music because they are governed by syntactic constraints — constraints, that is, which stipulate relationships of relative mobility, stability, and closure. The primary parameters give rise to what I call *syntactic form,* and important points of structural articulation — turning points in the form — are, accordingly, called *syntactic climaxes.* Because they can create clear closure, the primary parameters make hierarchic structures possible. Indeed, a musical form is usually analyzed in terms of the closural strengths of its several parts. Such analyses in turn lead to the classification of form based upon part/whole relationships. Last, because the parts of any hierarchy have a degree of autonomy, they (as well as the whole work) can be thought of as possessing the actuality of *being* rather than only the potentiality of *becoming.* It should be evident by now that these characteristics of syntactic form — dependence upon learned convention, the existence of hierarchies, the classification of more or less fixed types, and the actuality of being — were scarcely values of Romanticism.

Dynamics, timbre, rates of activity, pitch-frequency, concord and discord, and so on are understood to be secondary parameters. Because they do not stipulate relationships of relative mobility, stability, and closure, these parameters do not give rise to syntax. Instead of stipulative relationships such as leading-tone to tonic, subdominant to dominant, upbeat to downbeat, antecedent/consequent, the relationships created by secondary parameters involve changes in relative amount along an unsegmented continuum: for instance, faster or slower pitch-frequency, louder or softer dynamics, higher or lower rates of activity, etc.

Because such differences are quantitative, I call both the secondary parameters and the forms to which they give rise, *statistical.* The basic paradigm for statistical form is what Leonard Ratner has called the "dynamic curve" — a succession of cumulative, wave-like shapes in which the music builds to a highpoint, subsides somewhat, and builds again, until, toward the end of the work, the point of highest intensity is reached.[32] After that, there is a gradual subsidence toward cessation and silence. The highpoints in such dynamic curves are *statistical climaxes.*

The ability of secondary parameters to shape musical experience is less dependent upon learned constraints and conventions. In this sense their effects are "natural" rather than artificial, and their increased importance is consonant with the beliefs and attitudes of Romanticism. A passage consisting of gradually rising pitches, louder dynamics, faster rates of motion, a greater number of parts, and heightened degrees of discord will produce tension and excitement. Such *intensifying* passages lead to statistical climaxes. Passages of the opposite sort — consisting of descending pitches, slower rates of motion, softer dynamics, and so on — will, of course, reduce tension, leading to relaxation and repose. Such *abating* processes lead to cessation.

The music of the past century and a half abounds with examples of statistical form. On a small scale, the prevalence of the plan affected many of the excerpts considered earlier in the lecture — Schumann's "Träumerei," the "Kiss" theme from Verdi's *Otello,* the sequential passage from Wagner's *Die Walküre,* and the highpoint and abatement from Mahler's Fourth Symphony. My illustration of larger-scale statistical form — perhaps the most famous exemplification of all — will be the last part of Isolde's "Liebestod" from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde.*[33]

[32] *Music: The Listener's Art* (New York, 19GG), pp. 314-16.

[33] Because of its length, the music is not given; the passage referred to begins with the words "in mich dringet, auf sich schwinget . . ." and goes to the end of the opera.

Little needs to be said about the first part of the "Liebestod's" typically three-stage form: the gradually rising wave-like surges of intensification seem to strive toward some unattainable goal. In Liszt's words, what is expressed is "all that relates to the inaccessible depths of imperishable desires and longing for the infinite."[34] The statistical climax — here a briefly sustained highpoint[35] — is related to an important value of Romanticism: that is, the expression of the sublime. As Peter Lichtenthal wrote in his Dictionary of 1826,

> Pleasure in the sublime is distinguished from pleasure in the beautiful, in that whereas the beautiful relates to the *form* of things, that is to say to their *quality,* the sublime is a matter of their *size,* or *quantity* and may be found in objects devoid of form, such as enormous masses of rock. . . . So the sublime is that which, by its immeasurable grandeur, stimulates the action of reason increasing its vital senses. Indeed, as Kant and Schiller have said, the sublime comprises the infinite which terrifies the senses and the imagination beyond the powers of comprehension. . .[36]

It should be obvious that the distinction between syntactic form (stipulated by the primary parameters) and statistical form (fostered by secondary parameters) corresponds closely to the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime — a distinction that was part of the scuttlebutt of Romanticism.

The abating processes that follow the statistical highpoint of the "Liebestod" lead to cessation, but not to definitive closure.[37] Because the relationships created by secondary parameters involve incremental changes along a continuum, they establish states of

[34] Preface to the *Album d'un voyageur;* excerpted in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics,* p. 537.

[35] During the words "Welt Atems wehen dem All . . . ."

[30] *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica;* excerpted in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics,* p. 372.

[37] Beginning with the words "ertrinken, versinken . . . ."

relative, rather than stipulative, tension and repose. When, for example, does a *diminuendo* — a gradual softening of dynamics — reach closure? When does a gradual slowing of rate of motion do so? The answer is *never.* Secondary parameters cannot create definitive closure. They can only cease or die away into nothingness. And precisely because they cannot close, the gradual abatement of the secondary parameters suggests the eternal continuousness of Becoming.

The openness of the abatement of secondary parameters is supported by harmonic relationships — relationships which suggest that Wagner deliberately avoided both conventional and definitive closure. The sustained highpoint of the "Liebestod" occurs over a forceful dominant-seventh chord, But instead of leading to customary closure on the tonic, the seventh chord moves — resolves is too strong a word — to the subdominant. And it is subdominant harmony that leads, somewhat inconclusively, to the softly sustained tonic chord at the end.

The abatement that ends the "Liebestod" not only signifies musical cessation — the end of the opera as well as the aria — but also relevant and important extramusical ideas: ideas associated with the deaths of Tristan and Isolde, with eternal Becoming, and with the redemption of the lovers. The redemption is symbolized both by the religious "overtones" of the "Amen," or plagal, cadence and by the heavenly height of the sustained violins and woodwinds.

Statistical form, such as that illustrated by the "Liebestod," is continuous. The ideal, consonant with the notions of organicism, is one of gradual, seamless unfolding — a process of natural and necessary growth that contrasts sharply with the presumably artificial and arbitrary part/whole hierarchies characteristic of syntactic form. However striking they may *appear* to be, differences and contrasts, as well as part/whole relationships, are regarded as accidental, illusory manifestations of a single process or principle

that governs the succession of patterns in the work. Moreover, in the Romantic view the process or principle that imparts meaning and unity to the composition almost invariably lies concealed beneath the trappings and suits of diversity. Such underlying principles have a tendency to become reified — to be thought of as the "real" stuff of works of art, while the sights, sounds, and smells of the world are considered to be but second-order happenstance. From this point of view, organicism is Platonism in biological clothing.

The prevalence of statistical form and the correlative increase in the importance of secondary parameters had significant consequences for music composition and theory in the nineteenth century. Because secondary parameters cannot create decisive closure, they cannot give rise to clearly articulated hierarchic structures. In the absence of hierarchy, and in the absence of belief in the efficacy of convention which normalizes the presence of contrast and disparity, the basis of musical unity becomes a pressing problem. That is, smaller parts cannot be subsumed within larger ones; as a result, contrasting harmonies and conflicting melodies confront one another directly in the confined space of foreground juxtaposition. How do patently different events, disparate gestures, contrasts of expression form coherent wholes? The persistent — almost obsessive — preoccupation in music theory and aesthetics generally, with the nature and sources of unity is testimony to the power of the denigration of convention and the decline in hierarchic structuring.

Of the various means employed to unify compositions perhaps the most important and pervasive was that of thematic transformation. Reflecting the power and prevalence of the organic model, thematic transformation involved the derivation of all the patterns and relationships of a composition from a single motivic cell. Carl Czerny's description of Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto is representative of this conception of unity. Writing around 1828, he observes that, following the first tutti, "all other passages are

drawn from the principal theme, by which means the composition obtains that characteristic unity by which it is so highly distinguished." [38] And theorist Peter Lichtenthal, writing around the same time, asserts that "Amongst the works of the great masters may be found innumerable pieces that are built on a single motif. What marvellous unity there is in the structure of these compositions."[39]

Observe that, according to this conception, unity is independent of convention, tonal syntax, and learning. Instead, it arises out of similarity relationships among musical patterns. If such similarities are at times difficult to discern, this is because the process of organic growth and transformation that generates a surface diversity often conceals the underlying, generating musical cell or principle. That this kind of organic unity is independent of conventional constraints is evident in the fact that it constitutes the basis for much non-tonal contemporary music — especially serialism. That the ideology of Romanticism which spawned such views of unity is still very much with us is evident not only in the oppressive prevalence of "deep structures" — whether those of Chomskian linguistics, Freudian psychology, or Schenkerian music theory — but also in the writings of music theorists and composers. Here is what one of the most influential serial composers, Anton Webern, had to say about Bach's *Art of Fugue*:

> All these fugues are created from one single theme, which is constantly transformed. . . . What does all this mean: An effort towards an all-embracing unity. . . . So we see that this — our — kind of thought has been the ideal for composers of all periods. . . . To develop everything from a single principal idea![40]

[38] *School of Practical Composition*, vol. I (London, 1848), p. 164.

[39] *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica*; excerpted in le Huray and Day, *Music and Aesthetics,* p. 374.

[40] Anton Webern, "Towards a New Music," *The Score,* no. 28 (January 1961), p. 30.

Thus we come to our own times; but not to the end of Romanticism. Both in practice and in theory its powerful presence is still pervasive — in the primitivism of popular music, in the statistical music of composers such as Xenakis, in the minimalism of Reich and Glass, and in the formalism of much music theory and much of music aesthetics. The consequences of Romanticism for the great tradition of Western art music have been ironic and paradoxical: for the repudiation of supposedly artificial conventions and arbitrary hierarchies in favor of presumably natural relationships not dependent upon learning has led to music which, far from being egalitarian and accessible, has proved to be elitist and academic. And this untoward outcome, I believe, poses an important — even profound — question about humankind: namely, whether it is our nature to be naïvely natural — without cultivated concepts and conventional constraints.

I must stop here, since the classic constraints of conventional lecture-time have been stretched to the limit. And it seems appropriate, given the concerns of this lecture, to end not with definitive closure, but with Romantic oppenness.[41]

[41]This essay owes an incalculable debt to the perceptive and cogent criticisms of my wife, Janet M. Levy.