The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis

Ruth A. Solie

19th-Century Music, Vol. 4, No. 2. (Autumn, 1980), pp. 147-156.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0148-2076%28198023%294%3A2%3C147%3ATLWOAM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-A

19th-Century Music is currently published by University of California Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

http://www.jstor.org
Wed Feb 21 04:35:32 2007

The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis

RUTH A. SOLIE

Every linear progression shows the eternal shape of life—birth to death. The progression begins, lives its own existence in the passing tones, ceases when it has reached its goal—all as organic as life itself.
Heinrich Schenker

Every culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood, and old age.
Oswald Spengler

The notion that human history, society, and experience may be viewed and described in organic terms has been a pervasive one in Western culture. The use of the organism and its life as metaphors specifically for works of art can be traced back at least as far as Plato and Aristotle, and has recurred periodically in the history of philosophy and aesthetics, but its most recent incarnation can be thought of as belonging quintessentially to the critical language of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The metaphor has not been without significance for music theory and criticism; since, as linguists have been telling us for some time now, language is not merely reflective but actually constitutive of our awareness, constellations of language like that surrounding the figure of the organism tend to shape and control the observations of the analyst using them. To borrow a few phrases from the literature on melodic analysis, for instance, in "the embodied will to motion" one might be inclined to perceive characteristics not so readily apparent in "a pitch-time trajectory" or "a stochastic process with sequential dependencies"—notwithstanding the possibility that all three phrases might refer to the same melody. Similarly, the analyst dealing with a "musical organism" will likely respond to it differently from one studying a "linguistic structure" or perhaps "fluid architecture."

For this brief study I will take as illustrative certain aspects of the work of Heinrich Schenker and Rudolph Reti. They are by no means alone in their reliance on organic language, but neither is their selection arbitrary. I choose them simply as loci of two now familiar impulses in analysis, especially of music of the common-practice period; that is,

0148–2076/80/030147+10$00.50 © 1980 by The Regents of the University of California.

both exemplify methodologies which have to some degree become "standard." Both reductive or layer analysis and notions of thematic unity are, in their several ways, offspring of the same metaphoric orientation in nineteenth-century aesthetics.

The characteristic of biological systems most commonly invoked in aesthetic evaluation is their "organic unity," a notion which lies at the center of a whole network of related ideas. The use of such unity as a primary criterion for excellence in works of art is hallowed by time and tradition, so much so that in recent decades it has often been taken utterly for granted. Generally, the principal canon of an organic aesthetic can be formulated in the following deceptively simple terms: a work of art should possess unity in the same way, and to the same extent, that a living organism does. Such a criterion, however, raises more questions than it answers. A more concrete and helpful definition has been formulated by Stephen Pepper:

> There are two qualitative dimensions that yield organistic standards of beauty—the degree of integration and the amount of the material integrated. . . . The maximum of integration is a condition where every detail of the object calls for every other. . . . Or negatively, it is a condition where no detail can be removed or altered without marring or even destroying the value of the whole. Such a whole is called an organic unity.[1]

The terms of Pepper's definition originate in the organistic school of literary criticism as found in the writings of its first major exponent, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Under the influence of the German organicist philosophers of the late eighteenth century, and in an era in which biology was gradually replacing mechanics as the central intellectual paradigm, Coleridge applies organic explanatory categories to a wide variety of areas of investigation, including history, a theory of mind, and aesthetics. Indeed, in his posthumously published *Theory of Life*, Coleridge defines life itself as "the power which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many," or "of unity in multeity"; this power "unites a given all into a whole that is presupposed by all its parts."[2] A work of art considered as living being, then, will be evaluated similarly, in terms of multiplicity-and-unity. Coleridge is particularly fascinated by the possibility that the multeity of traits assimilated in a work might include quite sharp contrasts, whose artistic unification will thus be all the more powerful. The task of poetic imagination, he says, is

> the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative.[3]

Not only is the balance of disparate qualities to be considered in an organic aesthetic, but also the reciprocal relationship of part and whole. The problem, as Coleridge sees it, is to create not the greatest possible amount of unity but the optimum amount consistent with preserving the separate character of the components—that is, to maintain the creative tension between whole and parts.

> A poem is that species of composition which . . . is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.[4]

In literary criticism since Coleridge the organic idea has become so widely known and applied that there is a certain tendency for its language to be taken for granted and for certain fundamental questions to go unasked. Why do works of art need such unity? what sort of organism can serve as the model? what are the relevant characteristics of life forms and, in fact, is there any evidence to suggest that they can support the weight of aesthetic justification which has been erected upon them? That is to say, a cardinal assumption of organicist

[1]Stephen Pepper, *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), p. 79.

[2]Pointed out by M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London, 1953), p. 220.

[3]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (London, 1965), p. 174.

[4]Ibid., p. 172.

criticism is that the form as given is "necessary"—parts cannot be removed, added, or rearranged without, as Pepper says, "marring or even destroying" the whole. As genuine organisms go, however, this view seems a bit sentimental. The customary neglect of these speculations in organicist criticism can largely be explained by considering that for Coleridge himself—and for many later nineteenth-century writers as well—the organic idea had much more than a metaphoric force. For the theory as Coleridge used it originated in the tenets of German and English idealist philosophy, where it had a far more concrete significance.

From its origins with Leibniz in the seventeenth century to the work of the neo-Hegelians of the twentieth, the tradition of idealistic philosophy has included a number of differing schools of thought. Common threads among them can be found, however, including especially an emphasis on mind-spirit values as opposed to material ones and the basic hypothesis that reality exists in the ideal realm and not in the finite world of objects. There is also the suggestion of a strong interrelationship between all things: in Bosanquet's words, "every finite existence necessarily transcends itself and points toward other existences and finally to the whole."[5] Concrete objects, to the early idealists, were merely the time-space relationships between the "real" (ideal) substances. Leibniz was much concerned with defining and characterizing these substances in such a way that concrete bodies could be explained.

> Assuming that the human being, consisting of mind and body, is a true unity he [Leibniz] extended the notion of organism to cover all beings endowed with substantial forms. A substantial form, for Leibniz, was something analogous to a mind and capable of "perception" (the lowest degree of mental activity, not involving either self-consciousness or thought). It is through its perception that any individual "expresses" what goes on in the universe.[6]

An organism, then, is an ideal substance which expresses the universe in a wider sense. Not an unlikely definition for a work of art!

With the philosophy of Kant, the transcendental aspect of idealism was given increased emphasis. It is interesting that this particular branch of the tradition, which flourished in both Britain and the United States, was closely associated in both countries with literary men and especially poets. The American transcendentalists, with their poetic vision of one Soul shared by all living creatures, are first cousins to the exponents of organic literary criticism. While the organism model itself is not particularly stressed by the idealists, they do dwell on the mystical relationship of parts and wholes in the universe—as we have seen, an important article in the organicists' creed as well.

The clearest explication of the relationship of idealism to organicism is found in the aesthetic writings of Hegel. For Hegel, the transcendence of the finite characterizes the highest human achievement, and at this summit he places art, religion, and philosophy. The arts in turn are ranked according to their degree of ideality, with architecture and sculpture at the bottom and poetry, closely followed by music, at the top. An art work, he writes, is "an individual configuration of reality whose express function it is to make manifest the Idea in its appearance." Such manifestations of Idea occur first in nature, and provide models of aesthetic beauty:

> We must . . . conceive Nature as herself containing in potency the absolute Idea. She is that Idea in *apparent shape,* which mind, in its synthetic power, posits as the object opposed to itself.[7]

Beauty is in turn defined by Hegel as the *union* of idea and objective reality; that is, the success of this unification is the measure of the degree of beauty. It follows, then, that the unity most like nature's unity produces the highest beauty.

---

[5]Quoted by H. B. Acton in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Paul Edwards (New York, 1967), s.v. "Idealism," p. 115.

[6]L. J. Russell, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* s.v. "Leibniz," p. 428.

[7]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art,* trans. F. P. B. Osmaston, vol. I (London, 1920), pp. 100, 127.

Note, however, that when in subsequent generations literal notions of "organic unity" are applied to the analysis or evaluation of particular works of art, a paradoxical reversal occurs of the values originally at the root of the concept. For the philosophers, the point of calling something "organic" was not to describe the arrangement of its physical attributes but, on the contrary, to elevate it to a status transcendent of the physical. They stressed that the ideal quality of living organisms was the element of soul or *Geist*, and wished to attribute this quality to works of art. For this reason Hegel placed considerably more emphasis on defects of content or Idea than on defects of executive skill in his discussions of art. That is, he never suggested a clinical accounting for the fingers and toes of a poem; his own writing about particular works of art makes this quite clear.

This particular manifestation of idealism, then, places much emphasis on the transcendence of the multifarious, diverse substances of the apparent world in a higher and unified reality. It suggests that, as Leibniz puts it, every small thing mirrors the whole universe.[8] A gradual reorientation of philosophical and analytical attention occurs during this period, from a consideration of the part-to-whole construction of the world which prevailed in mechanistic pre-Romantic times to a construction in which the whole is primary and its constituent parts derived therefrom. It appears first as a salient characteristic of the organism—

> The difference between an inorganic and organic body lies in this: In the first . . . the whole is nothing more than a collection of the individual parts or phenomena . . . while in the second, the whole is everything, and the parts are nothing[9]

—but is eventually applied to historical and aesthetic evaluation as well. "Depend on it, whatever is grand, whatever is truly organic and living, the whole is prior to the parts."[10] The general trend toward philosophical and intellectual holism which is apparent in nineteenth-century criticism is, then, intimately related to the fundamental biological orientation of thought in the period, since holism is an easily-observed property of organisms.

Further, biology is itself moving during the nineteenth century away from its earlier dependence or concentration on anatomy. An increased interest in physiology led to a new focus on process rather than structure. The study of functional interrelationships of the many parts of a complex organism calls for a new paradigm of thought, fundamentally different from the old linear cause-and-effect model. A branch of research in the life sciences which came to be called "organismic biology" characterized the physiological behavior of whole organisms in this way: "The whole acts as a causal unit on its own parts"—a quixotic invocation of *a posteriori* causality which, however illogical in terms of eighteenth-century rationalism, appears quite compelling in a climate of rampant organicism.

In keeping with this general shift of focus, the characteristic of the organism which first and foremost drew the attention of philosophers and artists was its status as a single complete entity. This self-contained unitary quality stands in direct opposition to the nature of machines or of inorganic matter. The problem for literal interpreters of the metaphor, then, is how the artwork may be "analysed"—a threatening word to organicists, with its implication of division into component parts.

> The fact that we divide a work of art into parts, a poem into scenes, episodes, similes, sentences, or a picture into single figures and objects, background, foreground, etc. . . . *annihilates the work*, as dividing the organism into heart, brain, nerves, muscles and so on turns the living being into a corpse.[11]

---

[8]Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Criticism* (London, 1955), p. 193.
[9]Coleridge, *Table Talk*, quoted in Abrams, p. 171.
[10]Coleridge, *Philosophical Lectures*, quoted in Abrams, p. 171.
[11]Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, 2nd edn. (London, 1929), p. 20. Emphasis added.

Or, as Hutchings says admiringly of Reti's *Thematic Process in Music,* "One observes living organisms; one dissects dead bodies."[12] If the critic must fear for the literal annihilation of the work, then meaningful analysis of its constituent elements is in fact not possible. The only clear path for investigation is the monistic one, which leads solely to the pursuit of unities, commonalities, ultimate one-ness.

Perhaps the most significant achievement of Heinrich Schenker was the creation of models and procedures for treating a musical composition as a whole. It has become a commonplace to compare his work to that of Gestalt psychologists, so directly does it address itself to the recognition of a whole work "greater than the sum of its parts." Unlike the Gestaltists, however, Schenker predicates his notion of totality not upon perceptual mechanisms in the observer, but upon the work of art itself. Wholeness stems from a central generative force to which everything else is subordinate. It is at this juncture that the reliance of Schenker's holistic aesthetic upon traditional concepts of organicism is most clear: the generative force which brings forth the composition—an entelechy or *élan vital* to which I shall return below—is music's origin in nature, in the major triad or *Naturklang* as found in the overtone series.

> Even the octave, fifth, and third of the harmonic series are a product of the organic activity of the tone as subject, just as the urges of the human being are organic.[13]

These natural urges of the tone are concretized in the *Ursatz,* a sort of anti-taxonomic device whose effect is to put all pieces in the same category by a Leibnizian transcendence of their multifarious surfaces. Like Leibniz's monads, the *Ursatz* is elemental stuff, mystical/musical protoplasm. Schenker himself draws the parallel:

> All transformations presume a final unalterable nucleus: in man, it is character, and in composition it is the urlinie.
>
> Just as there is only one line, there is only one consummation of it. The urlinie is, to employ a concept of Leibniz, the pre-stabilized harmony of the composition.[14]

Needless to say, here as in other critical realms the organism becomes by literal or metaphoric extension the validator of the work. In one of Schenker's discussions of the *Urlinie,* for example, he explains that no progression of $\hat{8}$–$\hat{5}$ can be an independent *Urlinie* since the fourth is not given in the harmonic series: it must be part of an $\hat{8}$–$\hat{1}$ progression. Similarly for musical languages as a whole: "the quest for a new form of music is a quest for a homunculus."[15]

It is nothing new to point out that Schenker is the organicist *par excellence.* He is everywhere explicit about the use of metaphoric figures, warning that "music is never comparable to mathematics or architecture"[16] and introducing his final work, *Der freie Satz,* as an antidote to such mechanistic approaches:

> I here present a new concept, one inherent in the works of the great masters; indeed, it is the very secret and source of their being: the concept of organic coherence.[17]

What is worth noting, however, is that for Schenker no less than for the organismic biologists of an earlier generation the passionate commitment to a holistic view leads inevitably to an intense singularity of focus. In defining the quality of "organic structure" he says the following:

[12]Arthur J. B. Hutchings, "Organic Structure in Music," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 2 (1962), 339.
[13]Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition (Der freie Satz),* trans. Ernst Oster (New York, 1979), p. 9.

[14]Schenker, "Resumption of Urlinie Considerations," in Sylvan Kalib, *Thirteen Essays from the Three Yearbooks* Das Meisterwerk in der Musik *by Heinrich Schenker: An Annotated Translation* (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1973), II, 144–45.
[15]Schenker, *Free Composition,* p. 9.
[16]Ibid., p. 5. [17]Ibid., p. xxi.

This characteristic is determined *solely* by the invention of the parts out of the unity of the primary harmony—in other words, by the composing out of the fundamental line and the bass arpeggiation.[18]

And again:

All musical content arises from the confrontation and adjustment of the indivisible fundamental line with the two-part bass arpeggiation.[19]

Thus Coleridge's interest in the paradox of irreducible unity-in-variety has been skewed sharply to one side, in the transcendental manner. As Sonia Slatin writes,

[Schenker's] ultimate criterion of musical value is that of a totality of integration in which all of the musical elements function actively and completely toward the necessities of the whole.[20]

Strikingly different is Rudolph Reti's invocation of organic models in his studies of "thematic process" and "thematic patterns."[21] For one thing, he concentrates less upon the synchronic view of an individual organism, preferring metaphors of growth, development, and evolution—upon which I shall elaborate a bit farther on. For another, the Coleridgean paradox interests him more: the composer, he argues, "strives toward *homogeneity in the inner essence* but at the same time toward *variety in the outer appearance*."[22] The purpose of his analytic work is to resolve this paradox.

Notwithstanding these differences, it becomes clear that the two views of music spring from a common source. The starting point for Reti's work, he is fond of pointing out, is in a question he asked as a student:

Why is it that we cannot produce a convincing musical composition by taking a group or a section from one work and linking it to that of another—even assuming an affinity of key, rhythm, and tempo?[23]

The question rests, of course, on the assumption that we *cannot* do so—by no means a foregone conclusion—and as such it reflects one of the fundamental tenets of nineteenth-century organicism. And Reti is very much concerned with extending thematic relationships beyond the boundaries of the individual piece or movement toward a kind of transcendent one-ness; he says, like an echo of Bosanquet, that

thematic connections account not only for the structural detail of a work but also for its larger shaping and gradually even for its widest architectural plan.[24]

As these thematic connections are stretched to include key relationships between movements, "the whole [work], through its key relationships, *becomes one great expression of its basic motiv*."[25]

Not only does the organism display exemplary unity and coherence, but it is, to use an anachronistic term, genetically coded. That is, barring catastrophe its final state is inevitable from the moment its first cells are formed. Leibniz generalized this characteristic to all substances (which, remember, he called organisms) in his metaphysics. "Each substance contains in its nature the law of continuation of the series of its own operations and all that has happened to it and all that will happen to it."[26] An organism, that is, *grows*, and it grows in a *teleological* or goal-oriented manner.

The metaphor of organic, developmental growth is of course quite a different thing from organic unity. As growth has to do with change occurring in time, it has had particular rele-

[18]Schenker, "Organic Structure in Sonata Form," *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik II* (1926), trans. Orin Grossman, *Journal of Music Theory* 12 (1968), 166. Emphasis added.
[19]Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. 15. Emphasis added.
[20]Sonia Slatin, *The Theories of Heinrich Schenker in Perspective* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1967), p. 495.
[21]See Rudolph Reti, *The Thematic Process in Music* (London, 1961) and *Thematic Patterns in Sonatas of Beethoven*, ed. Deryck Cooke (New York, 1967). The latter was published posthumously from analyses done in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
[22]Reti, *Thematic Process*, p. 13.
[23]Ibid., p. 348.
[24]Reti, *Thematic Patterns*, p. 45.
[25]Reti, *Thematic Process*, p. 223.
[26]Quoted in Russell, p. 428 (see fn. 6).

vance for the study of music. Schenker, for example, saw the musical work quite literally as an organism with a life of its own, making its own demands in accordance with its own inner needs. He wrote in *Der freie Satz:*

> The origin of every life, whether of nation, clan, or individual, becomes its destiny. . . . The inner law of origin accompanies all development and is ultimately part of the present. Origin, development, and present I call background, middleground, and foreground; their union expresses the oneness of an individual, self-contained life.[27]

There is more than an accidental resonance here with the words of a contemporary Viennese phenomenon, Sigmund Freud—"biology is destiny"—and in turn with Rudolph Reti's deterministic characterization of the "Tristan" chord: "compressed into one chord, the musical story of the whole opera is latent in this initial harmony."[28]

Elsewhere in his final book Schenker reiterates the idea in a vivid image:

> The hands, legs, and ears of the human body do not begin to grow after birth; they are present at the time of birth. Similarly, in a composition, a limb which was not somehow born with the middle and background cannot grow to be a diminution.[29]

One notices about such statements a certain confusion of modality between the temporal and spatial. Clearly, the existence of a human child in complete (albeit small) form is not properly analogous to the unheard but ever-present background of a piece of music. Schenker is not simply suggesting that the beginning of a piece predestines its outcome, but is conflating ideas of temporal and logical priority. This very confusion, however, is endemic to the use of organic growth metaphors—witness the two epigraphs at the head of this essay, with their proclivity for not-quite-analogies suggesting that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny in art and culture as well as in genetics.[30] Furthermore, the same confusion is typical not only of distinctions between Schenker's work and Reti's, but of the development of the former's own thought.

In his early writings, when he still used the notion of musical motives, Schenker explained that the continuity of a piece arises from the fact that motives reproduce themselves as men beget men and trees beget trees.[31] Here the temporal organization of the metaphor is congruent with the "growth" of the piece of music as it is heard—the beginning of the piece begets its end. Some of his early analyses make use of this "seminal" version of organic explanation, in a rather familiar way. Of the beginning of Mozart's Symphony in G Minor, he writes:

> A sixth-leap is thrown into the filling voices like seed into clod; see b-flat–g^1 in the viola part in bars 1–2; this seed is seen in the upper voice in bars 3, 7, etc. . . . In bar 10, through a^2–f-sharp^2, the [actual] downward arpeggiation, which was still obscure in bars 3 and 7 because of the sixth-leap upward, is clearly recognized here. In this new, merely rectified form basically, the third-leap of bar 10 becomes the assumption for the fourth-leap g^2–d^2 in bar 11 (seed→harvest).[32]

But later on, as Schenker's formulation of the *Ursatz* nears completion, his application of organic growth metaphors changes. Now the growth direction does not mirror the perceptual progress of the piece, but rather its conceptual progress from background to foreground. He explains, for example, that free composition arises from elements which were "lying budlike" in strict contrapuntal technique—by which he means the prolongations of passing tones, neighboring tones, and so forth. A piece originates in the *Urlinie* which is the *Keim*, or seed, from which the piece grows, ". . . as man, animal and plant are

[27]Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. 3.
[28]Reti, *Thematic Process*, p. 338.
[29]Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. 6.

[30]Ibid., p. 44; *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York, 1939), I, 107.
[31]Wilhelm Keller, "Heinrich Schenkers Harmonielehre," in *Beiträge zur Musiktheorie des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Martin Vogel (Regensburg, 1966), p. 204.
[32]Schenker, "Mozart: Symphony in G minor," Kalib, pp. 345, 347.

figurations of the smallest seed. . . ."[33] The *Urlinie* is of course a particular arrangement of the Chord of Nature; the beginning of its growth process is the "awakening to life" of the chord through the layers in their increasing complexity. This natural motion, Schenker says, "wills to persist and increase on its own." He uses the Chord of Nature in much the same way that Hegel uses the Idea, that ultimate source of content which is concretized in the external artwork by its own power.

> The Idea, which is essentially concrete, carries the principle of its manifestation in itself, and is thereby the means of its own free manifestation. . . . But inasmuch as in this way the Idea is a concrete unity, this unity can only enter the artistic consciousness by the expansion and further mediation of the particular aspects of the Idea; and it is through this evolution that the beauty of art receives *a totality of particular stages and forms.*[34]

As the foreground is reached, the seed continues to grow by its own teleology and in an inevitable, foreordained direction.

> The content of the second and subsequent levels is determined by the content of the first level, but at the same time it is influenced by goals in the foreground, mysteriously sensed and pursued.[35]

Reti's conception of organic growth remains much like the early Schenker of the *Harmonielehre* and thus, as his analytic demonstrations of individual musical "cells" make clear, his theoretical apparatus is not hierarchically but linearly organized.

> Music is created from sound *as life is created from matter.* In the organic sphere one cell engenders the other in its own image, yet each of the innumerable cells is different from all the others. . . .
>
> In an astoundingly analogous way one musical motif, one theme releases another as an expression of its own innermost idea, yet the latter is a being entirely different from the first.
>
> . . . and the act of creation is centered on this very process by which a musical idea emerges as a consequence of another, as a thing which is a part of the given world, yet which has never existed before.[36]

The very instinct which draws analogies between organic life and musical works impels the theorist to see the history of music as a determinate, developmental process. Evolution, especially as viewed within nineteenth-century intellectual history, has an organic life —a teleology—of its own, and invites still further ontogenetic/phylogenetic entanglements.

> The *Grave* [of the "Pathétique" sonata], like all slow introductions in the symphonies of Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, etc., or the toccatas and preludes of Bach, symbolizes *the improvisational stage of a composition at the moment of its creation.* In these cases, the following allegro or fugue represents *the organized result* of that former quasi-instinctive activity.[37]

The slow introduction foretells, as an embryo, the form and content of the mature individual. As regards history, Reti tells us that the thematic principle did not appear in the early stages of Western music, but

> Gradually . . . in the course of the evolution, since it obviously corresponds to an inborn sense of musical formation, such affinities between the voices [of counterpoint] emerged in the compositional design, at first sporadically and perhaps instinctively, later more frequently and clearly intentionally.[38]

The notion is familiar—the sense is "inborn," and it "emerges" in the history of the art.

It has been clear by implication all along that if a musical work shares with animal or plant its teleology, its goal-oriented pattern of growth, it must share also in whatever mysterious force or wisdom guides that predestined course. This entelechy, what old-fashioned biologists used to call the "vital force," plays an acknowledged role in Schenker's musical cosmos:

---

[33]Quoted by Walter Riezler in "Die 'Urlinie'," *Die Musik* 22 (1930), 508.

[34]Hegel, p. 102. Emphasis in original.

[35]Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. 68.

[36]Reti, *Thematic Process*, p. 359.

[37]Reti, *Thematic Patterns*, p. 30.

[38]Reti, *Thematic Process*, pp. 59–60.

> The fundamental structure shows us how the chord of nature comes to life through a vital natural power. But the primal power of this established motion must grow and live its own full life: that which is born to life strives to fulfill itself with the power of nature.[39]

Reti likewise defines his subject matter as the "inner force" of music, as opposed to the more obvious "outward" aspects of form. This expressive core of the piece "certainly . . . cannot grow from the harmonic or contrapuntal mechanism"[40]—a statement which, despite its violent rejection of Schenkerian principles, is no less firm a commitment to the idealist's belief in the autonomous inner life of the organism and his instinctive distrust of the mechanical. Like Schenker's *Ursatz* fleshing out from layer to layer, Reti's thematic pattern "moves by transformation toward a goal."[41]

Belief in an autonomous vital force at the heart of a musical work, whether explicit or tacit, has interesting consequences in the contemporary depiction of both artist and critic. For one thing, such goal-oriented behavior on the part of works of art—teleology and entelechy combining to give every sonata movement what can only be described as a mind of its own—renders the composer's role somewhat ambiguous. The organism grows and takes shape by itself: the artist need only give it birth. Coleridge repeatedly uses the phrase "*ab intra*" with reference to a very few poets of the highest genius, notably Shakespeare. It suggests that they worked with natural forces coming from within, not "with prescience" and rational planning. The role of the artist as problem-solver in the modern view—or even as creator in any craftsmanlike sense of the word—is distinctly minimized. Jean Paul Richter wrote in his *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (1804) that the genius is "in more than one sense a sleep-walker; in his clear dream he is capable of more than in waking, and in darkness does he mount every height of reality."[42] William Blake testifies to his own inspired composition, "I have written this Poem [*Milton*] from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without Premeditation and even against my Will. . . ."[43]

Furthermore, since the artist was regarded as a sort of midwife to this immanent life force, rather than a maker-of-things, a sharp and absolute distinction grew up between the genius and the non-genius, the poet *ab intra* and the poet manqué *ab extra.* There is much to ponder here for students of music in the nineteenth century. The idea is faithfully reflected in Schenker,

> Musicians are distinguished [i.e., can be divided] into those who create out of the background, that is to say, from tonal space, the urlinie, who are the geniuses, and those who move only within the foreground, who are the non-geniuses. . . . A perennial barrier lies between them.[44]

and makes its presence felt as well in the restricted repertoire of compositions he considers in his analyses. As we have noted above, Hegel's aesthetic concern focused on the quality of Idea, not execution, because only the natural ability of the artist of genius to perceive and formulate the Ideal was really at stake. It is important, though, that however one characterizes this artistic genius it has nothing to do with intelligence or rationality. On the contrary, "the organic poet, as it were, does not know very clearly what he is doing until he has done it."[45] The forces of nature are at work in him.

> The fundamental line and bass-arpeggiation governed him [Haydn] with the power of a natural force, and he received from them the strength to master the whole as a unity.[46]

[39]Schenker, *Free Composition,* p. 25.
[40]Reti, *Thematic Process,* p. 109; pp. 136–37.
[41]Ibid., p. 139.
[42]Quoted in Abrams, p. 212.

[43]Quoted in Abrams, p. 215.
[44]From "Clarifications," Kalib, pp. 161–62.
[45]James Benziger, "Organic Unity: Leibniz to Coleridge," *PMLA* 66 (1961), 28. Some artists were uneasy about this dismissal of their responsibilities; in his poem "Individuality," Sidney Lanier asks:

What the cloud doeth	What the artist doeth
The Lord knoweth,	The Lord knoweth;
The cloud knoweth not.	Knoweth the artist not?

[46]Schenker, "Organic Structure in Sonata Form," trans. Grossman, p. 168.

Organicism was, of course, intimately involved with the whole development of the romantic notion of the genius as a being apart from and essentially unlike other men, a law unto himself. Genius was indeed considered organic itself, born and not made. Blake put it this way:

I do not believe that Raffael taught Mich.Angelo, or that Mich.Angelo taught Raffael, any more than I believe that the Rose teaches the Lilly how to grow or the Apple tree teaches the Pear tree how to bear fruit.[47]

The connection between the work of art and the artist's personal consciousness once severed, the artistic genius becomes a kind of vessel for the life forces of art or inspiration. Since the vital element or entelechy of artworks as well as organisms appears quite mysterious to the onlooker, a certain amount of magical power becomes attached to the artist who then is revered as the prophet or revealer of hidden unities, relationships, or meanings in his work—what Carlyle called the "secret and silent growth" of the organism. This quasi-priestly function of the artist is even shared, by extension, with the critic, who serves as a kind of acolyte or substitute revealer, and to whose advantage it therefore is to dwell upon hidden and obscure aspects of a work. "I was given a vision of the urlinie, I did not invent it!"[48] The very mysticism and obscurantism which organicist criticism invites puts it in sharp contrast to present-day ideas about the role of perception and of understanding by a more "democratic" audience in designing an adequate critical theory. Too, the desire for an explanatory theory for idiosyncratic events and for individual elements within the work of art has led theorists in recent decades to explore a variety of approaches more phenomenologically oriented and borrowing insights from disciplines as disparate as anthropology and engineering. Still, the romantic legacy of the critic or analyst as priestly oracle is very much with us, perhaps at its most noticeable in our endemic uncertainty about the role of perception and "musicality" in the theorist's work. More than one school of contemporary analytic thought relies upon somewhat cabalistic symbology accessible only to a closed circle and prompting inevitable analogies to "discipleship."

In another respect, however, organic aesthetic beliefs have been useful for musical criticism insofar as they have helped to steer the course of analysis away from the purely mechanistic and simplistically structural. A comparative view of the analytic traditions born from the work of Tovey and Riemann shows clearly enough that their preference for the languages of architecture, logic, and rhetoric entails a restriction to morphological, low-level observations. There is no question that the crucial role played by the passage of time in music, and its ineffable sense of motion (whether "real" or "imaginary") are better dealt with in terms of growth and development metaphors than additive, static ones. Many commentators have noted that organic theories tend toward a view of music as process, and it is of course precisely this new orientation that is most enthusiastically greeted in Schenker's work. Its source, as Hegel reminds us, is in the life process itself. "[The] affirmation and resolution of the contradiction which obtains between the ideal unity and the material juxtaposition of the members, constitutes the appointed *process* of life itself. And Life is simply *process*."[49]

[47]Quoted in Benziger, p. 38.
[48]Schenker, "Resumption of Urlinie Considerations," Kalib, p. 218.
[49]Hegel, p. 166.