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Beethoven's Heroic New Path Organic Form and its Consequences

Let me begin with a brief reflection about the widespread (in my view profoundly misguided) assumption that all “critical knowledge” ought to issue from a neutral point of view and to conceive its “objects” as ostensibly unrelated to us. On this account, knowledge of a particular issue originates in a dispassionate “view from nowhere” (T. Nagel) that supposedly owes nothing *to* and notably is not affected *by* the phenomenon under investigation. To know is not to commit to a (potentially transformative) *interaction with a form* but, rather, to pursue the unilateral and impersonal *determination of a shape*. Indeed, form largely ceases to have an epistemologically significant role as, by the late sixteenth century, the identity of a given object (as indeed the warrant for crediting it with reality in the first place) is overwhelmingly conceived in terms of *efficient causation*. Yet if this model of rational inquiry seems obvious to us now, we should remember that it is of rather recent historical provenance; viz., it reflects the ascendancy of modern scientific *method* over a pre-modern modern culture of *judgment*, a shift that commenced barely four-hundred years ago. Previously, to know something had involved one’s drawing progressively closer *to*, indeed participating *in* the phenomenon at stake so as to grasp its intrinsic law (*lex insita*) of operation. The reality and identity of a thing were deemed inseparable from the *form of its appearance*, the way in which it not only appears *to* our attention but stakes a positive claim *on* it, thereby enabling the beholder to evolve in dynamic interaction with the appearing phenomenon. To know thus meant to *participate in the formal cause* that accounts for the unique functioning (Aquinas’ *operatio*) of a “thing” (*res*)—the latter not to be confused with the term “object” that would only supersede it in the early modern era.

Where classical and Scholastic accounts of knowledge deem the essence of a thing to be inseparable from its dynamic, indeed charismatic way of making itself known—thus prompting Aquinas to define “being” (*ens*) as an activity (*actus*)—modern analysis dismisses such notions as lacking an adequate conceptual warrant and, instead, proceeds to break down a given “object” of inquiry into constitutive parts so as to isolate the efficient causes that set it apart from other objects. The late Coleridge calls this analyzing the *shape* rather than apprehending the *form*, echoed a

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century later in Husserl's distinction between two models of truth: that of correctness and that of disclosure. In time, the modern concept of scientific method that had evolved since the seventeenth century also came to dominate humanistic inquiry. Yet even as the rise of historicist and philological methodologies in the nineteenth century continues unabated, developments in the life-sciences, Romantic philosophy, and aesthetics suggest growing resistance to the Enlightenment's restrictive understanding of form as either an order arbitrarily *imposed* (as in Linneaus' scheme of botanical classification) or as something to be *shattered* by the analytical interventions of science (as in Wordsworth's "we murder to dissect"). As regards musical composition and -aesthetics, it has long been noted that Beethoven's instrumental oeuvre, beginning as early as 1802, appears to resist a model of knowledge that would frame its object in terms of a static, symmetrical, and pre-established order. From A. B. Marx to E. Hanslick, H. Schenker, R. Reti, F. Cassirer, and C. Dahlhaus, this line of argument has consistently mobilized metaphors of organic life – which eventually congealed into the aesthetic program of "organicism" – to illustrate the momentous shift wrought by Beethoven's heroic style. It may help briefly to recapture some of the principal traits associated with the musical idiom of Beethoven's middle-period. The opening movements of Beethoven's piano sonata op. 57, his second Razumovsky quartet op. 59, and the Eroica symphony op. 55 all feature in their opening measures what, at first, appear to be solidly diatonic, if deceptively simple gestures. As the late Charles Rosen had observed some time ago, "us[ing] the simplest elements of the tonal system as themes lay at the heart of Beethoven's personal style from the beginning."¹ This is true of many works besides the ones here mentioned (e.g., op. 12/1; op. 30/3; op. 70/1; op. 73; op. 96 et al.). Yet such a seemingly unequivocal laying of harmonic foundations quickly yields to an experience of auditory disorientation inasmuch as a distinct subject or theme never quite arrives. Instead, in the first two examples, the terse presentation of the movement's key signature is immediately attenuated upon its repetition a half step higher. In addition to destabilizing the diatonic subject through its chromatic repetition at the beginning of the Appassionata, the theme's closing, half-cadential phrase (m. 3) with its initially ornamental trill soon emancipates itself as a separate motif that extends the opening's chromatic ambiguity (mm. 9 and 11). Likewise, the bass-register's staccato counterpoint evolves into a transitional, registrally expanding motif by the upper voice (mm. 11-12), from where it leads into the virtuosio arpeggiated diminished chord of measure 14. The opening of the second Razumovsky quartet (op. 59 no. 2) features a strikingly similar approach, with Beethoven once again sequencing a diatonic opening in chromatic form and then refracting it into smaller cells seemingly bent on developing

on their own.

These are just some of the ways in which an opening subject's presentation is subject to a near-instantaneous morphological transformation such as envelops the listener in what Scott Burnham characterizes as a "compellingly involving" auditory experience. Roger Kamien offers a succinct inventory of the formal devices whereby the developmental potential of a motivic proposition is being drawn out and sequenced as a transformational progression: "registral expansion and gradual registral ascent," "rhythmic acceleration, motivic foreshortening, crescendo, addition of voices, or arrival at a dissonant chord"², syncopation³ and the introduction of "prominent chromatic tones"⁴—for which the curiously disorienting C# in the seventh measure of the Eroica symphony offers a justly famous instance. To this one might add Beethoven's reorganization of a motif's initial rhythmic *Gestalt* by shifting stress to previously unstressed beats, especially by means of the *sf* mark so pervasive throughout his oeuvre.

Characteristic of the beginnings of numerous works from the middle period thus appears to be an epigenetic, modular process that can also be observed in Goethe's account of plant development in his botanical writings of the 1790s.⁵ Echoing the compact and often witty minimalism of his sometime teacher Haydn, rather than Mozart's serene and elegant melodic arcs, Beethoven's opening movements often present their thematic material as minimal in scope and unusually terse in instrumentation and sonority. It is their compactness above all that enables Beethoven's heroic style to generate, almost from the very outset, an unfamiliar and complex process of transformation such as will often metastasize across an entire movement. To appraise what all this might betoken one should recall, ever so briefly, what that model of (aesthetic) knowledge is *from which* Beethoven appears to break away around 1802. In his great study of *The Classical Style*, the late Charles Rosen observes how that idiom, particularly in Mozart, typically conceives of its thematic material by means of contrast or *antithesis*—itself a concept derived from classical rhetoric that in musical composition involves a juxtaposition of tonic and dominant, as well as rhythmically accentuated vs. fluid-lyrical elements.⁶ Consistent with its rhetorical origins, such an architectonic or "quadratic" concept of form revolves around a period-structure or "sentence" whose syntax (8 measures, consisting of an antecedent "presentation phrase" ending on a half-cadenza in the fourth measure and a "continuation" terminating in full-cadential closure at measure eight) at once presupposes and reaffirms an underlying grammar of musical design.

Now for reasons soon to occupy us, we should bear in mind that the "classical" model of melodic and developmental units realized as "a hierarchical arrangement of discrete, perceptually significant time spans"

only emerged as a theoretical and pedagogical concept in the early nineteenth century.⁷ Carl Dahlhaus has thus characterized the form of the sonata as “an epigonal theory,” one arrived at only posthumously as it were.⁸ Considering Beethoven’s increasingly iconoclastic outlook on the constraints of Viennese classicism, it therefore comes as something of a surprise to find that in codifying the classical sonata form the emergent discipline of nineteenth-century musicology should have so consistently, at times almost exclusively drawn on Beethoven’s instrumental oeuvre to illustrate and legitimate that paradigm. Indeed, beginning sometime after 1850, the disciplinary objectives and methodological possibilities of musicology appear to have been overwhelmingly articulated and defined *through* and *by means of* Beethoven’s revolutionary or “heroic” style. From A. B. Marx, E. Hanslick, via H. Schenker, F. Cassirer, R. Réti, to C. Dahlhaus, William Kindermann, and most recently, Daniel Chua and Scott Burnham,⁹ both the *raison d’être* and the sheer intellectual fecundity of musicology appear both prompted and circumscribed by Beethoven’s remarkable capacity for exploring music’s sonorous and intellectual potential to its fullest possible extent. Having traced A. B. Marx as “the first theorist to trace the processive aspect of Beethoven’s music from the perspective of musical form and style,” Scott Burnham goes on to speculate that, “*It might even be argued that Beethoven’s music made Marx’s method and its underlying theory possible.*” In the same vein, Kevin Korsyn remarks how for H. “Schenker, the organic work is not merely a coherent object that we contemplate, it is also a subject who returns our gaze.”¹⁰ If, as Denise Gigante has argued, there is an organicist “spirit of the age” (*Zeitgeist*) dominating aesthetics, poetics, and the life-sciences around 1800, it seems that we still have not entirely stepped out of its shadow.¹¹

However that may be, the overwhelming consensus has long been that by the time he had achieved his so-called “heroic” style Beethoven had fundamentally altered the classical conception of form, and that the works of Beethoven’s middle-period no longer accommodate an aesthetic framework that views form as a static template premised on a conventional grammar of contrasts or rhetorical antitheses. Instead, it is said, Beethoven’s heroic style confronts the listener with a quasi-organic and incessantly self-organizing auditory structure that (as is usually pointed out), bears a striking resemblance to a modular and self-organizing understanding of form then taking over in the life sciences (in the work of Robinet, Spallanzani, Blumenbach, Kant, Goethe, and von Baer) and in early-Romantic poetics and aesthetics (again in Goethe, Schlegel, Novalis, Coleridge). In abandoning a “sectional” or “quadratic” notion of form – where contrasting themes can be isolated on the basis of harmonic functions and by their lyric or percussive structure, respectively – Beethoven uncouples music from a classical rhetoric that tended to

organize form through the juxtaposition of sharply delineated “subjects” and “sentiments.” Instead, musical form morphs into a temporal and notably dialectical progression that hinges on the continual transformation of its opening motivic propositions. No longer comprised of discrete and contrasting sections to be held in virtual simultaneity in the listener’s auditory memory, form constitutes itself *in actu*. We witness a “temporalization of musical form” that actively displaces the classical paradigm of “form as architecture” with a new paradigm of “form as process.”

True to Goethe’s dictum that “the doctrine of forms is the doctrine of transformation,” “exposition” in Beethoven has become “itself a ‘transition.’” As a result, notions of “repetition” and “recognition” – so central to classical (“quadratic”) form – have become acutely problematic.¹² Or, as Scott Burnham puts it, “Beethoven’s enhanced sense of drama entails a new relationship between theme and form: the form no longer serves to present prestabilized thematic material but becomes a necessary process in the life of a theme. This identification of theme and form allows form to appear to develop as the theme develops.”¹³ It is just this pervasive transitional logic of Beethoven’s instrumental style – its unrelenting transformation of minimalist thematic propositions – that also brings about a decisive change in the auditory experience of his music. To experience form as “process” implies that the meaning and logic of that process cannot be captured in a single instant of “recognition” whereby a familiar convention is identified and its enduring validity reaffirmed. Rather, the phenomenology of musical experience involves performers and listeners alike virtually re-composing form by reflecting and recombining the myriad formal relationships that the work unfolds with such seeming organic ease. To quote Burnham once more: “inasmuch as it alters as it is perceived, music . . . positively challenges the listener who plays an active part in re-creating it as a coherent unity . . . to be conscious of his activity, and of the conditions in which he is doing it – that is, to turn away reflexively from the object of his perception to the process whereby music comes into existence”.¹⁴

Yet such an account, while perspicacious and articulate, also hints at an underlying tautology of the listener’s musical *Bildung* as it is said to unfold here. Under the impact of increasingly complex and ceaselessly self-transforming auditory signals, our response to organic musical forms is said to turn progressively more supple and reflexive, thereby effectively “developing” as an intellectual corollary of the auditory structure unfolding before us. Just as Goethe had remarked that “my botanical education resembled to a certain degree the course of botanical history itself,” so A. B. Marx notes how “Beethoven’s foray into a spiritual and more self-conscious domain concurrently summons the listener to achieve

a higher level of awareness [*zu einem höherem Bewußtsein*].”¹⁵ As Mark Evan Bonds puts it, “listening becomes a way of knowing.”¹⁶ Similarly, Carl Dahlhaus understands listening to Beethoven as a dialectical progression in which the auditory event proves so absorbing of the listener’s subjectivity as to determine the tropes and concepts by which listeners may subsequently seek to account for their aesthetic experience. To construe the “Waldstein” sonata’s opening as a cadential sequence, as formalist critics have tended to do, is to lose sight of “the total course of assumptions, denials, reinterpretations, and contradictions that the musical consciousness has traveled along. The meaning is not something fixed and given; . . . rather, it lies in the musical perception, as the activity the music itself prompts; it is in the dialectics of assertion and retraction, confrontation and mediation.”¹⁷

Striking about this account – however lucid in its own right – is its strong allegiance to arguments first developed by A. B. Marx just years after Beethoven’s death. With the possible exception of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s enthusiastic review of Beethoven’s 5th symphony, Marx is arguably the first theoretician of organicism in music; and if we are to delimit the scope and applicability of organic metaphors for understanding Beethoven’s heroic style, some of Marx’s pioneering claims ought to be briefly reconsidered. In his 1860 *Formenlehre*, Marx confronts head-on the question of form: “is form something fixed, subsisting in and for itself?” Is it “a useful power for the artist and his listener . . . or merely a thing of tradition, more or less arbitrary, at most a tether and stay for the weak and wayward?”¹⁸ The answer, unsurprisingly, is a plea for understanding form as dynamic matrix whose value and legitimacy pivot on its ability to incorporate change: “the opposite is stagnation, pseudo-life, death” (58). Drawing on Goethe’s botanical writings and Hegel’s aesthetic theories, Marx declares that “gaining shape – form – is nothing other than self-determination, a Being-for-itself apart from the Other. . . . Form is not the opposite of content but its determination” (60). Such “gaining shape” originates in a musical motive or “primal configuration [*Urgestalt*] of everything musical, just as the germinal vesicle, that membranous sac filled with some fluid element . . . is the primal configuration of everything organic – the true plant or primal animal” (66). Presenting us with a case of pure Romantic ideology, Marx’s account of musical form stresses the self-originating and endlessly differential progression of form, as well as its uncanny ability to advance the listener’s intellectual “formation” (*Bildung*). By relying on “repetition in varied circumstances” organic form enables “the intellect [to] come into play.” A crucial feature of all organicist theory thus turns out to be a shift in focus from a vertical to a horizontal axis. Or, in Marx’s vocabulary, unprecedented stress is placed on the progressive, self-organizing

temporality of musical form (*Gang*), in contrast to an idea of form that is fundamentally static and “closed in and of itself” (*Satz*). Here lie the origins of a compositional ideal that Wagner (describing the compositional design of *Tristan und Isolde* in a letter to M. Wesendonk) was to call the “art of the most subtle transition” (*die Kunst des allmählichsten Übergangs*), a concept that Schoenberg was to extend under the heading of “developing variation” (*Entwicklungsvariation*).

At least implicitly, the two key terms of Marx’s dialectic of form – *Satz* and *Gang* – alert us to the problematic ways in which an Aristotelian conception of biological form *qua* entelechy is being appropriated by nineteenth-century organicist aesthetics. There is an initial failure – which in Schenker’s writings blossoms into principled refusal – to recognize the questionable nature of that conceptual transfer. To sharpen the point, we need to take note of some fundamental discontinuities between an organic conception of life and an organicist theory of aesthetic form. Within the life sciences of the later eighteenth century, an organic conception of form (*morphe*) is both epigenetic (self-generating) *and* teleological—even as Kant had crucially restricted teleological models of explanation to a heuristic (“as if”) function. Simply put, an acorn contains the totality of its developmental possibilities in nuce; yet should it evolve at all, it can only ever become an oak. Hence, philosophical realism from Aristotle to Aquinas locates the *ratio* of forms in the inexorable ways that beginning and end, the substantial form and its material instantiation, appear fused. What separates the inner stringency of form (*morphe*) from merely accidental being, yet also from the discretionary logic of *human* flourishing or the determinative manipulation of *matter* by human ingenuity (*techné*), is that the sources and possibilities of becoming are entirely intrinsic to the organism at issue. In the domain of organic life, form is the progressive realization of a *telos* already coded into the organism from the outset. Aristotle calls this an entelechy. Yet crucially, there is no justification – certainly not according to Aristotle – for transposing or “applying” a teleological and organic conception of biological form to the (aesthetic) productions of man. The realms of *physis*, *zoë*, and *techné* are ontologically distinct.

Yet by the late Enlightenment that ontological divide appears to have eroded, as poetics and musical aesthetics draw on organic tropes so as to invest aesthetic form with unique powers of self-generation and progressive self-organization. As R. Campe and D. Wellbery have shown with reference to Goethe’s Sesenheim lyrics of 1772, and as Charles Taylor’s theory of “expressivism” has proposed in more sweeping terms, this new amalgamation of artistic form with an inner (formal) causality reflects a renewed and now widespread discontent with the *ancient régime* of French neo-classical aesthetics. We recall E. T. A. Hoffmann’s often-

quoted analogy between “the inner structure of Beethoven’s music unfolding [*entfalten*] like a beautiful tree with its buds, leaves, blossoms, and fruits,” though doing so only for a “profoundly contemplative gaze.”¹⁹ Similar passages abound in Wackenroder, Tieck, Novalis, and Schlegel. Yet even as the Romantics enlist metaphors of organic, self-generating life for their understanding of aesthetic form, they still tend to be aware that their choice of botanical tropes is just that: a *choice* aimed at capturing in figurative language the transformative nature of the artist’s and/or listener’s dynamic engagement with aesthetic form. Yet beginning with A. B. Marx and culminating in the work of H. Schenker, R. Reti, and F. Cassirer, organicism evolves from a descriptive aesthetic to a prescriptive theory aimed at naturalizing an intrinsically constructive act. Not coincidentally, the attempt to conceive aesthetic form less as something constructed than something organically *grown* reaches its apex in the years after World War I. Here Beethoven’s heroic style is mythologized as *natura naturans*, be it in the sense of Goethe’s morphological theories (frequently invoked in Fritz Cassirer’s 1925 *Beethoven und die Gestalt*) or as attesting to a deep-structural and inexorable *Tonville* that H. Schenker (drawing on Schopenhauer) was to invest with metaphysical status.

Nowhere is this shift from a metaphoric to a noumenal conception of organic form more apparent than in Schenker’s idea of a “will slumbering in sonorous matter” (*Tonville*), which he develops after 1921; and it is this *ens metaphysicum* that licenses his vituperations against Rameau and all things French, which he charges with sacrificing the primal dynamism of organic form to the abstract and desiccated conventions of French neo-classicism. Among the more revealing (if also peculiarly unsubtle) writings in this regard is Schenker’s “Rameau or Beethoven” (1930). Already the essay’s subtitle (“creeping paralysis or spiritual potency”) introduces the central binary opposition, subsequently amplified into the chasm separating nature from artifice, German *Kultur* from French civilization, and an undiluted, autochthonous romantic expressivism from the decadent contrivances of high modernism. Schenker’s organicism clearly draws on a dialectical tension between what A. B. Marx had construed as the static and vertical principle of *Satz* and the dynamic and temporal logic of *Gang*. Yet what remained a generative dialectic in Marx’s *Formenlehre* (1860) now has hardened into an essential conflict. Rameau’s retroactive misfortune, it would appear, consists in his countrymen having prevailed in the recently concluded Great War. Abandoning his rather more conciliatory view of French musical culture until around 1910, Schenker’s late writings on organicism seem intent on resuming a kind of cultural trench warfare. His opening salvo, namely, that “German composers . . . must finally free themselves from the

Versailles shackles” thus sets the stage for a conflict between French enlightenment and German organicist values.²⁰ Yet in what seems a curious reversal of historical time, Schenker suggests (as indeed he must) that Romantic organicism was there first, only to be assailed by a desiccated theory that “shunned the horizontal in favor of the vertical” and so lulled the listener into complacency with its “enticing possibility of a cozier schematization.” French Enlightenment here is charged with seducing (dare I say “emasculating”) the thrust and potency of organic life as manifested in Beethoven’s heroic style: “it became Rameau’s sorry task in life to lure the musical ear away from voice-leading” (3).

On Schenker’s reading, Beethoven’s heroic idiom does for German music what the spontaneous 1813 uprising against Napoleon had done for German nationalism: “All of a sudden, an art came of age, an art . . . creating solely out of its own inner resources, and . . . *constructing with the sensually vital motion of its innate horizontal linear progressions, patterns that correspond with the motions of the human soul.*” (4). The elemental, propulsive thrust of Beethoven’s heroic style thus contrasts with the hidebound abstractions of neo-classical theory. Hence, too, Schenker’s theory must simultaneously present itself as anti-theory: “I am keenly aware *that my theory*, extracted as it is from the very products of artistic genius, *is and must remain itself art*, and so can never become science” (8). Even so, Schenker’s analyses seek to draw out the deep-structural cohesion and operative logic of Beethoven’s heroic style. Anticipating Noam Chomsky’s integration of depth- and surface structures in his 1957 *Transformational Grammar*, “Beethoven or Rameau” briefly sketches what Schenker’s analysis of the Eroica symphony in the same volume proceeds to unfold in excruciating detail: “The supreme secret of all cohesiveness . . . is: *Content, such as is arrayed before us continuously in the foreground, acquires the status of true cohesiveness only if it emanates from a cohesiveness that has already been detected with clear vision in the depths of a background.* But the axial cohesion that extends from background to foreground is at the same time the lateral cohesion that functions horizontally at foreground level. Only this type of cohesion, to put it biologically, attains the genuinely organic” (7).

Now, I certainly do not mean to suggest that the organicist model is simply wrong or wrongheaded but, rather, that it cannot accommodate a key feature of Beethoven’s instrumental oeuvre. Any characterization of Beethoven’s heroic style as modular, self-revising, and process-like presupposes in the composer (and instills in the listener) a high degree of reflexivity. In Hegelian terms, organic form is never just “in itself” (*an sich*) but depends for its full realization on being *for* itself (*für sich*). Hence, if we are to accept a strong correlation between what Dahlhaus calls a “musically perceived transformational process”²¹ and an epigenetic conception of organic life as the metamorphosis of a motivic *Urgestalt*

(e.g., the leaf in Goethe's morphological writings), the developmental logic in question must also be observable at the level of artistic production. We have already observed the tendency of Beethoven's opening thematic propositions to break down into smaller, motivic increments. In so exfoliating the generative potential of minimal, three- or four-note sequences, Beethoven's instrumental music effectively recalls earlier stages of its own development. As William Kinderman puts it so well, Beethoven's "music seems constantly to be listening to itself."²² Though focused on Beethoven's late variation sets (opp. 109, 111, 127, etc.), Charles Rosen likewise accents the inherent orientation of Beethoven's organicism toward auto-analysis and reflexivity. "There is," he notes,

a progressive simplification as the variations proceed – not of the texture but of the conception of the underlying theme. That part of its shape to which the variations allude becomes gradually more and more skeletal in nature. There is also a progressive isolation of different aspects of the theme, as if they were being illuminated one by one. . . . Beethoven tends to simplify as the texture becomes more complex. For this reason, his late variations give the impression that they are not so much decorating the theme as discovering its essence.²³

Beethoven's later instrumental works in particular exhibit an uncannily reflexive outlook on their own epigenesis; they seem bent on recapitulating the trajectory of their own becoming, thus pointing to a frequently overlooked characteristic of organic form: viz., its inherent tendency to shift from a generative and goal-oriented dynamic towards something rather more attenuated, darker, and forlorn.

Already in Beethoven's early sonatas (e.g., op. 10 no. 3), there is a marked tendency to interpolate often long and wandering transitional sections whose tonal and thematic identity often proves near impossible to ascertain.²⁴ Likewise, the tenuous adagio sections opening many works of the heroic period (such as op. 59 no. 3 or op. 74) hint at a shift from goal-directed to open-ended, variational forms. By the time of his late piano sonatas and quartets, this peculiar tendency to linger over transitional sections has pushed the modular logic of form-*qua*-transformation toward a type of auto-analysis. Increasingly, a teleological model of organic form is supplanted by an open-ended metamorphosis. As a result, organic form becomes increasingly reflexive, that is, mindful of its inherent formalism and potentially formulaic tendencies. One might think here of the Cavatina in op. 130, an aria-like form interpolated in an otherwise decidedly open and fluid composition that (to borrow John

Searle's distinction) would appear more a case of "mention" rather than "use." Similarly, the famous second ("Arietta") movement in op. 111 progressively estranges us from the song-like naivety of its initial presentation as it yields to increasingly complex and free variations. As that movement progresses, so does our understanding of its deceptively simple and guileless opening proposition. Thus, by the end of the movement, the very meaning "arietta" seems to have shifted, much in the spirit of Schiller's famous distinction, from the naïve to the sentimental. It now signifies a remote, perhaps irretrievable lyric ideal that can be captured only in its very evanescence. Indeed, notwithstanding the concise presentation in which it is first introduced, the arietta theme itself soon takes on a conspicuously wandering, errant, and digressive quality. In its very unraveling, the naïve thus unmasks itself as a kind of fantasized past that, as Rousseau had already darkly hinted in his second *Discourse*, "no longer exists, [and] perhaps never did exist";²⁵ closer to Beethoven's time, Schiller echoes Rousseau's suspicion of classical balance as an early instance of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* by showing how the naïve could only ever have acquired reality as a retroactive projection of the alienated, "sentimental" subject of modernity.²⁶

Yet this reflexive destabilizing and estrangement of organicism from its questionable appeal to immediacy not only shapes the experience of listening to Beethoven's instrumental oeuvre but also distinguishes its compositional genesis. In their sheer copiousness and ceaselessly evolving thrust, Beethoven's Note- and Sketchbooks reveal the full extent to which such discovery and distillation of thematic "essence" circumscribes Beethoven's compositional process. As Barry Cooper observes, "no other composer has devoted such a large proportion of his time to refining his initial ideas through sketching processes."²⁷ Some 8,000 pages of such sketches remain, with the compositional process typically beginning with loose leaves, moving on to so-called "concept sketches" found in pocketbooks, transferred to desk sketchbooks, refined into score sketches ("continuity drafts"), and eventually worked out as a fully realized movement. "As the sketching process grew more complex, [Beethoven] eventually found that loose leaves were inadequate"²⁸ and began to stitch them together into little booklets. What at first glance might seem but a punning connection to Goethe's botanical theory, where "all is leaf," will upon closer inspection yield far more significant, deep-structural affinities between Beethoven's compositional process and Goethe's epigenetic theory. Thus close analysis of Beethoven's later compositions often shows these works evolving through ten, even a dozen sketches and successive drafts. While each "successive draft tends to be closer to the final version than its predecessors, . . . there is some backtracking."²⁹ For these sketches not only reveal "increasingly elaborate methods of sketching"

but also the composer's emergent awareness of "previously overlooked motivic relationships between different ideas in a movement."³⁰

If, then, one attempts to situate Romantic organicism within a larger narrative of intellectual and aesthetic history, the distinctive approach to musical form that defines Beethoven's heroic style might be triangulated as follows. Up to a point, Romantic organicism revives the Aristotelian ontology of natural entelechies. This we can observe in the way that works of Beethoven's middle period edge away from the sectional and symmetrical preformationism of the classical sonata form, opting instead for a self-generating and through-composed idea of form-as-process, one fueled by intricate and constantly evolving motivic relationships. Concurrently, the propulsive and shifting rhythmic configuration of compact motifs, as well as their presentation in a dramatically expanded soundscape shows Beethoven's heroic style to break with a grammar of rhetorical and social conventions still observed by Haydn's and Mozart's late works. Form in Beethoven's heroic style is no longer derived from (nor indeed accommodates) an *a priori* aesthetic grammar; instead, it is generated and continually altered in the course of its linear, temporal unfolding. The resulting change in the phenomenology of auditory (aesthetic) experience also destabilizes those social and affective conventions on which one might previously have drawn in order to articulate the significance and value of musical experience.

Yet if these features seem largely consistent with the "theory" of organicism that musicology has evolved from Marx to Schenker and beyond, there is a third aspect to his idea of musical form that significantly complicates the prevailing view of organicism as "natural" and "immediate." Ultimately, the rapid mutation of thematic material so characteristic of Beethoven's organicism resists notions of immediacy and continuity that we tend to associate with the development of organic forms. At the very least, if we should wish to retain organic tropes for understanding Beethoven's instrumental oeuvre, the acute variability of his heroic and, even more so, late works could more plausibly be seen as the musical equivalent of modern bioengineering or a high-speed version of what Darwin means by "variation under domestication." For every mutation of a motif – be it as chromatic transposition, rhythmic reorganization of its tone sequence, registral expansion, or something else yet – constitutes a choice of how actively to intervene in and reconstitute some specific thematic proposition. Hence the inexorable shift from a teleological to a variational conception of form shows organicism in music to be at best a transitional phenomenon. Given its highly constructed and reflexive nature, Beethoven's oeuvre progressively heightens our awareness of the intrinsic malleability and essentially constructed nature of aesthetic form. An account of organic form thus cannot but expose

organicism's implausible, certainly unsustainable attempts at passing itself off as "nature." Attesting as much, the open-ended, variational, and hyper-reflexive logic of Beethoven's late style thus glances ahead to the high modernism of Schoenberg's *Entwicklungsvariation* and the psychological self-scrutiny and hyper-lucid intertextuality so characteristic of Kafka, Proust, Eliot, or Musil. No longer a product of spontaneous, natural generation, the late Beethoven's proto-modernist form instead vacillates (like Schiller's notion of the "sentimental") between the elegiac and the satirical. In the span of just twenty-five years (from 1802-1827), Beethoven's career thus ends up commemorating the inevitable passing of the naïve, the organic, and the heroic as one-time constructs of a mind now finding itself hypnotized by its own projections.

Notes

¹ Rosen, *Romantic Generation*, 389.

² Kamien, "Phrase, Period, Theme," 74.

³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵ On Goethe's morphological theories and their proto-phenomenological character, see Pfau, "All is Leaf."

⁶ Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style*, rev. ed., New York 1998.

⁷ Caplin, *Classical Form*, 9.

⁸ Dahlhaus, *Beethoven*, 101.

⁹ Cassirer, *Beethoven und die Gestalt*; R  ti, *Thematic Patterns*; Chua, *Absolute Music*; Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*.

¹⁰ Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, 11 (italics mine); Kevin Korsyn, "Schenker's Organicism Reexamined" *Int  gral* Vol. 7, (1993), pp. 82-118, 9.

¹¹ Gigante, *Life*, 38-48.

¹² Goethe, quoted in Richards, *Romantic Conception*, 454; Brinkman, "In the Time of the Eroica," 16-18.

¹³ Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, 120; commenting on the "ambiguous . . . second subject" of the Amajor op. 2 no. II sonata, Dahlhaus notes that this entire "lyrical episode . . . is essentially modulatory" (*Beethoven*, 104); yet rather than suspending listeners momentarily between two distinct thematic conceptions, such "ambiguity" may itself be "the intended meaning of the formal structure" (*ibid.*, 103). Yet with good reason, Caplin takes pains to counter the impression that the structure of the classical theme or sentence might itself simply arise as a function of some organicist, modular logic of form *qua* metamorphosis such as Goethe's botanical theories had argued. As he notes, "many books on musical form begin by discussing the very smallest units of formal organization, a collection of several notes usually termed a *motive*" (or, alternately, "cell" or "germ"); they "then show how these motives group into larger units, and so forth," thus creating the impression that form "is constructed out of tiny building blocks." Even as Caplin concedes the uses of such motivic analysis later cultivated by Fritz Cassirer, Rudolf R  ti, and others for later-Romantic works (Brahms), he insists that it is inapplicable to the classical idea of form. For the latter "initially groups

together several motives into a single gesture, a larger idea lasting two real measures” (*Classical Form*, 17-20). Caplin’s reservations are echoed by Dahlhaus, who understandably worries that a purely motivic approach risks losing sight of the obvious goal-directedness of Beethoven’s early- and middle-period instrumental works.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁵ A. B. Marx, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Leben und Schaffen* (Berlin: Janke, 1859), vol. 1, 294.

¹⁶ *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), 37. As Bonds previously observes, “The musical work was perceived no longer as an oration, but rather as an object of contemplation, a potential catalyst of revelation accessible to those who actively engaged the work by listening with creative imagination” (*ibid.* 33).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 115; Scott Burnham echoes the point when noting how “Beethoven is not composing with themes in the sense of exploring the developmental possibilities of some a priori fixed thematic entity. He instead is creating the illusion of powerful motion, the realization of a large-scale rhythm. Everything becomes thematic, in the sense of bearing the principal argument, for the unfolding of such a whole is the principal argument” (*Beethoven Hero*, 62).

¹⁸ A. B. Marx, *Musical Form in the Age of Beethoven: Selected Writings on Theory and Method*, ed. Scott Burnham (Cambridge, 1997), 56; henceforth cited parenthetically.

¹⁹ *Schriften zur Musik* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1988), 25f.

²⁰ Heinrich Schenker, *The Masterwork in Music*, vol. 3 (1930), trans. Ian Bent et al. (Cambridge, 1997), 7; henceforth cited parenthetically.

²¹ Dahlhaus, *Beethoven*, 117.

²² Kindermann, “Contrast and Continuity,” 200.

²³ Rosen, *Classical Style*, 436f.

²⁴ Carl Dahlhaus in particular has drawn attention to how Beethoven’s sonatas abound with “melodically pregnant, sometimes even lyrical, but also tonally open-ended” transitions between what formalists tenaciously construe to be the first and second subject of the classical sonata form.

²⁴ Countless examples could be adduced for the variational and modular structure of Beethoven’s sonata movements; clearly, the deterioration of boundaries separating ostensibly 16 distinct thematic groups and filled with highly inventive transitional passages notably accelerates after 1802.

²⁵ Rousseau, *Discourses*, 125.

²⁶ On this topos, see Pfau, “Mourning Modernity.”

²⁷ Cooper, “The Compositional Act;,” 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32, 41.