

Schenker's Organicism Reexamined

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Was Schenker always an organicist? Until recently this question would never have arisen; Schenker was the "organicist *par excellence*."¹ In 1984, however, William Pastille published an article with the provocative title "Heinrich Schenker, Anti-Organicist."² Pastille explicated Schenker's early essay "Der Geist der musikalischen Technik" ["The Spirit of Musical Technique," hereafter called "Geist"], which had originally appeared in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* in 1895.³ Excerpts from "Geist" seemed to reveal a new Schenker, a skeptic who radically questioned the sort of organic philosophy enshrined in Schenker's later work. For a growing number of musicians seeking to liberate Schenker from an often static and ahistorical interpretative tradition, "Geist" was a revelation. Instead of a prophet uttering timeless truths, here was a man

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¹Ruth A. Solie, "The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis," *19th-Century Music* 4/2 (1980):151.

²William A. Pastille, "Heinrich Schenker, Anti-Organicist," *19th-Century Music* 8 (1984):29-36.

³Heinrich Schenker, "Der Geist der musikalischen Technik," *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 26 (1895):245-46, 257-59, 273-74, 279-80, 309-310, 325-326; Reprint, Leipzig: E. W. Fritsch, 1895; last three installments reprinted in *Musiktheorie* 3/3 (1988):237-42; reprinted in *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker: Gesammelte Aufsätze, Rezensionen und kleinere Berichte aus den Jahren 1891-1901*, ed. Hellmut Federhofer (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1990), 135-154; trans. by William A. Pastille as "The Spirit of Musical Technique," *Theoria* 3 (1988):86-104. References to this essay will cite both Federhofer's edition and Pastille's translation, giving the German page numbers first. I will follow Federhofer's practice of preserving the 19th-century German orthography of Schenker's original text.

who had changed his mind about a very fundamental issue, hence someone with a history. This insight, however, brought a new discomfort: although a window had been opened on Schenker's past, instead of a unified picture of his development, we glimpsed a startling discontinuity. It was as if Schenker had acquired an antithetical double, a *Doppelgänger*; he now seemed rather like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Who could explain this metamorphosis?

I

Pastille's conclusions went unchallenged until 1989, when Allan Keiler proposed an entirely different reading of "Geist." Repudiating Pastille, Keiler argues that Schenker's avowed anti-organicism should not be taken literally:

Schenker's anti-organicist position . . . has to be seen as based on arguments that are constructed within a somewhat contrived and unsystematic philosophical framework, in order to stand in opposition to ideas of Hanslick and others.⁴

Even in Schenker's earliest period, "the influence and stimulus of organic thought can be established in more than one context."⁵ Keiler positions himself as one who will correct certain "errors and wrong turns" in mapping

⁴Allan Keiler, "The Origins of Schenker's Thought: How Man is Musical," *Journal of Music Theory* 33/2 (1989):289. In addition to the articles by Keiler and Pastille, Schenker's essay has inspired a number of other commentaries. Federhofer discusses it in his preface to *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker*, pp. 26-29; Stephen Hinton refers to it in "Musikwissenschaft und Musiktheorie oder Die Frage nach der phänomenologischen Jungfräulichkeit," *Musiktheorie* 3/3 (1988):195-204 and "'Natürliche Übergänge': Heinrich Schenker's Begriff von der Sonatenform," *Musiktheorie* 5/2 (1990):101-116; my article "Schenker and Kantian Epistemology," *Theoria* 3 (1988):1-58, also analyzes this extraordinary essay (see especially pp. 21-22 and 46-49).

⁵*Ibid.*, 291.

Schenker's development. One pioneer singled out for correction is Pastille:

I should say that [Pastille's] interpretation is achieved by the utter disregard of the complicated meaning of the essay from which the evidence is drawn, by the disregard of any other of Schenker's writings during that period, and by the disregard of the many contemporary works of musical historical and theoretical scholarship that must have played a crucial role in Schenker's thinking during the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁶

Keiler also portrays Pastille as the victim of Schenker's own ideology, contending that Pastille imposes an organicist design on Schenker's career, by interpreting the latter's thought as a gradual evolution toward organicism:

Here again the tyranny of diachronic inevitability plays its part, this time heightened and dramatized by the typical motif in which a serious and even threatening obstacle to the steady march of ideas has to be overcome. After all, what good is the achievement of a necessary outcome without a little healthy struggle?⁷

Finally, Keiler characterizes Pastille's position as absurd:

I hope the reader is prepared to accept now the utter absurdity of the view that, to paraphrase Pastille, Schenker moved gradually from anti-organicist to arch-organicist throughout the course of his writings. . . . I think any view that characterizes Schenker, during any part of his development, as

⁶Ibid., 275.

⁷Ibid., 275.

fundamentally opposed to essential attributes of organic thought would have to appear questionable, if not downright odd.⁸

We have, then, two antithetical interpretations of the same text. Who is the more vigilant reader, Pastille or Keiler? Should we take Schenker's anti-organicism at face value, or is it merely a mask he adopts for purposes of argument? At a certain level, "Geist" can accommodate both readings, because it is a very heterogeneous text, full of unresolved conflicts suggesting that Schenker was responding to very diverse cultural pressures. Keiler is right, therefore, to insist that there are organicist impulses in "Geist." He is mistaken, however, in refusing to acknowledge anything that resists the hegemony of organicism. My reading will therefore vindicate Pastille by reconstructing the historical, philosophical, and biographical background to "Geist," a background that both Keiler and Pastille largely overlooked. This background will suggest that a radical critique of traditional concepts of unity was underway in late-Hapsburg Austria, in fields as diverse as philosophy, psychology, and art. Once we recover Schenker's position in this ongoing cultural conversation,⁹ his anti-organicism, far from seeming "downright odd," will suddenly appear quite normal.

Keiler and I share one assumption: the meaning of "Geist" must "emerge from the defining context."¹⁰ His choice of context, however, may be too narrow. Keiler places "Geist" squarely in the tradition of German idealism, stating that "the evidence drawn from the totality of Schenker's works is that he accepted unequivocally the German idealist

⁸Ibid., 291.

⁹This notion of "cultural conversation" is developed by Steven Mailloux in *Rhetorical Power* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989).

¹⁰Keiler, "The Origins of Schenker's Thought," 288.

tradition of his earliest education and background and knew in a fairly intimate way the works of Goethe, Kant, Hegel, and Schiller and, of course, many others.”¹¹ As unobjectionable as this conclusion seems, it harbors several troublesome points. First, using “the totality of Schenker’s works” as a hermeneutic context seems a questionable strategy when the issue at stake involves whether or not “Geist” contradicts the image established by Schenker’s later works. Perhaps more seriously, Keiler fails to document the content of Schenker’s “earliest education and background,” taking it for granted that German idealism pretty much covers it. Given the obvious presence of that idealism in Schenker’s works, which I have analyzed elsewhere, few readers are likely to contest Keiler’s claims here.¹² We risk simplifying the contradictions of *fin-de-siècle* Austria, however, by assuming that German idealism would have been the only tradition, or even the dominant tradition, to which he would have been exposed. As William M. Johnston notes in *The Austrian Mind*, “innumerable scholars and historians of literature write about things German without differentiating Austria-Hungary from Bismarck’s Empire.”¹³ Austria had its own distinct traditions

¹¹Ibid., 291.

¹²See my “Schenker and Kantian Epistemology.” Other discussions of Schenker’s relationship to German idealism include Michael Cherlin, “Hauptmann and Schenker: Two Adaptations of Hegelian Dialectics,” *Theory and Practice* 13 (1988):115-131; Gary W. Don, “Goethe and Schenker,” *In Theory Only* 10/8 (1988):1-14; Jamie Kroy Kassler, “Heinrich Schenker’s Epistemology and Philosophy of Music: An Essay on the Relations between Evolutionary Theory and Music Theory,” in *The Wider Domain of Evolutionary Thought*, ed. David Oldroyd and Ian Langham (Dordrecht: R. Reidel, 1983):221-60; William A. Pastille, “Ursatz: The Musical Philosophy of Heinrich Schenker,” Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1985; Pastille, “Goethe’s Influence on Schenker’s Musical Ontology,” in *Schenker Studies*, ed. Hedi Siegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Solie, “The Living Work”; Lotte Thaler, *Organische Form in der Musiktheorie des 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhunderts*, Berliner musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten 25 (Munich, 1984).

which often diverged from German trends. German idealism in particular was resisted in Austria, and there are compelling historical reasons why this was so.¹⁴

The German idealists were often Protestant and liberal, while Austria was a Catholic country with a conservative monarchy. Since a highly centralized bureaucracy controlled all textbooks and professorial appointments at all levels of instruction, the state could exert considerable cultural leverage. Yet this conservative control over education had some unintended radical consequences, because the space opened up by official resistance to idealism allowed alternative ideas to develop. Thus "a bewildering variety of philosophical movements," including realism, positivism, and empiricism, flourished during the period 1880-1920.¹⁵ Indeed, the atmosphere of innovation in Vienna at this time was certainly fostered by the variety of contradictory impulses that thinkers sought to harmonize.¹⁶

The complexity of Austrian culture at the turn of the century suggests the need to complicate and problematize any received notions concerning Schenker's background and development. There is no question that idealist traits are present in "Geist," nor is there any doubt that idealism

¹³William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 5.

¹⁴The following account is based in part on Johnston, *The Austrian Mind*, and also on David F. Lindenfeld, *The Transformation of Positivism: Alexius Meinong and European Thought, 1880-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

¹⁵Lindenfeld, *The Transformation of Positivism*, 78.

¹⁶For studies of Viennese cultural life at the turn of the century, see Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981). Nicholas Cook, in "Music Theory and 'Good Comparison': A Viennese Perspective," *Journal of Music Theory* 33/1 (1989):117-41, considers Schenker within the context of Viennese thought.

exerted increasing influence on Schenker's work. To read "Geist" exclusively within the German tradition, however, invites serious distortions of its meaning. If we can establish Schenker's connection to more radical, experimental tendencies in Viennese thought, we will not only be able to read "Geist" with a new set of assumptions in mind, we may also discover some new directions for Schenkerian research.

II

To return to my opening question: was Schenker always an organicist? We cannot answer this until we understand organicism more precisely. It would be naive to expect a formal definition of this term; as Nietzsche said, "only that which has no history is definable."¹⁷ What we can do, however, is to inscribe this term in history to grasp its nuances and implications. We can also insert it into a network of related terms, to see how it functions in a terminological cluster, creating a structure of meanings.¹⁸ Until we conduct this sort of investigation, arguments over Schenker's organicism will resemble, as Kant remarked, "one man milking a he-goat and the other holding a sieve underneath."¹⁹

Keiler neglects this sort of inquiry. His use of the term betrays an imperfect understanding of its history; he seems to equate organicism with mere coherence:

¹⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 80.

¹⁸This concept of terminological clusters was developed by Raymond Williams in *Keywords* (London: 1976).

¹⁹Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), A 58/B 83.

Schenker is convinced that there is, indeed, music that is coherent, or that sounds coherent. . . . There is no mistaking coherent from non-coherent music, at least for Schenker.²⁰

Although Keiler intends this as a refutation of Pastille, Pastille could agree without changing his interpretation of "Geist" in the slightest. Organicism involves more than mere coherence, if by coherence we mean logical consistency, unity, or sense. Keiler seems to fear that Pastille attributes an attack on musical coherence to Schenker. Actually, Schenker's skepticism never went that far. Although organicism includes coherence, it is coherence of a very special sort; otherwise expressions such as "organic coherence" and "organic unity" would be mere pleonasms. "Organic" is an honorific; it confers a certain aura. We have to ask how works of art came to possess such an aura.

Organicism must be understood as a way of rescuing the soul from the assaults of skepticism. Theology had built a splendid edifice around the soul, ascribing all sorts of wonderful properties to it: it was immortal, unique, autonomous, indivisible, and free; it possessed an indiscerptible unity. As skeptical philosophy demolished this structure, one sought to salvage some aspect of it through what Thomas Weiskel calls "an ingenious and often unconscious reflex of metaphorical transposition."²¹ Thomas McFarland describes "the numinous transfer of the predicates of soul" to a complex of terms that includes not only "organicism," but also "genius," "originality," "imagination," "symbol,"

²⁰Keiler, "The Origins of Schenker's Thought," 290.

²¹Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 22.

and "the sublime."²² Organicism, then, belongs to what M. H. Abrams calls the "secularization of the sacred," the transformation of devotional experience into terms acceptable to the secular mind.²³

Thus in Romantic discourse, the work of art received something like a soul; it was not merely coherent or unified; it was alive, it had the unity of a mind or consciousness. The encounter with a work of art was conceived more as one between two subjects than as the experience of an object. Terry Eagleton has lucidly analyzed this transformation in aesthetic discourse:

Conceptions of the unity and integrity of the work of art . . . are commonplaces of an "aesthetic" discourse which stretches back to classical antiquity; but what emerges from such familiar notions in the late eighteenth century is the curious idea of the work of art as a kind of *subject*. It is, to be sure, a peculiar kind of subject, but it is a subject nonetheless. And the historical pressures which give rise to such a strange style of thought by no means extend back to the epoch of Aristotle. . . . For Kant . . . the disinterested gaze which reads the world purely as form is a way of eliciting the object's enigmatic purposiveness, lifting it out of the web of practical functions in which it is enmeshed so as to endow it with something of the self-determining autonomy of a subject. It is by virtue of this crypto-subjectivity that Kant's aesthetic object "hails" individuals, speaks meaningfully to them, assures

²²Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 186, 180.

²³M. H. Abrams examines this idea of the Romantic secularization of sacred thought in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971).

them that Nature is not after all entirely alien to their preoccupations.²⁴

This idea of cryptosubjectivity certainly illuminates Schenker's mature attitude towards organicism, as the following cento suggests:

Every organic being yearns for another organic being, and art, which is organic, drives towards the organic human soul.

Music is not only an *object* of our theoretical reflection, it is also *subject*, as we ourselves are subject.

We perceive our own life-impulse in the motion of the fundamental structure, a full analogy to our inner life.²⁵

For Schenker, the organic work is not merely a coherent object that we contemplate, it is also a subject who returns our gaze.

Organicism must also be seen in relation to mechanistic and materialistic trends, as a response to everything that threatened to reduce human beings to mere mechanisms. Thus organicist discourse establishes a polar opposition between organicism and mechanism, in which organicism is the valorized term. Here we can see that organicism is not a scientific doctrine, despite the proliferation of biological metaphors in organicist thought. The comparison of a work of art to a biological organism is not a reduction to a physical explanation; in the organicist appeal to nature, nature is not an

²⁴Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 4, 169.

²⁵Schenker, *Free Composition*, ed. and trans. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 9.

impersonal mechanism as it is for modern science. Instead, such analogies are a way of attributing spirit, *Geist*, to nature, asserting an organic continuity between nature and mind.

This appeal to nature, as Christopher Norris rightly emphasizes, marks the point at which organicist discourse congeals into a coercive ideology by assimilating human artifacts to natural processes, giving historically-conditioned works of art the force of natural necessity.²⁶ "Genius" has a pivotal function in this ideology, because the obsession with genius results from the desire "to find *proof* of . . . that ideal convergence between mind and nature, language and whatever belongs to the world of sensuous experience."²⁷ Since Schopenhauer probably gave the cult of genius its most compelling philosophical voice, his metaphysics of art deserves analysis here. This turn to Schopenhauer seems especially urgent because his prestige reached its zenith in 1890s Vienna.²⁸ Whether one endorses Keiler's interpretation or Pastille's, clearly Schenker's understanding of organicism would have been influenced by Schopenhauer.

For Schopenhauer, the exercise of genius demands complete objectivity. This may seem a paradoxical claim, especially if we associate Romantic theories of genius with self-expression and subjectivity. But Schopenhauer's insistence on objectivity is unwavering:

The gift of genius is nothing but the most complete objectivity.

²⁶Christopher Norris, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 62.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 44.

²⁸Schopenhauer's profound influence during this period, especially among students at the University of Vienna, is explored by William J. McGrath in *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

The *punctum saliens* of every beautiful work, every great and profound thought, is an entirely objective perception. But such a perception is absolutely conditioned by a complete silencing of the will which leaves the person as pure subject of knowing. The aptitude for the prevalence of this state is simply genius.

... objectivity, i.e., genius.²⁹

Objectivity is crucial to Schopenhauer's organicist project: only by being transparently receptive to nature, only by surrendering subjectivity, can the genius become "the clear mirror of the inner nature of the world," and thus the point of convergence between inner and outer realms.³⁰ The art of genius allows us to see things as they are, purged of any connection to an individual will: "We apprehend them no longer according to their relations, but according to what they are in and of themselves; and then, in addition to their relative existence, suddenly we see their absolute existence as well."³¹ Because he believes that genius overcomes the tyranny of the individual will, Schopenhauer valorizes unconscious, instinctive inspiration:

²⁹"[so] ist Genialität nichts Anderes, als die vollkommenste Objektivität . . ." "Das *punctum saliens* jedes schönen Werkes, jedes grossen oder tiefen Gedankens, ist eine ganze objektive Anschauung. Eine solche aber ist durchaus durch das völlige Schweigen des Willens bedingt, welches den Menschen als reines Subjekt des Erkennens übrig lässt. Die Anlage zum Vorwalten dieses Zustandes ist eben das Genie." "Objektivität, d. i. Genialität . . ." Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, ed. Paul Deussen (Munich: R. Piper, 1924), 2 vols., 1:218; 2:422; 1:233. Translated as *The World as Will and Representation* by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), 2 vols., 1:185, 2:371; 1:198.

³⁰"[zum] hellen Spiegel des Wesens der Welt . . ." 1:219; 1:186.

³¹"[indem] wir sie jetzt nicht mehr ihren Relationen nach, sondern nach Dem, was sie an und für sich selbst sind, auffassen und nun plötzlich, ausser ihrem relativen, auch ihr absolutes Dasein wahrnehmen." 2:424; 2:372.

The kind of knowledge of the genius is essentially purified of all willing and of references to the will; and it also follows from this that the works of genius do not result from intention or arbitrary choice, but that genius is guided by a kind of instinctive necessity.³²

This release from willing contrasts with “the case of all intentional reflection [in which] the intellect is not free, for the will in fact guides it, and prescribes its theme.”³³

From Schopenhauer’s account of genius we can extract a cluster of terminological oppositions that structure organicist discourse:

organic	non-organic
genius	non-genius
natural	artificial
objective	subjective
absolute	relative
unconscious	conscious
unwilled	willed
instinctive necessity	arbitrary choice

Figure 1

As Jacques Derrida has shown, such binary oppositions are never neutral, but always involve a “violent hierarchy” in

³²“Daraus, dass die Erkenntnisweise des Genies wesentlich die von allem Wollen und seinen Beziehungen gereinigte ist, folgt auch, dass die Werke desselben nicht aus Absicht oder Willkür hervorgehen, sondern es dabei geleitet ist von einer instinktartigen Notwendigkeit.” Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 2:433; 2:380.

³³“[Hingegen] ist bei allem absichtlichen Nachdenken der Intellekt nicht frei, da ja der Wille ihn leitet und sein Thema ihm vorschreibt.” Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 2:433; 2:380.

which one term “governs the other . . . or has the upper hand.”³⁴ In Figure 1, the terms on the left are privileged, constituting a system of valorizations that defines organicist ideology. Thus for Schopenhauer, the art of genius is natural, objective, absolute, unconscious, unwilled, and so on. By clothing genius in the authority of nature, organicist thought risks making inflated claims for art, as if one could somehow erase all traces of human origins and imperfections from what are, after all, the products of human labor, as if a work of art could possess the same inevitability and necessity possessed by a natural organism.

This is only a provisional definition of organicism, a first approximation. It is enough, however, to show what is at stake in interpreting Schenker’s early thought. Virtually all the oppositions shown in Figure 1 circulate in “Geist.” The question that must direct our reading, however, is whether or not Schenker accepts the organicist hierarchy among these terms: Does Schenker merely reproduce the organicist system of valorizations, or does he critique it, problematize it, and expose its limits?

III

If we look more closely at Schenker’s intellectual background, it is not difficult to find a possible source of inspiration for questioning the basis of organicist ideology: Nietzsche. Although Nietzsche is not mentioned in “Geist,” we must remember his special role in Viennese culture at the end of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche’s wider European fame began around 1890, but he became a cult figure in Vienna much earlier.³⁵ In 1877, for example, a group of

³⁴Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41.

³⁵For accounts of Nietzsche’s influence starting around 1890, see Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990*

students at the University of Vienna sent him an open letter in which they declared their intention to use his essay "Schopenhauer as Educator" as a pattern for their lives.³⁶ As a student at the University of Vienna in the 1880s, Schenker assimilated this enthusiasm for Nietzsche. Schenker not only mentions Nietzsche several times in his early essays, but he also alludes obliquely to him in moments where Nietzsche's name does not appear in the foreground.³⁷ In the early essay "Capellmeister-Regisseure," for example, Schenker speaks of "Mozart 'as educator'," putting this phrase in quotation marks, confident that his readers will recognize a discreet homage to the title of "Schopenhauer as Educator."³⁸

Nietzsche's later work represents, to cite Paul Ricoeur, "an enormous enterprise of methodical disillusionment."³⁹ Nietzsche contends that by forgetting the historical origins of concepts we confer a spurious wholeness and unity upon them. Thus he mercilessly critiques all supposedly self-evident concepts in a manner that uncannily anticipates what we have come to call deconstruction, showing, to quote Paul de Man, "the hidden fragmentation of assumedly monadic

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), and several of the essays in *Intellectuals and the Future in the Hapsburg Monarchy 1890-1914*, ed. Laszlo Peter and Robert B. Pynsent (London: Macmillan, 1988).

³⁶McGrath, *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, 211.

³⁷The Nietzsche references in Schenker's early works appear in "Unpersönliche Kunst" (1897), reprinted in *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker*, 216-221, and "Mehr Kunst!" (1897), in *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker*, 248-252.

³⁸Schenker, "Capellmeister-Regisseure" (1897), reprinted in *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker*, 239.

³⁹Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 207.

totalities.”⁴⁰ Despite Nietzsche’s glorification of art in *The Birth of Tragedy*, art was by no means exempt from the demystifying rigor of his later phases.

If we amplify the Nietzschean echoes in “Geist,” we will gain a new context for understanding Schenker’s attitudes toward organicism. Consider the following two passages, one from “Geist,” the other from *Human, All-too Human*:

Naturally artifice was not to be displayed overtly. It had to be masked and concealed, in order to keep the listener’s perception in that instinctive state which would be most likely to hear and accept the artificial whole as an apparently natural occurrence. And when expanding musical content the composer never forgot to give a feeling of “wholeness” to the extended melodies This sense of rounding, of closure, simulated conceptual thought And so the appearance of intellectual logic glimmered above all the extended shapes resulting from fanciful, arbitrary artifice. Soon it was even believed that artificial constructs had the same sort of necessity possessed by natural organisms. This belief still exists today, at a time when artifice threatens almost to exceed our perceptual capacities.⁴¹

⁴⁰Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 249.

⁴¹“Jedoch schaute man selbstverständlich darauf, die Absicht der Künstlichkeit nicht crass zu verrathen, man verdeckte und schminkte sie, um für die Empfindung jenen unbewussten Zustand daraus zu retten, in dem das künstliche Ganze als ein scheinbar natürlich Geborenes am glücklichsten empfangen und gehört werden konnte. Und man vergass nie, bei der künstlichen Erweiterung der Toninhalte für die so erweiterten Melodien . . . um das Gefühl eines ‘Ganzen’ . . . zu werben. Das Gefühl der Rundung, des Sichabschliessens, täuschte immer im Associationswege den Charakter des begrifflichen Gedankens vor . . . Und so schimmerte über all den erweiterten Bildungen einer phantastisch künstlichen Willkür trügerisch der Schein einer gedanklichen Logik, und bald begann man gar zu glauben, in der

The artist knows that his work has its full effect only when it arouses belief in an improvisation, in a wondrous instantaneousness of origin; and so he encourages this illusion and introduces into art elements of inspired unrest, of blindly groping disorder, of expectantly attentive dreaming when creation begins, as deceptions that dispose the soul of the viewer or listener to believe in the sudden emergence of perfection.

As is self-evident, the science of art must oppose this illusion most firmly, and point out the false conclusions and self-indulgences that drive it into the artists' trap.⁴²

There are obvious differences between these two passages: Schenker portrays the composer as simulating logic, while Nietzsche portrays the artist as simulating disorder. Both men, however, depict artists as encouraging illusions, as conspiring, as it were, against the unwary audience, seducing us into accepting their creations as perfect, mysterious, seamless entities. Schenker speaks of keeping the listener in an "instinctive state," Nietzsche of disposing "the viewer or

künstlichen Bildung ruhe eine eben solche Nothwendigkeit, wie in einem natürlichen Organismus. Dieser Glaube besteht noch heute, wo die Künstlichkeit die Aufnahmefähigkeit unserer Zeit schier zu sprengen droht." Schenker, "Der Geist der musikalischen Technik," 147-48; 98.

⁴²"Der Künstler weiss, dass sein Werk nur voll wirkt, wenn es den Glauben an eine Improvisation, an eine wundergleiche Plötzlichkeit der Entstehung erregt; und so hilft er wohl dieser Illusion nach und führt jene Elemente der begeisterten Unruhe, der blind greifenden Unordnung, des aufhorchenden Träumens beim Beginn der Schöpfung in die Kunst ein, als Trugmittel, um die Seele des Schauers oder Hörers so zu stimmen, dass sie an das plötzliche Hervorspringen des Vollkommenen glaubt. —Die Wissenschaft der Kunst hat dieser Illusion, wie es sich von selbst versteht, auf das bestimmteste zu widersprechen und die Fehlschlüsse und Verwöhnungen des Intellekts aufzuzeigen, vermöge welcher er dem Künstler in das Netz läuft." Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister*, in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werk in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, n. d.), vol. 2 §145. Trans. Marion Faber with Stephen Lehmann as *Human, All-too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), §145.

listener to believe in the sudden emergence of perfection." Schenker obeys Nietzsche's injunction to "point out the false conclusions and self-indulgences" that confer an organic aura on art, by reminding us that compositions are, after all, "artificial constructs."

Schenker's textual strategy is one of deconstruction, showing that "a hierarchical opposition, in which one term is said to be dependent upon another conceived as prior, is in fact a rhetorical or metaphysical imposition."⁴³ As we saw in Figure 1, organicist discourse relies on a series of binary oppositions such as natural/artificial, unconscious/conscious, unwilled/willed, and so on, in which the first term constitutes a privileged category that dominates and excludes the other term. Instead of accepting this system of valorizations, however, Schenker deconstructs and destabilizes it by showing that the inorganic side of the opposition contaminates the organic. Organicist ideology asks us to believe that art can erase all traces of its construction, achieving the necessity of a natural event. Schenker insists, however, that a composition is always an "artificial whole" rather than "an apparently natural occurrence," a product of "arbitrary artifice" that lacks the "necessity possessed by natural organisms."

Time and again in "Geist," Schenker provides a Nietzschean genealogy, reminding us of the historical and contingent origin of compositions, emphasizing the composer's artifice and conscious decisions:

Rather, as part of the labor of building content, the composer draws from his imagination, various similarities and contrasts, from which he eventually makes the best choice. His final decision obscures the other materials he had to choose from (the rejected portions can often be found in his studies

⁴³ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 183.

and sketches), and reveals only that which appealed to him most.⁴⁴

This insistence on choice and conscious labor contrasts sharply with the organicist emphasis on unconscious inspiration. Schenker's affinity with Nietzsche here could not be more obvious; indeed, the passage cited above has an almost exact counterpart in *Human, All-too Human*:

Artists have an interest in others' believing in sudden ideas, in so-called inspirations; as if the idea of a work of art, of poetry, the fundamental thought of a philosophy shines down like a merciful light from heaven. In truth, the good artist's or thinker's imagination is continually producing things good, mediocre, and bad, but his *power of judgment*, highly sharpened and practiced, rejects, selects, joins together; thus we now see from Beethoven's notebooks that he gradually assembled the most glorious melodies and, to a degree, selected them out of disparate beginnings.⁴⁵

44 "Gehört es doch zu den Schmerzen des Inhaltsaufbaues, dass der Componist von seiner Phantasie sich mehrere Aehnlichkeiten und Contraste verschafft um schliesslich die beste Wahl zu treffen. Durch die Wahl, die er so getroffen, erfährt man zwar nicht, was er sonst noch zur Auswahl vorrätig hatte (das Unterdrückte kann man oft aus seinen Studien und Skizzen erfahren), wohl aber, was ihm persönlich am besten gefiel." Schenker, "Der Geist der musikalischen Technik," 148-49; 99.

45 "Die Künstler haben eine Interesse daran, dass man an die plötzlichen Eingebungen, die sogenannten Inspirationen glaubt; als ob die Idee des Kunstwerks, der Dichtung, der Grundgedanke einer Philosophie wie ein Gnadenschein vom Himmel herableuchte. In Wahrheit produziert die Phantasie des guten Künstlers oder Denkers fortwährend, Gutes, Mittelmässiges und Schlechtes, aber seine *Urteilstkraft*, höchst geschärft und geübt, verwirft, wählt aus, knüpft zusammen; wie man jetzt aus Notizbüchern von Beethoven ersieht, dass er die herrlichsten Melodien allmählich zusammengetragen und aus vielfachen Ansätzen ausgelesen hat." Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, §155.

In the following excerpt, Schenker argues that music can never escape the composer's personal disposition:

Now it can happen that the composer's (or an exceptional listener's) imagination surveys the entire content—despite its natural succession—from a bird's-eye view, so to speak. He sorts and balances the characteristics and proportions of all the individual moods. Although this process seems to be a logical operation, it is actually neither logical nor organic in origin. Rather, the moods and proportions of the individual parts, and the content of the whole, plainly disclose the composer's personal disposition. They show his intense determination to convince the listener of his own arrangement of moods and proportions, and to smuggle this arrangement past the unsuspecting listener. But it is our choice whether we comply willingly with his proportions, or whether we approve of his arrangements of moods. Our acceptance of the moods and proportions is just as relative and subjective as the composer's arrangement.⁴⁶

⁴⁶“Nun kann es geschehen, dass die Phantasie des Componisten (ähnlich auch die eines vorzüglichen Hörers) den gesamten Inhalt, trotz dem natürlichen Nacheinander desselben, gleichsam aus der Vogelperspektive überschaut und Charakter und Maass aller einzelnen darin enthaltenen Stimmungen gegen einander ordnet und abwägt, und doch hat dieses Verfahren, so sehr es eine logische Arbeit zu sein scheint, weder einen logischen, noch einen organischen Gesichtspunct zur Ursache, vielmehr enthüllen sich in den Stimmungen und Maassen der einzelnen Theile, so wie des ganzen Inhaltes, am deutlichsten der persönliche Charakter des Componisten und der starke Wille, den Zuhörer zu den Stimmung- und Maassordnung, wie er selbst sie geschaffen, zu bekehren und sie, die Ueberzeugung des Zuhörers täuschend, einzuschmuggeln. Aber an uns ist es, auf diese Maasse ohne Hindernisse einzugehen zu können oder nicht, es gefällt uns die Ordnung der Stimmungen oder nicht, und alles Aufnehmen der Stimmungen und Maasse auf unserer Seite ist genau so relativ und subjectiv, als alles Ausgestalten auf der Seite des Componisten.” Schenker, “Der Geist der musikalischen Technik,” 149; 99.

Once again, the composer is trying to hoodwink “the unsuspecting listener.” Schenker argues that the composer is a cunning rhetorician whose desire to create a whole is part of the will-to-persuade, revealing an “intense determination to convince the listener.” Schenker attacks a central claim of organicist discourse: the power of the artist to create a second nature, a heterocosm that would provide a kind of secular redemption by bridging the ontological gap between mind and nature. With Nietzschean skepticism, Schenker demonstrates that music can never match the absolute and objective necessity of nature, but always remains “relative and subjective.” This skepticism does not reduce music to incoherence; rather it acknowledges that unity is always relative and provisional, that works of art conceal, but do not transcend artifice, and cannot achieve the sort of natural necessity that organicist thought demands of art. Far from yielding to the blandishments of organicist ideology, Schenker resists assimilating music to natural processes.

Schenker’s title, “The Spirit of Musical Technique,” already foreshadows this deconstruction. Spirit, or *Geist*, and technique are antithetical terms. While *Geist* is a privileged Romantic term, technique is a term from which the Romantics distanced themselves because of its associations with the rational and the mechanical.⁴⁷ In terms of the classic opposition between organism and mechanism, *Geist* belongs to the organic side, technique to the mechanical. To speak of a spirit of musical technique is to deconstruct this opposition by inscribing each term within the other, destabilizing the hierarchy that privileges *Geist*.

The extent to which Schenker questions the entire organicist system of valorizations is suggested not only by what is present in his text, but also by what is absent. Astonishingly, the word *genius* never appears in “Geist.” As

⁴⁷For a striking analysis of the implications of the word “*Geist*” with reference to Heidegger’s philosophy, see Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

we have seen, genius is essential to the terminological cluster of organicist discourse. The faith in genius as the mediator between mind and nature sustains the organicist project, since genius is the guarantee of privileged access to nature. The fact that the most significant essay of Schenker's early career fails *even to mention* genius shows how far he was from embracing the whole organicist agenda. (It is true, of course, that the word genius appears in some of Schenker's other essays from the 1890s, but it never carries the messianic aura that it bears in Schenker's later works.)

There is more. Another significant absence is the theme of German nationalism. Organicism and the ideology of genius are often connected to notions of national superiority. As Norris observes, the etymology of "genius" carries an ideological charge through its relation to the *genius loci*, "the tutelary spirit of homegrounds and origins, a figure that translates readily enough into forms of nationalist mystique."⁴⁸ If one believes Schopenhauer's claims that genius transcends the will of the individual, it is but a short step to view genius as the expression of a collective will, as the embodiment of the *Volk*. These themes of German nationalism and genius became intimately intertwined in Schenker's later works. Their complete omission from "Geist" should suggest how remote Schenker's early position is from the views he later espoused in essays such as "Von der Sendung des deutschen Genies."⁴⁹

One clue to Schenker's assumption of a Nietzschean stance may involve the latter's repudiation of Wagner. Although Schenker's attitude towards Wagner's music was still sympathetic in 1895, his reactions to Wagner's aesthetics were an entirely different matter.⁵⁰ *Human, All-too Human*

⁴⁸Norris, *Paul de Man*, 63-64.

⁴⁹This is the title of the first essay in Schenker's *Tonwille*.

⁵⁰See for example, Schenker's essay "Mozartrenaissance" (1897), reprinted in *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker*, 252-56, in which

was written just after Nietzsche's break with Wagner; according to one commentator, "the word *artist* [in this book] is largely a cipher for Wagner," who is never mentioned in the book.⁵¹ Could it be that Schenker found Nietzsche's demystification of art attractive because it offered an alternative to Wagner's aesthetics?

IV

"Geist" can be read as a covert debate with Wagner; a compelling reading of the text can be organized around this theme. Schenker does not openly acknowledge this preoccupation with Wagner, whom he mentions only once, and then quite incidentally. Wagner's presence, however, is evident through Schenker's intense engagement with certain topics central to Wagner's aesthetics. Schenker's readers in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* would probably have been well acquainted with Wagner's prose works.⁵² Many points in "Geist" become clear if we recognize Schenker's critique of certain Wagnerian premises.

One idea that especially demands such contextualization is Schenker's discussion of musical moods. In the final and longest section of the essay, entitled "Moods, Forms, and the 'Organic'" ("Stimmungen, Formen, und das 'Organische'"), Schenker undermines the notion that some sort of organic necessity might underlie the succession of moods in a composition.

Schenker contends that Wagner's efforts on behalf of Mozart and Beethoven involved a misunderstanding of their music.

⁵¹Marion Faber, introduction to her translation of Nietzsche's *Human, All-too Human*, xxi.

⁵²Wagner himself had contributed to the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*; Ernst Wilhelm Fritsch, editor and publisher of the journal, was a Wagner partisan. See Jürgen Kühnel, "The Prose Writings," in *The Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, translation ed. John Deathridge (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 634.

Now we might be tempted to consider at least the sequence of moods as strictly organic. But several facts oppose this notion. For example, the mood that gives birth to the first theme of a sonata never recurs in exactly the same way in the whole course of a piece. More important, a sequence of moods that are not rooted in the world of ideas and experience must disclaim any vestige of necessity. The causality inherent in the vicissitudes of life directs and determines its moods. The images of moods formed in music, however, unburdened by the weight of ideas and experience, can attain only the deceptive appearance of life's causality.⁵³

Read with historical awareness, Schenker's analysis of the sequence of moods echoes an idea that Wagner expounded in at least three major prose works. In *The Art-Work of the Future* (*Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*) Wagner complained that music in itself is not organic because it cannot create an inevitable series of moods: "Absolute music . . . can juxtapose feelings and moods, but cannot develop one mood out of another through any necessity."⁵⁴ In *Opera and Drama* (*Oper und Drama*) Wagner celebrated the power of the

⁵³"Und möchte man doch mindestens die Stimmungsfolge für streng organisch halten, so ist dagegen zu erwägen, dass die Stimmung, in der z. B. das erste Thema einer Sonate geboren wurde, niemals wieder so zurückkehrt, wie sie gewesen, im Laufe der ganzen Arbeit, und dass, was viel entscheidender, jede Nothwendigkeit abzusprechen ist einer Folge von Stimmungen, die nicht im Begrifflichen und in der Welt der Erfahrung wurzeln. Die Stimmung des Lebens beherrscht und ordnet die Causalität des Lebensereignisse, die Stimmungsbilder in der Musik aber, die nicht die erdwärts zerrende Schwere des Begriffs und der Erfahrung kennen, beherrscht nur der täuschende Schein einer Lebenscausalität." Schenker, "Der Geist der musikalischen Technik," 149; 99-100.

⁵⁴"Die absolute Musik . . . kann Gefühle und Stimmung nebeneinander stellen, nicht aber nach Nothwendigkeit eine Stimmungen aus der andern entwickeln . . ." Richard Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, in *Dichtungen und Schriften: Jubiläumsausgabe in zehn Bänden*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1983), 6:64. (My translation.)

poet to foster an inexorable progression of moods.⁵⁵ In *A Communication to My Friends* (*Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde*) he stressed that “the development of the moods out of each other” confers a characteristic unity on each of his dramas.⁵⁶

The organic sequence of moods, then, was crucial to Wagner’s polemics against absolute music. In *Opera and Drama* Wagner constructed a myth of origins: the individual arts belong to a mutilated whole; in Greek culture they had an organic relationship to each other and to the community.⁵⁷ In isolation, each art is inorganic; only together, and operating under the hegemony of poetry, could the arts achieve an organic unity.⁵⁸ This devaluation of absolute music is part of Wagner’s project of clearing space for himself, presenting himself as the one who would restore the lost organic unity of the arts.

Wagner, then, had already stated that music is inorganic, using this objection to argue for the fusion of the arts. Contra Wagner, Schenker supports the autonomy of music, refusing to let the text serve as the guarantee of an organic sequence of moods. Although he speculates that “early man could have developed speech and song together,” he does not view this as a paradise to be regained, contending instead that music “was

⁵⁵Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, in *Dichtungen und Schriften*, 7:361.

⁵⁶“... die Entwicklung der Stimmungen aus einander...” Wagner, *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde*, in *Dichtungen und Schriften*, 6:301. (My translation.)

⁵⁷Wagner’s analysis of the fragmentation of modern life and his appeal to the supposed organic unity of Greek culture recall Friedrich Schiller’s similar statements in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1795).

⁵⁸I leave aside here the question of whether Wagner’s theorizing about the relative priority of music versus the poetic drama contradicts his own practice. For a discussion of this point, see William Weber, “Wagner, Wagnerism, and Musical Idealism,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 52.

emancipated from language much earlier than music historians suppose.”⁵⁹ He refuses to subordinate music to language, even if this entails sacrificing organicism.

To invoke Harold Bloom’s terminology, Schenker’s strategy here is an *ascesis*, a revisionary movement that subverts a precursor text by a self-curtailment: “the poet yields up part of his human and imaginative endowment . . . to separate himself from others, including the precursor.”⁶⁰ Schenker accepts a limited, non-organic music to achieve autonomy; he jettisons organicism to clear space for music as an independent art. Thus he executes a double *ascesis*, distancing himself from Wagner while also detaching music from the other arts. Schenker’s demand for autonomy—a theme from which he never wavered—pressures him to accept an inorganic music.

Schenker’s swerve from Wagner is epitomized by their conflicting attitudes towards repetition. In his essay “On Franz Liszt’s Symphonic Poems” (“Über Franz Liszts Symphonische Dichtungen”), Wagner criticized Beethoven’s Third “Leonore” Overture, charging that the conventions of sonata form had forced Beethoven to repeat what the drama portrays only once. Wagner reiterated this criticism in “On the Application of Music to the Drama” (“Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama”), using this overture to illustrate the limits of absolute music.⁶¹

⁵⁹ “[da nun so] in gleicher Zeit die Fähigkeit zum Wort und Ton den ersten Menschen eigen sein konnte . . .”; “. . . schon *viel früher vom Wort emancipirt* war, als die Musikgeschichteschreiber es annehmen.” Schenker, “Der Geist der musikalischen Technik,” 135, 138; 86, 89.

⁶⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 15. For an application of Bloom’s poetics to musical analysis, see my “Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence,” *Music Analysis* 10/1 and 2 (1991):3-72.

⁶¹ Wagner, “Über Franz Liszts Symphonische Dichtungen,” *Dichtungen und Schriften* 9:31; “Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama,” *Dichtungen und Schriften* 9:328-29.

In opposition to Wagner, Schenker sees repetition as “music’s most striking and distinctive characteristic.” Repetition provides a basis for musical autonomy, and if this makes music inorganic, so be it. Schenker explicitly contrasts musical repetition with the causality of life in which “every act, every event, takes place only once.”⁶² Without mentioning Wagner, Schenker’s seems to reply to Wagner’s criticism of Beethoven. (Schenker does refer to Wagner’s Liszt essay in another article published soon after “Geist.”)⁶³

On the crucial issue of musical autonomy, then, Schenker sides with Hanslick and against Wagner. Schenker’s claim that “the musical motive is only a sign for itself . . . it is nothing more and nothing less than itself”⁶⁴ echoes Hanslick:

The essential difference is that in speech the sound is only a sign, that is, a means to an end, which is entirely distinct from the means, while in music the sound is an object, i.e., it appears to us as an end in itself.⁶⁵

62“ . . . die stärkste und unterscheidenste Eigenthümlichkeit der musikalischen Kunst . . .”; “[wie] jedes Ereigniss und jede Thatsache blos einfach in die Welt gesetzt werden . . .” Schenker, “Der Geist der musikalischen Technik,” 137; 88.

63Schenker mentions Wagner’s Liszt essay in “Mehr Kunst!” (1897), reprinted in *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker*, 251.

64“[so] ist das musikalische Motiv nur ein Zeichen für sich selbst . . . Nichts mehr und Nichts weniger, als es selbst.” Schenker, “Der Geist der musikalischen Technik,” 138; 89.

65“Der wesentliche Grundunterscheid besteht aber darin, dass in der Sprache der Ton nur ein Zeichen, d. h. Mittel zum Zweck eines diesem Mittel ganz fremden Auszudrückenden ist, während in der Musik der Ton eine Sache ist, d. h. als Selbstzweck auftritt.” Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 11th edn. (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1910), 88. Trans. by Geoffrey Payzant as *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), 42.

This juxtaposition undermines Keiler's claim that Schenker's anti-organicism constitutes "a plea, surely . . . against the detached formalism of Hanslick's dogma."⁶⁶ (Nor does Keiler support this statement with any sort of detailed textual analysis.) Far from attacking Hanslick, there is evidence that Schenker actually consulted him during the composition of "Geist."⁶⁷

V

Schenker's anti-organicist position suggests affinities with many other cultural trends in the late nineteenth century. Let us consider one more possible source of inspiration for Schenker's early skepticism: the thought of Ernst Mach (1843-1916). I choose Mach not only because he was one of the most influential thinkers of his time, but also because, as we shall see, he can be directly linked to Schenker.

While Mach's achievements as a scientist were remarkable, it is his philosophy that concerns me here. Mach advocated new epistemological foundations for modern science. He wanted to purge science of all metaphysical assumptions; these he regarded as superfluous additions

⁶⁶Keiler, "The Origins of Schenker's Thought," 287.

⁶⁷"Geist" belonged to a larger work which was never published and is now presumed lost. Federhofer speculates that the title of the larger work was "Geschichte der Melodie" ("History of Melody"). A postcard from Hanslick to Schenker, dated 15 February 1894, and now in the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection at the University of California, Riverside, refers to Schenker's "Geschichte der Melodie"; Hanslick writes that he is very interested in Schenker's ideas for this work, but that because of the death of Theodor Billroth and other friends, and also because of his brother's illness, he will have to postpone discussion of Schenker's plans. See Federhofer, *Heinrich Schenker: Nach Tagebüchern und Briefen in der Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection, University of California, Riverside* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1985), 12-13, for the text of this card. This card certainly suggests that Schenker sought to discuss his work with Hanslick. To be sure, there is much in "Geist" that Hanslick might have disagreed with, but to interpret it as a covert attack on Hanslick's formalism seems unfounded.

harmful to the goal of science, which should be economy of thought. Thus all hitherto accepted unities such as the ego, body, matter, and so on, should be subjected to a radical critique. There is no need, he urged, to assume unobservable entities behind phenomena. Concepts of unity are only fictions, symbols without reality in themselves, "aids to description rather than objects of description."⁶⁸ He warned, for example, against "the habit of treating the unanalyzed ego-complex as an indiscerptible unity." At death "only an ideal mental-economical unity, not a real unity, has ceased to exist."⁶⁹

What could survive this relentless anti-metaphysical critique? Mach wanted to base science on the analysis of sensations, which he usually preferred to call "elements." He envisioned a psycho-physics which would analyze the psychological bases of experience, organized according to the principle of the association of ideas. Because Mach sought a unified methodology for all the sciences, his influence overflowed the boundaries of any single discipline.

His impact was enhanced both by the lucidity of his prose and by his energetic pursuit of the social and political consequences of his ideas. Thus his Dortmund speech in 1886, for his example, advocating educational reform, received widespread coverage in the popular press in Germany, Austria, and France. His speaking style also won him many converts. After his return to the University of Vienna in 1895, for example, he lectured to packed audiences in the largest lecture hall at the university.⁷⁰

His influence on the arts community in Vienna was profound; according to Johnston, "Mach's psychology of

⁶⁸Lindenfeld, *The Transformation of Positivism*, 82.

⁶⁹Ernst Mach, *The Analysis of Sensations*, trans C. M. Williams (New York: Dover, 1959), 26, 24.

⁷⁰John T. Blackmore, *Ernst Mach: His Work, Life, and Influence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 185.

sensations epitomized Viennese impression.”⁷¹ The writer Hermann Bahr attributed Mach’s impact primarily to a single aphorism: “The ego must be given up.” If we recall Eagleton’s analysis of the cryptosubjectivity of aesthetic discourse, we can see how Mach’s dissolution of the ego could have artistic repercussions. Just as aesthetic discourse had often modeled the work of art on the structure of the human subject, so questioning the necessary unity of that subject could be transformed into skepticism about organic unity in art. Adorno, for example (writing, of course, at a later period), said of Stravinsky’s music that “according to the philosophy implied, he belongs to the positivism of Ernst Mach: ‘the ego is not to be saved.’”⁷²

Schenker’s anti-organicism, then, could be considered an extension of Mach’s anti-metaphysical critique. Given Mach’s profound impact in Vienna, Schenker could hardly have escaped Mach’s influence. We do not have to assume any metaphysical entity like a *Zeitgeist*, however, to establish Schenker’s awareness of Mach’s ideas. *Schenker and Mach were personally acquainted.*

Although the date of their first meeting is unknown, we can establish a *terminus ad quem*: December 2, 1896, the year after “Geist” was published. A postcard from Mach to Schenker, bearing that date, is in the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection at the University of California, Riverside. Mach’s card suggests that they had discussed Schenker’s ideas:

It seems to me that the views you have broached have a healthy kernel and deserve to be pursued. In any case the discussion will be beneficial and

⁷¹Johnston, *The Austrian Mind*, 185.

⁷²Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomsten (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 166.

stimulating. —Dr. Wallaschek lives at IV Waaggasse 11, in case you want to open relations with him.⁷³

Reconstructing the context of this card is difficult. The Jonas Collection has no other correspondence between the two; since both men lived in Vienna, it is unlikely that an extensive correspondence ever existed. Mach's stroke in 1898 would probably have ended any contact between them. Entries in Schenker's diary are sketchy for this period, and may not provide clarification.⁷⁴

We can, however, draw several inferences from Mach's card. First, Schenker and Mach probably had some prior contact, since Mach gives Schenker Wallaschek's address without any further explanation. (Richard Wallaschek [1860-1917] did some pioneering work in the field of music psychology; Mach mentions him several times in *The Analysis of Sensations*.) Second, I think it is likely that Schenker approached Mach; a man of Mach's stature would not have sought out an unknown like Schenker. If Schenker sought out Mach so soon after writing "Geist," it may be that he saw an affinity in their ideas. Since Mach responded favorably, writing that Schenker's views "have a healthy kernel and deserve to be pursued," Mach himself may have perceived some similarity in their approaches; he was not the sort of man to give his approval lightly. At least this interpretation seems the most economical hypothesis.

⁷³"Es scheint mir, dass die Ansichten welche Sie zur Sprache gebracht haben, einen gesunden Kern haben und verdienen, verfolgt zu werden. Die Discussion wird jedenfalls förderlich und anregend sein, auch wenn Sie nicht in allen Punkten Recht behalten sollten. —Dr. Wallaschek wohnt IV, Waaggasse 11, falls Sie ihn in Beziehung treten wollen." Ernst Mach, postcard to Schenker, 2 December 1896, now in the Oswald Jonas Memorial Collection, University of California, Riverside. Quoted in Federhofer, *Heinrich Schenker: Nach Tagebüchern und Briefen*, 14-15. (My translation.)

⁷⁴I am grateful to Robert Lang, curator of the Oswald Joans Memorial Collection, who provided this information about Schenker's diary and correspondence.

Of course, a single postcard constitutes a slender basis for establishing influence. It does, however, situate Schenker in a wider context than Keiler considered, linking Schenker to one of the seminal thinkers of the period. Moreover, although Schenker does not mention Mach in "Geist," he does cite him in another article, "Zur musikalische Erziehung" ("On Musical Education"), published the same year.⁷⁵

I consider these facts an invitation to revisit "Geist" with Mach's thought in mind. Mach's influence on Schenker has never been discussed or even suspected in the literature.⁷⁶ In "Schenker and Kantian Epistemology," I noticed parallels, in Schenker's rejection of musical causality, to David Hume's skepticism. This resemblance to Hume seems strange in comparison to Schenker's later work. When seen in relation to Mach, however, this Humean influence seems quite in character. Mach revered Hume, and dedicated a book to his memory. In *The Analysis of Sensations* he wrote: "that my starting-point is not essentially different from Hume's is of course obvious."⁷⁷

Consider other parallels to Mach in "Geist." Schenker declares his intention to "explain the nature of harmonic and contrapuntal rules almost entirely in terms of their psychological origins and impulses."⁷⁸ This is entirely consistent with Mach's program of analyzing experience in terms of psychological sensations and complexes of

⁷⁵Schenker, "Zur musikalische Erziehung" (1895), reprinted in *Heinrich Schenker als Essayist und Kritiker*, 154-66. Schenker cites Mach on page 162.

⁷⁶Federhofer cites Mach's card to Schenker but draws no inferences from it.

⁷⁷Mach, *Analysis of Sensations*, 46.

⁷⁸"Dass ich die Natur der harmonischen und contrapunctischen Gebote fast rein psychologisch aus ihrer Ursache und ihren Bedürfniss erläutern werde" Schenker, "Der Geist der musikalischen Technik," 142; 93.

sensations. Exactly what Schenker means by “psychological origins and impulses” is never rigorously defined in “Geist.” Since “Geist” was part of a longer work that was never published, it is possible that Schenker elaborated on this in his complete manuscript.⁷⁹ His later works, however, fulfill this promise of a psychological explanation. A close reading of Schenker’s *Harmony*, for example, suggests that it was intended as a psychology of harmony. Many chapter and section headings attest to this preoccupation with psychology: “On the Psychology of Contents and of Step Progression,” “On the Psychology of Chromatic Alteration,” “The Psychology of the Pedal Point,” and so forth. He begins the book by introducing the psychological principle of the association of ideas.⁸⁰ Schenker’s concept of the scale-step reflects psychological categories; the decision to organize chords into larger units is based on psychological criteria such as pattern recognition, memory, the law of the least expenditure of effort, and so on.⁸¹ Psychological concerns are still evident in the first volume of Schenker’s *Counterpoint*. Indeed, in the preface to *Harmony*, he refers to his forthcoming book on counterpoint by a different title: *Psychology of Counterpoint*.⁸²

Here the urgency of reading Schenker with historical awareness becomes clear. Schenker’s preoccupation with music psychology has been largely ignored in the literature, primarily because of interpretations that read all of Schenker from the perspective of *Der freie Satz*. Lee Rothfarb, for example, contrasts Schenker with Ernst Kurth, writing that

⁷⁹See note 57.

⁸⁰Schenker, *Harmonielehre* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1906), 3; trans. as *Harmony* by Elisabeth Mann Borgese, ed. Oswald Jonas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1954), 3.

⁸¹See, for example, §79 on how to recognize scale-steps.

⁸²Schenker, *Harmonielehre*, vii; xxvi.

while Kurth was psychologically oriented, Schenker was concerned with syntactic general theories.⁸³ Yet Schenker, at least, seems to have believed that he was advancing psychological explanations, judging from the sheer quantity of his appeals to psychology. What Schenker understood the tasks of music psychology to be is a topic that demands further investigation; a good starting point would be Mach's theories.

Mach's influence on Schenker may have extended beyond questions of psychology. For example, Mach might have urged Schenker to view music in Darwinian terms. Mach had earlier encouraged his friend the Viennese musicologist Eduard Kulke to do exactly that, to see if there is "a survival of the fittest in music."⁸⁴ In Schenker's *Harmony*, evolutionary metaphors are pervasive. Music is characterized in terms of "biological urges," the major and minor keys are said to have "defeated the modes," and so on.⁸⁵ Again, I must urge historical awareness in reading Schenker, because this Darwinian approach characterizes only one part of Schenker's career. Schenker is often described as being obsessed by biological metaphors, but careful reading reveals that this tendency peaks in the harmony book.

Finally, I suspect that Mach's approach to the history of science may illuminate Schenker's approach to the history of contrapuntal theory in *Counterpoint*. Mach believed that science should be historical, critical, and psychological, and he stressed the importance of studying the history of science to

⁸³Lee Rothfarb, *Ernst Kurth as Theorist and Analyst* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 220.

⁸⁴Blackmore, *Ernst Mach*, 23. This Darwinian struggle for existence seems to contradict Mach's Buddhistic renunciation of the ego. This sort of blending of incompatible ideas is characteristic of much innovative thought in late-Hapsburg Austria; a single work will often bear traces of antithetical ideological systems.

⁸⁵See, for example, §38 in Schenker's *Harmonielehre*, in which the ruling metaphors of this book are displayed with special clarity.

see how errors have arisen. Schenker's *Counterpoint* contains a running commentary on various contrapuntal theories, including Fux, Albrechtsberger, Cherubini, and Bellermand. Notice, however, that Schenker did not consult the history of music theory to discover the rules of counterpoint. His approach to the history of his discipline, like Mach's, was also historical and critical. Schenker believed that he had a perspective outside of history from which to critique theory: namely, a kind of introspective psychological analysis of perceptions.

Mach's influence on Schenker demands further investigation. Even my brief exposition here, however, should suffice to show some trends in late-Hapsburg Austria that questioned the very basis of organicist thinking. And Schenker's awareness of these debates is also clear. He was neither intellectually isolated nor solely preoccupied with musical issues. Seen in this way, Schenker's anti-organicism is not "downright odd," as Keiler suggests. Schenker's anti-organicism is congruent with the psychological approach that he advocates in the same essay. By prioritizing the listener's perceptions rather than the composition itself, he would have had no motivation to see pieces as autonomous, organic entities. His focus, in "Geist," is on the subject, not the musical object—or rather, his perspective produces that interpenetration of subject and object that characterizes Mach's thought.

VI

The interpretation of Schenker's early thought presented here has consequences for the future of Schenkerian studies. Let me suggest some directions for rethinking our relationship to Schenker.

If we read Schenker in the context of Austrian psychology, we may come closer to recovering his unspoken problematic as we retrieve the deep but largely tacit questions that motivated his theorizing. Schenker came of age during a

period of intense innovation that attended the establishment of psychology as a discipline separate from philosophy.⁸⁶ There are many suggestive parallels between Austrian psychology at the turn of the century and Schenker's thought. The critique of mental atomism in psychology, for example, which included a rejection of reductive and simplistic ways of conceiving the unity of the mind, resembles Schenker's critique of chord-to-chord harmonic thinking. The movement in psychology from static toward more dynamic models of the mind resembles Schenker's quest for a more dynamic music theory.

If we read Schenker in this context, there seems to be a cluster of psychological terms in his work that functions in a coordinated manner, creating a more precise structure of meanings than we presently realize. We need to recover this set of terms and the historical context that gives it meaning. If we take Schenker's appeals to psychology seriously, his *Harmony*, for example, becomes quite a different book.⁸⁷

⁸⁶See Lindenfeld, *The Transformation of Positivism* for a lucid summary of this critical period in the establishment of psychology as an independent discipline.

⁸⁷To take just one brief example of Schenker's own music psychology in *Harmonielehre*, consider his analysis of the relationship between antecedent and consequent phrases. He derives the need for the consequent phrase from the psychological need for "associations" (*Assoziationen*). The antecedent phrase arouses an "expectation of a continuation" (*Erwartung einer Fortsetzung*, §117). Schenker develops an informal hierarchy of degrees of "satisfaction" (*Befriedigung*); the antecedent provides only a "preliminary, relative kind of satisfaction" (*eine vorläufige, relative Befriedigung*, §118), while the consequent phrase, by fulfilling our need for conceptual associations, provides "final and absolute satisfaction" (*eine endgültige, absolute Befriedigung*). Schenker's entire narrative here focuses on the listener's perceptions, upon feelings of expectation, satisfaction, and so on. Without historical awareness, this description may seem incidental to what we assume is the main thrust of Schenker's book—namely, his disentangling of the concepts of scale-step and counterpoint. These concepts themselves, however, are inextricably intertwined with Schenker's psychology; the possibility of understanding both the differences between harmony and counterpoint and their interaction depends, at least at this stage of Schenker's project, on grasping the psychology of the scale-step.

Some would view Schenker's organicism as a lapse, as a regression from empirical sobriety to metaphysical intoxication. "Geist" shows, however, that he did not accept organicism blindly; he was aware of alternatives, and sought to devise a theory that could withstand his own clearly-formulated objections. Any attempt to critique Schenker's ideology must confront the fact that Schenker himself, at the beginning of his career, presented a bolder, more penetrating critique of organicist thought than any of his subsequent critics.⁸⁸ This does not mean, however, that music is really organic. Organicism, however, can function as a regulative concept (in Kant's sense). If we adopt a pragmatic approach, viewing theories as rhetorics, it is clear that Schenker invented a new way of talking about music in terms of certain governing metaphors of organic unity.⁸⁹

⁸⁸For two recent essays that examine Schenker's ideology, see Richard Littlefield and David Neumeyer, "Rewriting Schenker: Narrative—History—Ideology," *Music Theory Spectrum* 14/1 (1992):38-65, and Robert Snarrenberg, "Schenker's Senses of Concealment," *Theoria* 6 (1992):97-134.

⁸⁹This pragmatic approach is developed by Richard Rorty in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).