Nineteenth-Century Fortunes of Musical Formalism

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Abstract German-speaking aestheticians of the nineteenth century followed various paths of inquiry stimulated by Kant’s Critique of Judgment. One path leads in a formalist direction, through Johann Friedrich Herbart and Robert Zimmermann; the other leads in an empathist direction, from Johann Gottfried Herder’s rejection of Kant through Hegel, Friedrich Theodor and Robert Vischer, Karl Köstlin, and Johannes Volkelt. Eduard Hanslick, in arriving at his own destination, travels some distance on both paths, collecting along the way, on the one hand, Kant’s rigorous focus on the phenomenon and purposive form, eschewing “charms and emotions”; and on the other hand, Hegel’s focus on art’s spirituality, its “ideal content,” in characterizing the specifically musical, which for Hanslick embodies a “full share of ideality.” Clustered ideologically around Kant, Hegel, and Hanslick in closer or more distant orbit are the aforementioned authors whose writings chronicle the fortunes of formalism in the 1800s.

Introduction

FORMALIST APPROACHES TO MUSICAL ANALYSIS have come under attack over the last decade by proponents of new musicology and others with various charges against music theorists’ ideologies, methodologies, and goals. Theorists, in turn, have countered with explanations and self-justifications. One leading point of argument is whether “the music itself”—autonomous structured sound—is sufficient as an object of analytical inquiry for drawing conclusions about the design of a musical work, or whether such inquiry must necessarily consider biographical and sociocultural factors in order to reach valid conclusions.¹ This essay provides some historical context for the dispute by showing its roots in similar differences of opinion in nineteenth-century aesthetic writings. To be sure, the voice has changed and the arguments shifted,

but the motivations and aesthetic issues are similar. The discussion highlights the fortunes of formalism, its ups and downs, in what is a returning—or ongoing—clash between differing views of music and their aesthetic foundations.

At the risk of oversimplifying, and for the convenience of having an established point of departure, formalist analysis here refers to explanations of music based on internal evidence about structural design arising from functional relationships among musical elements, primarily pitch configurations (successive and simultaneous) and temporal arrangement of those configurations, but also engaging other features of a musical work, such as timbre, register, and texture, as they interact with and complement pitch and rhythm. In its pure version, formalist analysis is founded on the assumption that the work exists objectively, independent of our mental activity—although we comprehend it only through such activity (discovery and interpretation)—and that its chief content and guarantor of aesthetic value and timelessness is the articulation of organizational principles. All else—biography, psychology, cultural, and intellectual history—is secondary.²

² Wayne Bowman (1998, 133) characterizes the formalist approach to music in a chapter titled “Music as Autonomous Form.” Music’s value is “strictly its own, strictly intrinsic, located wholly within a purely musical realm,” and human response is relevant only insofar as it “ensues from perception of qualities that are ‘out there’, in the ‘work’ or the music itself.” Leonard Meyer (1967, 152, 139–60) calls such analysis “formalist criticism.” In contrast to analysis, which connotes impersonally taking apart and explaining, criticism implies a personal imprint and, crucially, judgment. Nicholas Cook (1987, 116) characterizes formal analysis as “any kind of analysis that involves coding music into symbols for deducing the musical structure from the pattern these symbols make.”
or historical circumstances lead away from it as an object of aesthetic exploration. Music aesthetics, he insists, “hears and believes only what the artwork itself has to say, and should pay no attention to the personal circumstances and historical background of the composer.” Form (tonal structure) is our only sure guide in studying and evaluating music, for form (in contrast to feeling) “is precisely the real content of music, is the music itself” (Hanslick [1854] 1986, 29, 30, 31, 39, 60).1

Immanuel Kant, Hans Georg Nägeli, and Johann Friedrich Herbart prepared the way for Hanslick. Robert Zimmermann, Hanslick’s long-time friend, greatly expanded Herbart’s formalist position in an oft-cited though little-read 1865 treatise titled Allgemeine Aesthetik als Formwissenschaft (General Aesthetics as a Science of Form).5 Many pre-nineteenth-century thinkers, going back to ancient times (Plato, Plotinus, and Augustine, among others), address the matter of relationships among interdependent parts of a well-organized whole as the touchstone of beauty and, hence, of judgment. Contemporaneous with the school of thought developed in the writings of Nägeli, Herbart, Hanslick, and Zimmermann, a second one, less familiar in the English-speaking world, arose from Hegel’s aesthetics in the writings of Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–77) and his son, Robert (1847–1933), and in thematically related treatises of Karl Reinhold Köstlin (1819–94) and Johannes Volkelt (1848–1930).6 These authors propound a type of formalism different from that of Herbart and Zimmermann, one that takes into account musical content and the reciprocity between subject and object in aesthetic experience. This reciprocity relies on the notion of “symbolic form” (Formsymbolik), which originates in Einfühlung, generally translated as “empathy” but in German

4 In the first edition of Vom Musikalisch-Schönen (1854), Hanslick formulated the celebrated statement about music being tonally moving forms more emphatically than in later editions: “Tonal moving forms are solitarily and solely the content and object of music” (“Tönend bewegte Formen sind einzig und allein Inhalt und Gegenstand der Musik”; 32). “Tönend bewegte Formen” is a phrase no less odd in German than its literal and, perhaps, more evocative translation “soundingly moved forms.” Payzant’s translation smoothes over the peculiarity of the phrase and does capture the sense to a degree, but not without altering the grammar. Tönend is an adverbial present participle that modifies the adjectival past participle bewegte. “Moved” is the correct translation (not Payzant’s “moving,” which is a present participle). We are left, then, with something along the lines of “sonically moved forms” or “soundingly moved forms,” neither of which is very clear—not unlike the German! Roger Scruton (1997, 353) translates “forms moved through sounding.” Hanslick’s views depend on the notion of “absolute music,” whose origins in the idea of nature as a “whole perfected in itself” Carl Dahlhaus ([1978] 1989, 28–29; 1978, 33–35) discusses in connection with Hanslick. In light of Dahlhaus’s monographic study of the term, Sanna Pederson (2009) revisits the notion of absolute music, and Werner Abegg (2010) that of “pure instrumental music.”

5 General Aesthetics as a Science of Form (Zimmermann 1865) is the companion to, and completion of, a first volume titled History of Aesthetics as a Philosophical Science (Geschichte der Aesthetik als philosophische Wissenschaft) (Zimmermann 1858). Payzant, modern-day translator of Hanslick’s Vom Musikalisch-Schönen, explores the relationship among Herbart, Zimmermann, and Hanslick in Payzant 2002a. The essay was originally delivered as a paper at a symposium on music and philosophy titled “Sound Ideas,” held at the University of Toronto in October 1995.

connotes something richer in meaning than the overused, diluted English empathy (as quasi “sympathy”).

The Background of Nineteenth-Century Formalism: Immanuel Kant

As a way of approaching formalism in the 1800s, and as a step toward returning to Hanslick’s midcentury and, in a way, midfield position vis-à-vis similar-and dissimilar-minded predecessors and contemporaries, we will do well to review some key points in Kant’s Critique of Judgment, which inspired both disciples and disputants. Equally important to bear in mind is the influence of idealism in music-aesthetic writings beginning in the late 1700s and extending deep into the nineteenth century, as Mark Evan Bonds (1997) lucidly documented. Its tenets are manifest in the writings of various authors discussed in this essay, including not only Kant and Hegel (obviously) and their exponents but also Hanslick.

Kant’s Critique of Judgment teaches that a judgment of taste (Geschmacksurteil) is based on the pleasure or displeasure (Lust, Unlust) elicited by an object in the subject (viewer, listener). Such judgments are “reflective” (non-logical, reflektierend), as opposed to “determinative” (logical, bestimmend). They are not judgments of sense, that is, mere reportages of liking or disliking, nor are they pronouncements that an object is “good” as a means to an end or an end in itself (morally good). Further, they have explicitly nothing to do with how effectively or perfectly an object fulfills an ideal. Finally, all charm and emotion resulting from aesthetic experience must be set aside, and the focus must be on what Kant calls “purposiveness of form”:

Any taste remains barbaric if its liking requires that charms and emotions be mingled in, let alone if it makes these the standard of its approval. . . . A pure judgment of taste is one that is not influenced by charm or emotion (though these may be connected with a liking for the beautiful), and whose determining basis is therefore merely the purposiveness of the form [Zweckmäßigkeit der Form].

7 Edward Bradford Titchener (1909–10, 417) seems to have been the first to translate Einfühlung as “empathy.” He says the word is “formed on the analogy of sympathy,” and that it is “the name given to that process of humanizing objects, of reading or feeling ourselves into them.” Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) (1913, 99, chap. 9) further popularized the term. Paul Stern (1898) published one of the most important historical-critical studies of Einfühlung. English-language readers may turn to Ernest K. Mundt (1959), as well as to the introduction to Robert Vischer ([1873] 1994). The most recent summary and critique of empathy theory is an essay by Constantijn Koopman (2001), in which the author qualifies Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht’s idea of “aesthetic identification,” and its forerunners in the empathy theories of Johannes Volkelt, Hermann Siebeck, and Theodor Lipps. Volkelt’s ideas are discussed at length later in this essay.

8 Translated passages are from Kant ([1793] 1987). References to the German will be to Kant (1793) 1990, which follows Kant’s third edition (1799). Hegel’s Lectures on Fine Art (1991; originally published in 1823, 1826, and 1828–29) will also come into play in the recasting of form into symbolic form. As the translator, T. M. Knox, explains in a preface (Hegel 1991, 1:vii), Hegel’s lectures were originally edited for publication in 1835 by H. G. Hotho, who worked from Hegel’s handwritten notes and transcripts of the lectures. References to the German are to Hegel 1986. All passages in English are from the Knox translation.

9 See also “Introduction,” section VII (Kant [1793] 1987, 30; [1793] 1990, 271; and §14: “Hence a judgment of taste is pure only insofar as no merely empirical liking is mingled in with the basis that determines it. But this is just what happens whenever charm or emotion have a share in a
The foundation of aesthetic judgments is purposiveness of form, an expression whose meaning may not be immediately clear to modern readers. We must first know what Kant means by purposiveness, and what by form, in order to understand what qualifies for him as a judgment of taste.

Kant defines “form” in the *Critique of Pure Reason:*

(Form) . . . effects that the content of [a] phenomenon can be arranged under certain relations. . . . [T]he form [of all phenomena] must lie ready *a priori* for them in the mind, and consequently can be regarded separately from all sensation [Empfindung]. (1910, 21; [1781] 1990, 64)

For Kant, form is the relational arrangement of parts constituting a phenomenon (its content), is something prefigured in the mind (prior to experience), and is independent of sensation. In the *Critique of Judgment*, form is the basis of aesthetic enjoyment:

When the form of an object . . . is judged in mere reflection on it to be the basis of pleasure . . . then the presentation [Vorstellung, mental representation] of this object is also judged to be connected necessarily with this pleasure, and hence connected with it not merely for the subject apprehending this form but in general for everyone who judges [it] . . . For the basis of the pleasure is posited merely in the form of the object . . . and hence not in a sensation of the object.10 ([1793] 1987, 30; [1793] 1990, 27)

The mention of form at the opening of the above quotation does not refer to just any manner of form. Any combination of elements creates form, even a poor combination that yields no pleasure, or one that is mechanical, formalistic, and hence dull. Rather, Kant means, importantly, *purposive* form, about which more momentarily.

Kant differentiates between form as shape [*Gestalt*] and as play [*Spiel*]. In the case of form as play, there are two possibilities: the play of shapes in space, as in dance, and the play of sensations in time, as in music. In visual art (a play of colors), the essential element of beauty—and hence the basis for judgment—is the overall pattern, the design [*Zeichnung*. In music, it is the composition [*Komposition*], meaning how elements are put together (componere)—the temporal configuration and ordering of sonic events (Kant [1793] 1987, 71–72; [1793] 1990, 65).

Recall that Kant specifically points to the purposiveness of form, not just to form generically, as the “determining basis” of a pure aesthetic judgment.

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10 See also Kant [1793] 1987, 195; [1793] 1990, 182. Because pure judgments reflect the agreement between the formal structure of an aesthetic object and the structure of the mind’s cognitive faculties, Kant understands pure judgments to be universally valid.
Purposiveness of form is for Kant the decisive factor for what we would now call “aesthetic enjoyment”:

What is essential in all fine art is the form that is purposive for our observation and judging, rather than the matter of sensation (i.e., charm or emotion). . . . [T]he pleasure we take in purposive form . . . attunes the spirit to ideas, and so makes it receptive to more such pleasure and entertainment.\textsuperscript{11} ([1793] 1987, 195–96; [1793] 1990, 182–83)

What does Kant mean by purposiveness (Zweckmäßigkeit)\textsuperscript{12}? Applied to human-kind, purposiveness implies purpose and volition; a purposive act is one carried out deliberately.\textsuperscript{13} Applied to objects, purposiveness takes on the meaning of function (e.g., the function of a tool). Kant’s invokes purposiveness to characterize aesthetic objects whose parts are harmoniously combined in such a way that they create unity from multiplicity: “What is formal in the presentation of a thing [is] the harmony of its manifold to [form] a unity” ([1793] 1987, 74; [1793] 1990, 67).

In a study of Kant’s life and writings, Ernst Cassirer describes the eighteenth-century understanding of purposiveness as referring to a “totality [that is] converted from a mere aggregate into a closed system, in which each member possesses its characteristic function . . . [where] all these functions accord with one another so that altogether they have a unified, concerted action and a single overall significance” (1981, 287).

There reigns . . . a unity of principle that maintains itself continuously and enduringly in a manifold of consequences, a simple, intuitive seed that is unfolded conceptually for us and divides itself into a series of new forms. . . . This yields precisely the cohesiveness and correlation of parts which constitutes the essential factor in Kant’s concept of purposiveness. (288)

Cassirer’s characterization of Kant’s purposiveness—a simple seed unfolded conceptually, dividing into a series of new forms—applies well to music. Understood in that way, it is easy to see why Kant’s idea of formal purposiveness would attract writers on music for whom its demonstrable formal properties were paramount. One branch of formal analysis traces the unfolding of motives (simple seeds) as a way of concretely substantiating musical coherence and logic. In music, purposiveness of form would refer to dynamic processes in which interdependent musical functions participate and by which they create a purposeful, goal-directed series of actions in the closed system we call a musical work.

\textsuperscript{11} Kant continues by saying that, in contrast to form, the “matter of sensation” [“Materie der Empfindung”] yields merely “enjoyment [Unterhaltung, entertainment], which leaves nothing behind as an idea and makes the spirit dull, the object gradually disgusting, and the mind dissatisfied with itself.”

\textsuperscript{12} In German, Zweckmäßigkeit means according to, or appropriate for, the purpose (Zweck is goal, aim, or purpose, and mäßig is according to).

\textsuperscript{13} Donald W. Crawford (1974, 93–96) discusses Kant’s notion of purposiveness of form.
Kant’s validation of aesthetic judgments based on purposiveness of form would seem to be the ideal foundation for a formalist view of music. But two decisive aspects of his ideas on aesthetic judgment and purposiveness of form prevent us from invoking his ideas as the basis for musical formalism: first, aesthetic judgments are noncognitive, and second, they must not depend on concepts.

Recall from a quotation above that Kant refers to form as being the basis of pleasure when we judge an object by “mere reflection on it.” Reflection has a specific connotation for Kant. It does not mean meditating on an object or merely considering it thoughtfully. Rather, it refers to the special circumstance where, in contemplating an object, there is no general principle, law, or evaluative category by which the object, as an instance of some unspecified general principle, law, or category, can be understood and judged. In a pure aesthetic judgment, an object’s form is judged “in mere reflection on it” (without regard to a concept that is to be acquired from it). Kant distinguishes aesthetic judgments, which are reflective and thus noncognitive, from determinant judgments, which are logical and thus cognitive. In the latter sort, judgment operates according to “universal transcendental laws” under which particulars are subsumed (Kant [1793] 1987, 50, 18–19; [1793] 1990, 27, 15–160). Since aesthetic judgments must be made without reference to concepts, Kant’s conclusion is that the purposiveness underlying aesthetic judgments is “purposiveness without purpose” (Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck), because purposes depend on concepts:

We do call objects . . . purposive even if their possibility does not necessarily presuppose the presentation of a purpose; we do this merely because we can explain and grasp them only if we assume that they are based on a causality [that operates] according to purposes, i.e. on a will that would have so arranged them in accordance with the presentation of a certain rule. Hence there can be purposiveness without a purpose, insofar as we do not posit the causes of this form in a will, and yet can grasp the explanation of its possibility only by deriving it from a will.15 ([1793] 1987, 65; [1793] 1990, 59; italics added)

In other words, the only way we can comprehend an object aesthetically in the Kantian framework is to imagine a purpose, a will, as its cause, even though there is none, as is the case for beauty in nature. This requirement of Kant’s

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14 The context for distinguishing between determinative (cognitive) and reflective (aesthetic) judgments is Kant’s definition of judgment as “the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal” (Kant [1793] 1987, 18; [1793] 1990, 15). Theodore E. Uehling (1971, 18–20) discusses Kant’s distinction between determinant and reflective judgments, as well as between empirical, sense-based, and pure, form-based aesthetic judgments. In a determinant judgment, the universal under which particulars are subsumed is given; in a reflective judgment, the particulars are in search of a universal (18).

15 Further: “The liking that, without a concept, we judge to be universally communicable and hence . . . the basis that determines a judgment of taste, [is] the subjective purposiveness in the presentation of an object, without any purpose . . . and hence the mere form of purposiveness” (Kant [1793] 1987, 66; [1793] 1990, 60). Kant also speaks of a “lawfulness without a law” ([1793] 1987, 92; [1793] 1990, 83).
The distinction is between *pulchritudo vaga* and *pulchritudo adhaerens*, free (*freie*) and adherent (*anhängende*) beauty.

Dahlhaus calls this second category of judgments “Kunsturteil.” Kant does not use that word. Instead, he refers to the “judgment of artistic beauty” (*Beurteilung der Kunstschönheit*), but only once, in §48.

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18 “Agreeable arts are those whose purpose is merely enjoyment. . . . Fine art, on the other hand, is a way of presenting that is purposive . . . and that furthers . . . the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication” (Kant [1793] 1987, 172–73; [1793] 1990, 158).
The word aesthetic is used here in the sense of its original Greek meaning, having to do with perception.

Further: “That is why, like any enjoyment, it needs to be changed fairly often and cannot bear several repetitions without making us weary” (Kant [1793] 1987, 198; [1793] 1990, 185). Clearly, Kant’s musical sensibilities—not to mention understanding—were regretfully limited.
the rules of the art of music” ([1793] 1987, 94, following §22; [1793] 1990, 86). Such views loosen considerably the connection between Kant and Hanslick’s musical formalism. The latter’s oft-quoted, pithy characterization of music’s sole content as “tonally moving forms” cannot be reconciled with Kant’s consignment of music to mere entertainment (sensory titillation)—a view that Hanslick emphatically rejects (Hanslick [1854] 1986, 29). Linked with poetry, music may acquire meaning through a text, or even without text it may take on meaning through analogy with vocally expressed affects. However, in both cases music is no longer independent. The extramusical and its formal purposiveness become the aesthetic object rather than the music (Dahlhaus [1967] 1982, 32; 1967, 49).

Kant’s ideas on aesthetic judgment, complex and richly developed as they are, serve as the stimulus and point of departure for the growth of formalism in the nineteenth century. Contemporaneous and subsequent authors, including his successor in the chair of philosophy at Königsberg, Johann Friedrich Herbart, reacted to, expanded on, and modified Kant’s teachings. Two schools of thought emerge: formalists, as expansions on Kant, and what we will call empathists, in reaction to him.

Kant’s Legacy: Johann Friedrich Herbart

The writings of Herbart (1776–1841) have had recognition as a more fruitful source of musical formalism than Kant’s third Critique, but they are not without ambiguities and even potential self-contradictions. Just as Hanslick would insist in 1854, Herbart argued two decades earlier against extramusical content in favor of a purely intramusical point of view. Poetic interpreters attempt to turn works of art into symbols about which the artist had no notion, he charges. “What all did Haydn undertake to paint through tones in his Creation and in the Seasons!” exclaims Herbart, for whom Haydn’s “music is music, and does not need to mean anything at all in order to be beautiful.”

Right up to the present day, even knowledgeable musicians perpetuate the principle that music expresses feelings as though the feelings that are perchance aroused . . . were the basis of the general rules of simple or double counterpoint, which underlie [music’s] true nature. ([1831] 1850, 112, §72)

In a strict composition, such as a fugue, music can dispense with expressive means such as forte and piano. “The tones should merely be heard, or even . . .

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21 Further: “Some sit there mindlessly at ease, others in extravagant rapture, but for all the principle is one and the same: pleasure in the elemental in music” (Hanslick [1854] 1986, 59). Dahlhaus ([1967] 1982, 32; 1967, 50) comments on the entrenched but mistaken connection between Kant and Hanslick: “Kant’s conception of form is so different from Eduard Hanslick’s that referring to both in the same breath is misleading.”

22 Paul Moos (1922, 206–10) discusses problems in Herbart’s aesthetics. The introduction to Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994, 10–13, takes up Herbart’s writings.

23 All translations from Herbart are mine.
merely read, yet they please anyway” (Herbart [1831] 1850, 111, §71). Hanslick agrees—beauty exists regardless of the arousal of feelings, “even if it be neither perceived nor thought” ([1854] 1986, 3).

If according to critics composers were expressing something in their works, what is it, Herbart asks, that they wanted to express? “Nothing at all,” he answers. “Their thoughts did not go outside of the art works but rather into their inner essence” ([1831] 1850, 112, §72).24 In analogy to drama and poetry, music embodies what have been called today dynamic agents—Herbart says “characters”—and their interactions (Handlungen) in shifting circumstances. Each part (instrumental or vocal), each with a distinctive quality, pursues a separate path in series of consonances and dissonances that result in harmony. Musical beauty originates in the changing situational interactions of these metaphorical characters in an imaginary drama, with its evolved expectations and their fulfillments, nonfulfillments, and surprises (Herbart [1831] 1850, 118–19, §77; 121–22, §79).25

What is left (one would like to ask) when expectations should neither simply be satisfied nor disappointed? The answer is rather easy. They just should not be satisfied completely but rather only to the extent that they have to be intensified anew. Thus the musician does not resolve all dissonances, and not by means of perfect cadences, up until the end. ([1831] 1850, 122, §79).

In contrast to Kant’s idealist aesthetics with its subjective judgments on beauty, Herbart’s realist aesthetics speaks of “objective beauty,” something we can address only by concerning ourselves in music with structural relationships among tones. All subjective frames of mind (Gemütszustände) and listener-assigned attributes—Prädikate, such as lovely, clever, and the like—must be set aside: “Discussion must be of tones.” We can focus on subjective attributes and evoked mental states, but we then determine nothing about the works of art themselves, which gradually recede in our attempt to prolong aroused effects. Herbart realizes that all aesthetic objects evoke such effects but holds that they must be abstracted lest we end up with principles of aesthetics based on varying effects and overlook the principles we seek (Herbart 1813, 67–68, §84; 69, §86).26

Whoever wants to really learn through analysis of art works, indeed wants to learn aesthetics [through such analysis], is neither admirer nor critic but rather allows analysis to bring out every thread of the fabric of art so that all of the often very different relationships come to light in which beauty resides, and in whose cooperation lies the power of the art work. (72, §§88; italics added)

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24 The introductory essay to Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994, 10, translates the relevant passage.

25 Herbart speaks of “Charaktere, Handlungen, und Situationen.” Marion Guck (1989, 1994), Fred Maus (1988), and, long before them, August Halm (1869–1929) had in Herbart a clear forerunner in their idea of music simulating the interactions of metaphorical characters. Two of my essays (1992, 1996) show how Halm analyzes music as a drama of forces.

26 A section of Herbart 1813 is translated in Katz and Dahlhaus 1987–93, 1:362–79.
Music shows very clearly that the richest artistic web can arise when several series of beautiful elements in succession (several melodic voices) develop such that, simultaneously, the requirements of harmony are continuously fulfilled. (78, §99)

As with other arts in their media and with their materials, music presents series of inherently musical ideas, which produce in us a corresponding series of mental images (Vorstellungsreihe). Discovering the beauty of a work of art is a cognitive process—not a “reflective” one, as with Kant—based on analyzing the series of interwoven ideas, and studying them individually as well as their reciprocity.

It is expected of listeners and viewers that they shape within themselves the individual series of ideas—whether voices or figures or characters and their actions—as exactly and purely as conveyed to them [listeners and viewers] by the work of art. Then the cooperation of various psychic motions effects the genuine feeling of characteristic approval that the work of art brings about on its own, and without signifying anything external. ([1831] 1850, 114, §73)

Through this shaping process, through a mental mirroring of the series of musical ideas expressed in relationships among tones, beauty arises. Beauty, therefore, “does not even exist apart from mental conception but rather always assumes at least one potential viewer” (114, §73).

It would seem from the foregoing paragraphs that Herbart limits the exploration of musical beauty to objective, formal criteria. However, his aesthetic views consider other factors as well. It is in the aspects to be discussed presently that the aforementioned self-contradictions arise (see note 22).

Taking into account the notion of “apperception,” for instance—the mental activity by which the cumulative mass of mental contents interacts with and conditions newly absorbed contents—Herbart acknowledges that “innumerable things must be mentally projected into every work of art. For the perceiver, its effect flows far more from within outward than from without inward” (Herbart [1831] 1850, 109, §70). Further, although mathematics is valuable for the physics of sound, making it possible to reduce music to mathematically quantifiable relationships (e.g., between tones or between dynamic levels), it nevertheless does not address the psychological aspects of music, and those are vital for a full understanding. While relations among tone frequencies, as bodies in motion, can be quantified, they are not mental images of tones. Herbart reminds us, too, that the musical ear is mathematically quite inexact as an instrument of hearing:

Even where an experienced musician perceives very false notes, a less experienced person nevertheless clearly perceives the impression of music. If musical impressions were very specifically bound to certain rational relationships, then

27 Also: “The thorough music teacher drills his student in counterpoint, that is, he teaches him how to connect several voices so that each of them may present to the listener a special, internally coherent series of ideas [Vorstellungsreihe]” (Herbart [1831] 1850, 113).
at the slightest deviation from the most precise purity those impressions would have to become completely incomprehensible because the rationality of frequency relationships is thereby completely destroyed and cast into the realm of the irrational.28 (1851, 4, 5)

Based on such evidence, Herbart concludes that “the physical ear is not even meant, not even the hearing of actually sounding tones, but rather musical imagination [musikalische Phantasie], which in its contributions is bound to general and necessary rules and, consequently, in no case to empirical ones.” To resolve questions of interval size, for example, we should not make acoustical measurements but should instead project ourselves mentally into the context, in musical thought, and decide “without all assistance of actual hearing which tones should sound in order to produce fully the right effect.” Music is in the mind, which, as active receptor, models music mentally “as exactly and purely as conveyed by the work of art” (Herbart 1851, 5). Like Kant before him and Hanslick after, Herbart is aware that perceivers experience art more than just cerebrally. They are whole, undivided, human[s], for whom criticism ought not to begrudge and spoil [their] due feeling [Gefühl]. The lyrical property of poetry and music would lose its true essence, which consists precisely in the conveyance of sentiment [Empfindung], although neither poetry nor music is mere lyric. ([1831] 1850, 123, §80)

Nevertheless, aesthetic judgment cannot be based on feeling; that which touches us sentimentally does not amount to beauty (123, §80).

Herbart’s writings on aesthetics are the most pronounced formulation of formalism in the early nineteenth century and are the foundation for the work of Robert Zimmermann, the most thoroughgoing formalist of the middle and later decades. However, another early nineteenth-century figure, Hans Georg Nägeli, known mainly as a publisher, composer of choral music and Lieder, and collector of manuscripts of Bach’s and Handel’s keyboard compositions, is recognized today as an early advocate of musical dynamism and, accordingly, as a forerunner of Hanslick.

**Interlude: Hans Georg Nägeli**

Nägeli (1773–1836), a near exact contemporary of Herbart (1776–1841), is an important yet, until recently, little acknowledged advocate of musical formalism before Hanslick. In a section of one of ten introductory talks on music aesthetics, delivered in 1824 and published in 1826 as *Vorlesungen über die Musik, mit Berücksichtigung der Dilettanten (Lectures on Music with Consideration of Dilettantes)*, Nägeli dismisses as “absolutely false, fundamentally” (durchaus falsch, grundsätzlich), the idea that every piece of music has a specific

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28 The essay was originally published in 1811, in the Königsberger Archiv für Philosophie 1/2.
character or sentiment (31). Foreshadowing Hanslick’s language and principal music-aesthetic argument, Nägeli declares confidently,

Rather than mental conditions [Gemütszustände], music causes mental motions [Gemütsbewegungen], and everything labeled mental disposition [Gemütsverfassung] contradicts its dynamic play [Spiel]. . . Play is its essence. . . . Because play is its particular essence, it plays on everything that coincidentally clings to the mind by which it is momentarily affected. By nature, music is thoroughly and completely a matter of play, nothing more. It has no content, as some think, and what some have wanted to ascribe to it. It has only forms, ordered connections of tones and tone series to create a whole. (32; italics original)

Our entire focus should be on music’s “play of forms” (Formenspiel). A musical work should “drive out of the mind every particular affect, every mixture of affects,” thereby making the soul “truly receptive to the pleasures of its free play of forms” (33). Clearly, Nägeli is a music-aesthetic soulmate of Hanslick, for whom the content of music resides, similarly, in “concrete structures, not in the vague general impression of an abstract feeling. The form (as tonal structure), as opposed to the feeling (as would-be content) is precisely the real content of music” (Hanslick [1854] 1986, 60).30

Nägeli’s ideas and language make him an early representative of musical dynamism, linking him to a twentieth-century style of music theory that Rudolf Schäfke calls “energetics” (1934, 393–450).31 Nägeli sounds astonishingly modern in the following paragraph, which might easily have been written a century later by August Halm (1869–1929) or Ernst Kurth (1886–1946), two of Schäfke’s energeticists:

In what does the simplest perception consist that we perceive in tone? Motion. What in organized series of tones? Diverse motion. What, further, in organized tone successions? Their connection in creating an artwork through diversified motion. Motion is thus the fundamental element of music. (Nägeli 1826, 38; italics original)

Form becomes, as Kurth inimitably formulated it, “control over energy through space and time” (1925, 1:239).32 Similarly, for Kurt Westphal (1904–78), a Kurth exponent, form arises through the disposition of flowing force. The “actual essential element of every large-scale form,” he explains, “the

29 Dahlhaus ([1978] 1989, 68) quotes the same passage, but the translator, Roger Lustig, renders it differently. 30 Dahlhaus ([1967] 1982, 28–29; 1967, 44–45) questions the connection between Nägeli and Hanslick. He finds Nägeli’s theory “more reminiscent of Herder’s or Wackenroder’s dithyrambs than of the more sober esthetics devoted to what is ‘specifically musical,’ the esthetics labeled in textbooks ‘formalism’.” 31 See also my essay titled “Energetics” (Rothfarb 2002), as well as Köhler 1996. 32 “Form ist Bezwungung der Kraft durch Raum und Zeit.” Kurth goes on: “The main emphasis lies on the word ‘control,’ for neither the energy nor its consolidation in the phenomenal world, but rather . . . the tension between the two makes up the concept of form” (1925, 1:239).
element that creates the whole,” is “the force which streams uniformly through the components” ([1935] 1971, 50).

Nägeli’s book did not have wide influence. By contrast, Herbart’s ideas had considerable influence in the middle of the nineteenth century (c. 1840–60), rivaling those of Hegel, at a time when in Germany a philosophical shift was underway from idealism and speculative metaphysics, including Naturphilosophie, to positivism, materialism, and natural science. Robert Zimmermann (1824–98), author of the first modern history of aesthetics (Geschichte der Aesthetik als philosophische Wissenschaft, 1858), was the foremost exponent of Herbart’s ideas on art. They became the basis of Zimmermann’s little-known treatise Allgemeine Aesthetik als Formwissenschaft (General Aesthetics as a Science of Form, 1865). As the title indicates, Zimmermann’s goal was to establish a science of aesthetics with the notion of form at the center.

**Full-blown Herbartian Aesthetics: Robert Zimmermann**

Zimmermann set out to write a comprehensive aesthetics based on Herbart’s philosophical viewpoint. The history volume, Geschichte der Aesthetik als philosophische Wissenschaft (History of Aesthetics as a Philosophical Science, 1858), favors those authors whose writings he saw as precursors leading up to Herbart. The book attempts to show that “the nature of the beautiful, since the time it was made an object of philosophical concern, was either put into [the context of] forms, or should have been put into that context” (Zimmermann 1865, v, vi).

In attempting to do that in the Allgemeine Ästhetik als Formwissenschaft (General Aesthetics as a Science of Form, 1865), Zimmermann assures us that form, as he uses the term, does not mean formalistic. Form is not to be thought of as the “lifeless, mundane vessel of a supersensory content.” Identifying the beautiful in formal relationships does not mean retaining the husk at the expense of the spirit:

The Herbartian concept of form as an aesthetic relationship remains remote from such conclusions. The voice of the respectable author on the “life of feeling”

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33 Westphal calls the resulting shape a “processive curve” ([1935] 1971, 50).


35 Christian Allesch (1987, 255) considers Zimmermann “the most significant exponent of the Herbartian School in the field of aesthetics.”

36 This volume is the sequel to Zimmermann 1858. Zimmermann and Hanslick were classmates at Prague. Both went on to earn doctorates at the University of Vienna: Zimmermann in Naturphilosophie, Hanslick in law. Zimmermann’s major teaching appointments were in Prague (1852) and later in Vienna (1861). His success was due in part to his allegiance to Herbart’s views, whose philosophy became something of the official philosophy in Austria, as prescribed by the Austrian Ministry of Education. See the aforementioned essay by Payzant (cited in note 5) on Zimmermann and Hanslick.

who saw a danger for the profundity of art in the limitation of the beautiful to pure form has remained sporadic in the circle of the school of Herbart. In leaving up to every individual the choice of what art wishes to represent, in Herbart’s school of thought . . . the question of whether art could or should represent something other than absolutely pleasing forms (in his sense) certainly seems decided to us. (Zimmermann 1865, vii, italics original)

The characteristic of an aesthetic attitude is, for Zimmermann, the sense of pleasure or displeasure that an object evokes in us. Zimmermann calls this special attribute the “supplement of the mind” (Zusatz des Gemüths), or simply the supplement. It is usually identified as “feeling” (Gefühl) (8, §14; 11, §26).  

This view recalls Kant’s judgment of taste (Geschmacksurteil), a reflective, non-cognitive form of judgment linked to the pleasure or displeasure evoked by an object (see above, on Kant). As perceivers, we are the source of the supplement in distinguishing between objects that appeal and those that do not. It is possible to ignore the supplement when investigating objects, either natural or artistic, but the investigation is then intentionally detached, as in natural science, and thus nonaesthetic. By contrast, aesthetic researchers become subjectively engaged in the object; their interior “resembles a sounding board, which lends to every sounding key a sonorous echo” (12, §27).

Zimmermann observes that an aesthetic judgment is generally not the first psychic condition we experience. Indistinct, “vague” (vage) feelings dependent on the personal and momentary frame of mind precede aesthetic judgment. Such vague feelings gradually yield to “definite” (fixiert) ones based on the image itself, the relationship of its parts. “As soon as those initial feelings cease and make room for the latter ones, which arise solely from the motivating conceptual mass, the feelings of pleasure and displeasure rooted in that mass emerge exclusively” (1865, 23, §62). Zimmermann stresses that the mental image of the object together with the supplement constitutes the aesthetic concept, and that the form of the image incorporates the supplement: “The supplement belongs to the form of the image” (10, 13, 20, 21).

However, he makes clear that working out aesthetic ideas is a matter of isolating those images to which the accompanying supplement belongs generally and necessarily owing to its content, from those images to which the supplement is attached merely temporarily owing to the individual state of mind of the subject. . . . The generally and necessarily pleasing mental content is the correct and valid aesthetic concept. (22–23, §60)

38 See Bujic 1988, 41, where he translates Zusatz as “additional activity.”

39 See also Zimmermann 1865, 20, §53.

40 Desire and individuality must also be eliminated: “Only once desire is silent can definite feelings as well as the aesthetic concept emerge”; “the person does not possess the object, it possesses him. . . . The individual exits from the arena” (Zimmermann 1865, 19, §§48–49).

41 See Allesch (1987, 256), who describes the result of Zimmermann’s bracketing out of all subjectivity as a “purely objective ‘morphology of the beautiful’” (“rein objektive ‘Morphologie des Schönen’”).
For Zimmermann, the foundation of aesthetics rests on three principles: (1) form in aesthetic objects requires two or more components that can be compared with or related to each other; (2) objects please or displease based on their form (the “how” of an object); and (3) the material aspect of objects (the “what”) is neutral [gleichgiltig], that is, neither pleases nor displeases. The feeling of pleasure or displeasure, the supplement—hallmark of the aesthetic attitude—arises only from relationships among parts and from parts to a whole in an embracing, resultant form. Noncompound, “simple” objects are therefore excluded from the possibility of aesthetic judgment because they have insufficient basis for form (21–22, §§55–57).

Aesthetics as a science first arises through the study . . . of aesthetic concepts. Since such concepts require that the image with which the supplement is associated can be clearly conceived, and since this is possible only in the case of compound images where the supplement is linked to the form . . . , it follows that all aesthetic concepts must be form concepts, and the what of the aesthetically pleasing and displeasing is, accordingly, a how. (22, §58)

Music consists of tone sensations, which are by nature composite (multipart). By virtue of their formal orderliness in music, tone sensations are aesthetic (166, §338). On hearing music, we conceive forms—orderliness, harmoniousness, proportionality, balance—in the waxing and waning of musical intensity, its “modulation,” which is independent of content. Unity of modulation is the global relationship of all levels of musical intensity to one another (259, 260, §§498, 500). Conceiving such musical formedness makes the mental image beautiful; it is animated, energetic, tensing, and relaxing and governed by the rule that governs all tone sensations: tonality (168, §341).

For an aesthetic science based on forms, Zimmermann’s objective is to discover and define forms that are unconditionally pleasing (and displeasing). Once found, the “necessarily and generally pleasing forms . . . remain everywhere the same . . . are immutable.” They serve as norms for judgment, and as principles for education in art.

Whatever is pleasing or displeasing to aesthetic judgment is so only because its forms are reflections of the aesthetic forms. Whoever wants to please must make the aesthetic forms the norms of his art; whoever wants to judge correctly must make the aesthetic norms the standard of his criticism. They are the fundamental forms that please or displease and precisely because of this are pleasing and displeasing forms beyond reason. (Zimmermann 1865, 32, §77; italics original)

42 “The foundation of aesthetics, not only as a pure science of form but also as a science generally, rests on these three principles” (Zimmermann 1865, 21–22, §§55–57).
43 Further, “The object of aesthetics is therefore only forms insofar as they are absolutely pleasing or displeasing.”
44 Modulation is the ordering of perceived tonal intensity, the “strength and weakness of tone sensations” (Stärke und Schwäche der Tonempfindungen) to make a harmonious whole. “If done effectively, modulation in and of itself can please on its own, regardless of the content being modulated” (Zimmermann 1865, 260, §499).
The material contained within aesthetic forms may change over time, but the forms that necessarily please in exhibiting harmoniousness, balance, proportionality, and so forth, are eternal. “It would be misguided,” Zimmermann points out prophetically, “to assert that no future musician will ever invent new harmonies, but there is no one who does not feel certain that the musically beautiful will always have to embody harmoniousness” (32, §§76, 77; 35, §81).

From the foregoing, it is clear that Zimmermann’s aesthetics is an a priori science, not an empirical one. Material is empirical, forms a priori. Not unlike Herbart, who had claimed that music could please just on reading it, apart from auditory experience, Zimmermann holds that “neither the eye nor the ear, nor even experience, but thinking alone is capable of deciding by what means, generally, something pleases or displeases, by means of which forms something, no matter what, pleases or displeases” (1865, 31, §75; 32, §76).

In elaborating Herbart’s work into a full-blown aesthetics of form, Zimmermann can succumb to abstractions and contrivances that overstretch aesthetic sensibilities. An example is Zimmermann’s idea of how perceivers encountering something displeasurable shift from a passive, theoretical mode of perception to an active, practical one, where the displeasurable is transformed into something pleasurable (1865, 9, §50):

In order to avoid the displeasurable, subjects no longer think of the given discord but rather of something else of their own invention. . . . [They] achieve respite from the discord but only through a willful act. . . . The form that arises in avoiding discord, through whatever means, is correctness [Correctheit].

Zimmermann acknowledges that this correctness is artificially imposed by perceivers on mental images. Nevertheless, they accept the substitute content, believing temporarily that the apparent content is the actual content. Appearance (Schein) becomes reality (Sein). No sooner has the substitution taken place and is accepted than it displeases because the fabrication contradicts reality. “Replacement of the original, natural condition with an artificial, conjured one displeases.” Only when the artificiality has been suppressed and the reality of the original mental image is restored does the displeasure cease. Zimmermann calls the aesthetic form that results from reinstating the original an “equalization” (Ausgleichung) (1865, 51, §121; 54, §§127–29).

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45 See Buić 1988, 43. Beginning in chapter 2, Zimmermann defines those forms that are unconditionally pleasing and displeasing.

46 Zimmermann 1865, 32, §76: “Aesthetics is thus not an empirical but rather an a priori science. Only the material that is incorporated into forms is empirical” (see Buić 1988, 43).

47 “The form of correctness is a veil [Scheier] that we spread over the given discord. Woe to the one who tears it!” (Zimmermann 1865, 53, §125).

48 “The artificial appearance must be suppressed to the same degree that it insinuated itself as a given reality. The resultant aesthetic form is that of an equalization” (Zimmermann 1865, 54, §129).
The three-stage perceptual process—original mental content preceding the replacement, artificial content during the replacement (Schein), restoration of reality (Sein) owing to the equalization—produces a sense of motion that animates the mental image. The result is the “appearance of spirituality” (Schein der Geistigkeit), a cardinal trait of art (Zimmermann 1865, 55–56, §§132–33).

A clear example of the process is dissonance in music. The nature of dissonance is not that it is discordant, Zimmermann explains, but that it palms itself off as consonance (sich für consonierend ausgibt). The function of dissonance is to create a sense of motion and goal directedness by making consonance a goal. “To that end, [dissonance] occurs as feigning consonance [Scheinconsonanz] so that the true consonance becomes the more conspicuous.” Equalization occurs when dissonance resolves, eliminating the artificial state of imposed, feigning consonance, and ending in a “pleasing conclusion” (Zimmermann 1865, 60, §146).49 In a statement that anticipates Wagner’s Tristan style, Zimmermann speaks of equalizations possibly occurring at both the beginning and end of the process, where a feigning consonance leads not to a true one but to yet another feigning consonance (successive dissonances):

The feigning consonances delight, the true consonance ends the process. The process continues as one feigning harmony resolves the other such that the appearance of animation [Beseelung] embraces the whole and reveals it as the work of a harmonious spirit, or of the spirit of harmony, with the true harmony that occurs at the conclusion.50 (61, §147)

We must bear in mind that the process leading to and including equalization is a mental one, activated by the sounds but not inherent in them. The sounds themselves have no content other than the forms they create—harmoniousness, proportionality, balance, symmetry, and so on. Furthermore, for Zimmermann music does not consist primarily in the sonorous element but rather in its overarching rhythmic-dynamic configurations, where rhythmic means music’s overall temporal ebb and flow, and dynamic means its modulation. Rhythm and modulation engender the perceived mental images that move us. Music can therefore portray mental life insofar as its flow simulates psychic flow, as Susanne Langer argued nearly a century later. However, unlike real psychic life, music lacks objective content. For Zimmermann, there is no connection to a “what” of the simulated psychic flow in music: “The ideas that find themselves in that [psychic] flow . . . are in fact the ‘what,’ the stuff of the

49 Moos (1922, 257) criticizes Zimmermann for this contrived view of dissonances and their resolutions. It is Zimmermann’s way, Moos says, of lending “vitality and animation that the abstract forms cannot yield.”

50 Further, “No sooner has the feigning consonance vanished than the displeasure of a clear dissonance again requires a consonance to be placed in its stead, which itself can be either a true or feigning consonance, in the latter case again requiring a resolution, etc., until it comes to a genuine conclusion in harmoniousness” (Zimmermann 1865, 61, §147).
inner life of the psyche, and these can never be reproduced by music” (1865, 351, §656).

Zimmermann, echoing Hanslick, explains that music cannot express ideas. People are misled into thinking that music expresses ideas because tones may evoke feelings, which are in turn associated with ideas. Based on such association, some have argued that tones express ideas. Like all sensations, musical (tone) sensations are mental images, but not the same type of mental images as thoughts. Zimmermann insists that tones cannot express ideas—thought content—in the way words can:

The acoustical element in poetry is . . . something altogether different from that in music. The acoustical element in music makes claim to independent significance, while in poetry it is subordinate to the idea. . . . Thus one tendency which in music aims at the idea in the poetic sense of the word can bring nothing but damage to the . . . musical element of music. (Zimmermann 1865, 348, §653)

Zimmermann, like Hanslick, rejects as well the notion that music expresses emotions. Tones may be thought to express feelings, and feelings may be associated with mental images, but tones cannot express mental images. “Only a false psychology,” he declares, “could lead to the attempt to express feelings through tones in the way that mental images are expressed through words, and so lead to the view that, since feelings attach to mental images, the tones that express feelings must also be capable of expressing mental images” (350, §655).

The Early Nineteenth-Century Formalists: Summary

The authors discussed so far, Kant, Herbart, Nägeli, and Zimmermann, are all formalists in that they narrow attention to, and base aesthetic evaluation on, intrinsic structural criteria. As Zimmermann puts it, aesthetics should focus on the how of art, that is, how it is structured (form), rather than on what is structured (content). For Kant, paradoxically, music is entertainment rather than culture, an agreeable rather than a fine art, because it possesses no conceptual content and therefore leaves nothing behind “as an idea” in the minds of listeners. It acquires such content only by connection with words or action and thus has specifiable meaning only by mechanical association (Kant [1793] 1987, 196, §52; 198, §53). For Herbart, music is music, artfully

51 The translation is by Bujić (1988, 48). In two well-known studies, Susanne Langer discusses the idea of music mirroring the flow of mental life (1942, 226, 228, 235, 238, 244; 1953, 27, 126).

52 Further, “Ideas coexist easily, ideas and tones, however, uneasily. . . . If the ideas are not reduced to signs of tones, then the tones are necessarily reduced to signs of ideas” (Zimmermann 1865, 349, §654).

53 See Bujić 1988, 48.

54 And even if music had conceptual content, according to Kant it would have to be disregarded in order to allow for a pure judgment of taste. Only a determinant judgment, based on accessory beauty, is possible.
shaped sonic procedures. It needs no listener-ascribed feelings—indeed, need not even be heard in order to please; tones can be “merely read, yet they please anyway” (see above, on Herbart). According to Christian Allesch, who traces the history of psychological aesthetics from early to modern times, Herbart’s views establish the dichotomy and irreconcilable conflict between philosophical and psychological aesthetics in the 1850s and 1860s.55 Zimmermann, too, even more so than his formalist forerunners, elevates form to the pinnacle of aesthetic criteria for appreciation and evaluation and rejects the “false psychology” that views feelings and ideas as the content of music. Before returning to Hanslick’s comparatively informal pamphlet on music aesthetics, which derives from Kant, to a degree, and from Herbart (Zimmermann’s treatise appeared more than a decade after Hanslick’s), we must first fill in the aesthetic scene in the first half of the nineteenth century by taking up the work of a contrasting, nonformalist influence on Hanslick, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), and also that of one of Hegel’s spiritual successors, Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–77), whose ideas differ markedly from those of formalists.

An Alternative to Formalism: “Inwardness” and Empathy in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

For Hegel, the “proper task of music is to vivify some content or other in the sphere of the subjective inner life,” to “make this inwardly veiled life and energy echo on its own account in notes” (1991, 2902). He focuses on the inwardness of music as the vehicle for communicating the “depth of a person’s inner life as such,” as “the art of the soul . . . directly addressed to the soul” (2:891). But that inner life is for Hegel, as for Hanslick, “object-free,” and the “object-free inwardness . . . constitutes [music’s] formal aspect” (2:892):

The musician [i.e., composer] . . . does not abstract [anything] from each and every topic but finds a topic in a text which he sets to music or, independently of any text, he clothes a mood in the form of a musical theme which he then elaborates further; but the real region of his compositions remains a rather formal inwardness, pure sound.56 (2:895)

Hegel had recognized, too, that a musical work has a well-ordered structure, an “inner articulation and a rounding of the parts into a whole in which one part makes the others necessary,” and that musical form results from “specific relations, oppositions, conflicts, transitions, complications, and resolutions” (2:896, 897). Hanslick expressed it similarly in calling form “the architectonic of the combined components and groups of notes out of which the

55 Allesch 1987, 255: “If we contrast this formalistic interpretation with the theory of ‘empathy,’ as it was evolved as the core of the psychological-aesthetic current a few decades later, the irreconcilability of the two views appears so obvious that it requires no further explication.”

56 Since music’s true power is to symbolize “the inner life of the individual,” “subjectivity itself,” it must “free itself from a given text and draw entirely out of itself its content . . . must be completely released from the determinate sphere of words” (Hegel 1991, 2952).
part 3a of chapter 2 ("music"), section 3 ("the romantic arts"), discusses "independent music" (Selbständige Musik). experts, who prefer independent music, are "entirely satisfied by the music itself," while the uninitiated, who listen for the "intelligible expression of feelings and ideas," prefer accompanimental music. for amateurs, independent music is "symbolical . . . capable of all sorts of interpretations" (Hegel 1991, 2:954).

57 Part 3a of chapter 2 ("music"), section 3 ("the romantic arts"), discusses "independent music" (Selbständige Musik). Experts, who prefer independent music, are "entirely satisfied by the music itself," while the uninitiated, who listen for the "intelligible expression of feelings and ideas," prefer accompanimental music. For amateurs, independent music is "symbolical . . . capable of all sorts of interpretations" (Hegel 1991, 2:954).

58 For pathological listeners, "slouched dozing in their chairs," the gratification of a "fine cigar . . . or a warm bath produces the same effect as a symphony" (Hanslick [1854] 1986, 59).
Vischer, the most influential writer on aesthetics in the decades just before and after 1850, took Hegel’s ideas on the understanding and appreciation of art as point of departure, especially the notion of symbolic art. Art as symbol took a modified form in Vischer’s writings and those of his contemporary, Karl Köstlin. It is to the work of those and like-minded authors that we now turn.

**The First Empathists:**  
**Friedrich Theodor Vischer and Johann Gottfried Herder**

Like the theologian and proto-romantic philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), for whom music surpasses all other arts, Hegel exponent Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–77) considers music “the soul of all the arts laid bare, the secret of all form, an intuition of world-building laws.” For Vischer, who harshly and at times sarcastically criticized Zimmermann’s formalism, it is an ideal embodiment of spiritual content. Through music, composers express the nature of emotion by dissolving the world of objects into sound. Music is a metaphorical passageway, the ear “a door through which emotion-filled tone must pass.” It stirs up our entire emotional being. The mathematical objectivity of a tone is cancelled out in hearing, and as listeners we become “indistinguishably intertwined” with music (F. T. Vischer 1846–57, 3: §§763, 764).

Vischer proposes that our natural aesthetic behavior as human beings is automatically to read, see, and hear content in all things that surround us, both animate and inanimate, including works of art. Following Hegel, who believed music’s subject matter to be “subjective deep feeling” and considered the “proper task” of music to be “vivify[ing] some content . . . in the sphere of . . . subjective inner life” (Hegel 1991, 2:902), Vischer sees art’s value in its expressive and conceptual content. Formalists, he argues, forget that the “how” of art is intrinsically linked to content-laden “what”: the movements of the artist’s mind and soul, which are the primal sources of art. There is no such thing as pure form, Vischer insists. Form is “the exterior of an interior,

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60 Vischer ([1897] 1907, 59) pushes Zimmermann’s ideas to the ludicrous in pointing out that, by Zimmermann’s principles, “toads arranged in regular series would actually have to be beautiful” (“rhythmisich aneinandereihten Kröten eigentlich schön sein müßten”). Robert Vischer compiled this book from his father’s lecture notes of 1876–77 and 1882–83.


62 Allesch (1987, 252) considers Vischer’s psychological interpretations of Hegel’s ideas and terminology contrived and forced.
better the exterior with its interior, the unity of interior and exterior, viewed from the perspective of the exterior” (F. T. Vischer 1922, 4:202). He agrees that the basis of all art is form, but insists that 

the inner psychic creative force, the spiritual content [geistiger Gehalt] . . . are manifested in the form. . . . Artists must have projected themselves into the affect and idea with the full animatedness of their fiber, with the full interiority of the mind and intensity of spirit. (2:208, 209)

In art, content dissolves into form, in the manner of a Hegelian Aufhebung. The dichotomy of content and form is removed, or transcended (aufgehoben). In analogy with liquid chemical suspensions, where component elements are present yet not visible, content in art is dissolved

only in the sense that it is no longer perceived in its separateness, in its individuality. The content as such is no longer present because it is fully transmuted into form. The materiality has been absorbed into the form, but it is not inconsequential what has been absorbed. (2:209–10)

When we speak of pure form in music, we are speaking of structurings of sonic phenomena that arise “from the interior of the mobile spirit” and are separate from it only relatively. “Even in the separation they still preserve a shimmer, a reminiscence of their original wealth of content and warmth. Without that connection, if thin, the form would vanish in a moment, would collapse into nothing” (2:203).

In perceiving this dissolved, spiritualized content, we rely on an aesthetic behavior that is universal in humankind: our tendency to see or hear in inanimate nature—“womb” and “cradle” of all life—the primordial forces that produced and shaped our environment. Through the activity of imagination and an act of self-projection into the inanimate, we intuit and reexperience the forces of creation:

In the forms [of earth], we see the motion and manner of their cause . . . and thus they summon before the mind the mighty agitation and upheaval by which the planet took its present shape. This motion seems to reproduce itself in perception; the lifeless forms come alive. . . . Seeing proper is an internal act of reproduction. In reproducing the formations of the earth . . . I dissolve and create them anew. In the lines, I . . . intuit the power that once created them from chaos. . . . I introject myself into that power and repeat its process. (F. T. Vischer 1846–57, 2:25, 27, §240; 65, §260)

In architecture, “immobile and silent masses appear to move,” owing to our intuitions of gravitational forces, “lines ascending, horizontally flowing . . .
traversing space. It is as though the ear could perceive sounds and reverberations that emanate from the movements” (3:204, §561)

At the basis of Vischer’s speculations on content in art is the notion of “introjection,” or empathy (Einfühlung), an aesthetic behavior expounded fully in a landmark dissertation by his son, Robert (1847–1933), to be discussed below. Herder, a vigorous opponent of Kant’s abstract formalism (purposiveness without purpose), had already written on the behavior more than fifty years earlier in an essay titled “Studien und Entwürfe zur Plastik” (“Studies and Sketches on Sculpture,” 1769).65 There, Herder discusses art’s immediacy, the “palpability that addresses us from inside the sculpture,” a spirit that “speaks directly to our spirit through a sympathy [Sympathie] . . . , an attraction that is similar to pleasure” (Herder [1800] 1967, 8:91). In another passage on sculpture written a decade later (1778), he again refers to “an inner sympathy . . . a feeling and projection [Versetzung] of our entire human ego into the [visually] scanned shape.” He takes this projection to be the basis of our sense of beauty, which Herder understands as perfection (Vollkommenheit), the unity of Beauty, Truth, and the Good (8:56).66 For him, beauty is not merely a trait of an aesthetic object, but rather the “feeling” (Gefühl) of the perfection of the aesthetic object, an “apex of its existence” (Maximum ihres Daseins) in sensory perception (22:48).67

Foreshadowing Vischer, Herder believes that we project “statics and dynamics” into art, where every contour and texture is alive, causing a “sympathetic disposition” in our soul:

We are embodied within the statue, or it is animated within us. . . . Nothing must be merely viewed and treated as a surface but rather must be scanned by the delicate finger of the inner sense and harmonious sympathy [Mitgefühl], as though it came from the hands of the creator. ([1800] 1967, 8:60; italics original)

While Vischer acknowledges the existence of music’s intrinsic structural mechanics—that it consists in series of relationships among intervals, chords, and strategic alternations of consonance and dissonance and embodies its own organizational principles, founded in nature, according to which the sonic material is deliberately shaped—while he recognizes all of this, he nevertheless stresses that music ultimately becomes music through the activity that takes place in listeners’ imaginations [Phantasie] (1846–57, 5:841–42,

65 Allesch (1987, 220–22) discusses Herder’s criticism of Kant and in the framework of a history of psychological aesthetics.


67 See Allesch 1987, 221. Allesch points out that Herder’s criticisms of Kant are not compelling because he seems to have missed Kant’s distinction between “free” and “adherent” (adherent) beauty, the latter of which does entail a purpose and concepts, and which Herder uses as examples in criticizing Kant’s notion of beauty and basis for aesthetic judgment of it. See note 16 and associated text on Kant’s distinction between free and adherent beauty (pulchritudo vaga and pulchritudo adhaerens).
§767). Composers “perform” their works on the stage of listeners’ minds, which recreate the music:

By means of the performance, through the transference into actual tone of the tone merely conceived in the imagination of the artist, it flows directly across the recreative imagination of the listener. The tone . . . passes from one imagination to the other. . . . Aural imagination must confront the work in order that it achieve real existence outside of the artist’s mind. (5:843–44, §767)

While listening to music, the imagination is “animatedly active.” It mentally reconstructs the aural experiences by tracing the movements of the tones, continuously summarizing as the music unfolds, analogous to watching the action of a drama. We hear in these tone motions the motions of the mind, the “agitation of the flowing mental life.” Music lends the mind “speech and voice from which the life and motion of the mind [of the composer] reverberate back to the mind [of the listener] like a wonderful echo” (5:845, 846, §767).

The realm of architecture is space; that of music, time. Music, like emotions, unfolds over time as changing intensities. We experience music in the same way as we experience emotions, as varying intensities. Its temporally unfolding dynamic profile traces the same periods of preparation and completion, the same cycles of intensification and attenuation, that we find everywhere in the environment and experience mentally. Melody in particular, with its rolling contours and rhythmic currents, allows us to “eavesdrop on emotion’s doorstep.” In melodic shapes, we hear the intensifications moving toward resolution and can imagine longing, anger, and other emotions (F. T. Vischer 1846–57, 3:§§754, 756).

Music’s temporally unfolding dynamic profile of intensifications and attenuations simulates and conveys to us the flow of emotions. But Vischer acknowledges that the ultimate source of its effects is numerical relationships among tones. “Even the differences which express the basic qualitative form of emotion by pitch level,” he observes, “and which provide the main means for introducing the character of a mood—even these differences reveal themselves as being quantitative in origin.” In this regard, Vischer agrees with

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68 “A musical composition is merely a multifarious practical application of various relationships, given in nature, of tones to one another. The knowledge of these relationships, the knowledge of the natural conditions and characteristics of the sonic material, is therefore an essential prerequisite for the comprehension of the nature of the composition itself” (F. T. Vischer 1846–57, 5:841).

69 “Only in a complex drama,” Vischer explains, “does something very similar [to hearing music] take place, where following of the whole of the action is the foremost aspect, what the viewers must do in order to assimilate the whole” (1846–67, 5:846).

70 According to Hegel, the “elemental might” of music can be attributed to its temporal nature: “Sound . . . penetrates the self, grips it in its simplest being, and by means of the temporal movement and its rhythm sets the self in motion. . . . This is what can be advanced as the essential reason for the elemental might of music” (1991, 2:908).

formalists: musical expression depends on proportions. “The whole gamut of the means of musical expression,” he explains, “consists in nothing but proportions and ratios.” However, as a referentialist Vischer highlights music’s expressive qualities: “It is in these [quantitative relationships among pitch levels] that emotion creates the apparatus for expressing its reality in qualitative movements” (F. T. Vischer 1846–57, 3.§761; Katz and Dahlhaus 1989–93, 2:146, 147, 148). Such referentialist and expressionist ideas motivated Eduard Hanslick (1824–1904) to publish his celebrated pamphlet about musical beauty.

**Midcentury Empathetic Formalist: Eduard Hanslick**

The first volumes of Vischer’s treatise on aesthetics appeared in the years just prior to the publication of Hanslick’s controversial booklet on music aesthetics, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (*On the Musically Beautiful*, 1854). For all of the authority accorded the work, Hanslick was well aware of its limitations. “Entirely foreign to me is the arrogance, nearly epidemic among music-aesthetic monographs, that a complete aesthetics of music is latent in these few leaves,” he remarked in the preface to the first edition. “There was from the start neither the intention nor sufficient strength for an aesthetics of music, even in the more restricted sense in which I consider one possible.”

Forty years later, he commented in an autobiography that the pamphlet was intended as no more than a sketch or substructure (*Skizze, Unterbau*) to be expanded and elaborated over time into an actual aesthetics of music. However, he lost interest after reading so many books on aesthetics that he became “oversaturated with philosophizing about music and . . . tired of wrestling with abstract concepts” (Hanslick 1894, 1:242–43).

Since the kernel of Hanslick’s formalist outlook was introduced earlier, we review his ideas here only in summary. His objective, argued vigorously in the first two chapters, is to show that music neither has feelings as its content (*Inhalt*) nor is its task to represent feelings (*Gefühle darstellen*). Framed colorfully in the preface to the first edition, Hanslick hoped “to carry victorious battering rams onto the battlefield against the decomposed aesthetics of feeling, and to lay ready a few foundation stones for the future, new edifice” ([1854] 1986, Vorwort). Music’s powers are restricted for Hanslick to symbolically depicting nonspecific feelings by means of motion, through which music and feelings are mysteriously linked (chaps. 1 and 2; Hanslick [1854] 1986, 3, 9, 11, 12, 20). Music’s content—its source of beauty—lies in autonomous forms, more precisely in “tönend bewegte Formen”—“sonically moving
forms." Music presents "concrete tonal structures" whose aesthetic delight arises from the "mental satisfaction ... in ... following and anticipating the composer’s designs, here to be confirmed in [our] expectations, there to be agreeably led astray." The result of those designs is form, the "architectonic of the combined components and groups of notes out of which the piece is made," and the only element capable of sufficient definition to be a reliable foundation for aesthetic principles.

The roots of Hanslick’s pamphlet lie in the aforementioned midcentury shift from modes of thought dominated by speculative metaphysics to those focused on materialism and natural sciences. Accordingly, Hanslick envisioned a science of music modeled on chemistry or physiology. His enduring significance as a music aesthetician rests to a large extent on how he was able to combine elements of both intellectual currents. For Hanslick music is both physical (material) and spiritual (metaphysical). It begins with raw material of nature (sound). Through artistic shaping, the raw material becomes musical tone endowed with "ideal content" (geistiger Inhalt), which manifests in myriad thematic and harmonic relationships that constitute musical form: "the architectonic of the combined components and groups of notes out of which the piece is made," "the symmetry of these parts in their sequence, contrast, repetition, and development" (Hanslick [1854] 1986, 35, 81). Musical beauty and value hinge on that content. "No beauty," he insists, is "without its full share of ideality [Geistigkeit]" (30). For Hanslick, then, it is the "specifically musical," the music itself that is of importance, but only when conceived as the "creation of a thinking and feeling mind," such that the work has "in high degree the capability to be itself full of ideality and feeling." It is that ideal content, embedded in the "tone-structure itself," which as listeners "we demand of every musical artwork" (xxiii, 31, 60).

The uniqueness and attraction of Hanslick’s work to musicians and musically sensitive thinkers and readers lie in its hybrid characteristics, deriving in part from the intellectual appeal of Kant’s Enlightenment aesthetics, in part from the intuitive appeal of Hegel’s idealist aesthetics. From Kant,
we see the foundations, if not the details, of Hanslick’s formalist viewpoint: nonconceptual, subjective purposiveness of form arising from a harmonious correlation between the faculties of imagination (Einbildungskraft, Phantasie) and understanding (Verstand), accessible only as phenomenon. From Hegel, we see the role of Geist (mind, spirit) in Hanslick’s idealist viewpoint, not in Hegel’s metaphysically transcendent Spirit or noumenon, but in the manifest human-spiritual content of music, a spirituality (Geistigkeit) evident in what Hanslick calls the “specifically musical” (Spezifisch-Musikalische): “In music the concept of form is materialized in a specifically musical way” (Hanslick 1986, 34). Beauty resides in the musical forms, in “the music itself,” as he puts it. But those forms, invested with “sense and logic,” are not empty. Rather, they are “filled,” he stresses, “not mere contours of a vacuum but mind [Geist] giving shape to itself from within” (Hanslick 1986, 30). The content of music is immanent, fused with form from the start, while that of visual and literary arts is transcendent. As Mark Burford describes perceptively, Hanslick “does not so much reject musical metaphysics as, to a certain extent, reconceptualize it by arguing that the ideality in music is the product of a human spirit, not a transcendent one” (2006, 171).

The impact and enduring influence of Hanslick’s pamphlet are inversely proportional to its diminutive size. Its appearance in 1854 was a watershed moment in the history of music aesthetics. Many of its ideas had appeared elsewhere in fragments, but Hanslick collected and crystallized them in the deliberately provocative Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. It served well as a conceptual hub and reference point for the late-nineteenth-century conflict played out between the opponents and advocates of the so-called New German School of composition. It was a conflict in which Hanslick actively participated as a music critic in Vienna, championing the music of Brahms and discrediting that of Wagner and Bruckner.

Various factors are responsible for the sustained importance and popularity of Hanslick’s pamphlet, among others, length (relative brevity), longevity (ten editions in his lifetime), language (general intelligibility), and limitation (restricted subject matter). Compared to other treatises on aesthetics of the day, Hanslick’s booklet, written at age twenty-nine, is rather short. The first edition ran to 104 pages and hardly qualifies as a “treatise” in the tradition

idealism in Hanslick’s aesthetics and the general congruence between Hanslick and Hegel. He also points out that by 1870 Hanslick had deleted many idealist-leaning passages from his treatise (419). However, others remained.

79 Barbara Boisits (2010) explores Hanslick’s notion of the specifically musical in connection with historical and scientific studies of art.

80 On transcendence and immanence in art, see Payzant 2002b, 9–11, 16.

81 Bowman (1998, 140) calls Hanslick’s pamphlet “one of the most important (or to some, infamous) treatises on the

nature and value of music ever written,” the “classic ‘manifesto’ for musical formalism.” Kivy (1990b, 18) calls Hanslick’s booklet “a beacon of musical clarity and truth.”

82 Abegg (1974, 16–36) discusses the sources and original ideas of Vom Musikalisch-Schönen in a monograph on Hanslick’s music aesthetics and criticism; chapter 1, a “Sketch of the Historical Situation around 1854” (11–13), summarizes the historical and cultural circumstances that contributed to the formation of Hanslick’s ideas. Payzant’s preface to his translation (Hanslick [1854] 1986, xi–xviii) is a useful summary of the background of Hanslick’s treatise.
of German philosophical works. Consider F. T. Vischer’s *Aesthetik, oder Wissenschaft des Schönen*, which encompasses six weighty volumes published over an eleven-year period (1846–57), beginning when the author was nearly forty. In addition to those six, Vischer published six further volumes, titled *Kritische Gänge* (Critical Paths) over twelve years’ time (1861–73), which revisit and revise ideas advanced in the original *Aesthetik*. Similar comparisons are possible with the extensive aesthetic writings of Hegel (three volumes), Ferdinand Hand (two), and Zimmermann (two). Of course, Vischer was a professional scholar and philosopher specializing in aesthetics. Hanslick, by contrast, trained as a lawyer and to 1854 had worked only as a part-time music critic. Understandably, Vischer’s work, and that of Hegel, Hand, and Zimmermann, is voluminous and covers the full range of topics in aesthetics, music being but one embedded within a comprehensive system of thought. But how many musicians or music academicians today know even those portions of Vischer’s treatise (or Hegel’s or Zimmermann’s) devoted to music? Far fewer, certainly, than those who know well Hanslick’s *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, whose brevity surely helped to establish its wide audience. It requires no major time commitment of readers—the entire booklet can be read in an evening. Further, the small size of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* may also have played a role in the publisher’s willingness to continue issuing new editions over the course of nearly five decades (1854–1902), making the work commercially widely available and affordable up through the end of the 1900s (and up to the present!). Finally, and most important, while Vischer, Zimmermann, and Karl Köstlin (see below) may have systematically explored the entire territory of aesthetics in hundreds of pages, Hanslick managed in one short pamphlet to put his finger precisely on decisive as well as philosophically divisive issues in aesthetics, and to formulate them incisively and more powerfully than anyone before (Allesch 1987, 260).

Hanslick’s prose style, too, contributed to the popularity of the booklet. He wrote succinctly, in clear, straightforward language, unlike the long-winded Hegel, Zimmermann, and particularly Köstlin—a paragon of German prolixity. *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* is not freighted with esoteric terminology and in general avoids the abstract mode of expression and abstruse ideas typical of German philosophical literature. It was therefore much more verbally comprehensible and conceptually accessible than similar works by other authors. Finally, Hanslick focuses solely on music, with no attempt to integrate his ideas into the context of art as a whole. Given that limitation and the verbal clarity, the ideas in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* are easy to acquire, digest, and retain for personal reflection on, and public dialog about, music.

There is yet another reason why Hanslick’s pamphlet achieved such notoriety and significance. Music was widely acknowledged in the nineteenth century as the quintessential romantic art, as the sonic embodiment of feelings, and uniquely capable of expressing those feelings. An eminently readable book such as Hanslick’s, which vigorously questioned then largely accepted
opinion about music embodying and expressing feelings, would naturally be of great interest for its bold, controversial viewpoint.

From our earlier discussions of Hegel’s and Vischer’s aesthetics, which highlight music’s primary role in making audible all the nuances of interior life, it is clear that Nägeli’s and Hanslick’s voices were not the only ones heard in the mid-nineteenth century regarding form as the principal music-aesthetic criterion. The aforementioned popularity and longevity of Hanslick’s “few leaves” notwithstanding, Friedrich Theodor Vischer was the dominant aesthetician after Hegel’s generation. A little known fact about his once widely read treatise is that Vischer’s student and, later, Tübingen colleague Karl Reinhold Köstlin (1819–94) wrote the section on music in Vischer’s Aesthetik. Köstlin’s work, along with that of F. T. Vischer’s son, Robert, and Johannes Volkelt, represents in the last half of the nineteenth century an emergent psychological aesthetics prefigured in the writings of Herder.

Late-Nineteenth-Century Empathists: Köstlin, Vischer, and Volkelt
Karl Köstlin

Relying on the theory of association, Köstlin concludes that in aesthetic behavior the mind perceives similarities “between external things and its own conditions” and finds “in everything a reflection of itself.” Through such mental activity, visual and aural perceptions acquire symbolic content and, therefore, exhibit “symbolic form” (Formsymbolik) (Köstlin 1869, 322–25). In the 1870s and 1880s, the notion of symbolic content in art, and especially in music, became key as a way of affirming the idea of expressive content, albeit on different premises than earlier in the century, after Hanslick and Zimmermann had discredited the idea in their revisionist aesthetics.

For Köstlin, sounds, including musical tones, are the opposite of silence and thus signs of life in our world. “In short, tone is a sign of life, and with that,” Köstlin holds, “everything is expressed” (1869, 522). Tones remind us of their material sources and, through the law of ideational association (Vorstellungassociation), of objects and images similar to those sources. Through such association, music can have an object, a content:

These forms [tone configurations], which are of course the only things that music can produce, carry something with them overlooked by those who, like Hanslick, declare music to be a mere play of forms. Owing to what we call ideational association [Vorstellungassociation], they carry with them such a lively, 83 Köstlin collaborated on and essentially wrote sections 767–832 in volume 4. Köstlin (1889, 102) mentions that he worked with Vischer in 1856, the year before volume 4 was published. Köstlin began his career at Tübingen in 1849 on the theology faculty but in 1858 shifted to philosophy, lecturing on German literature and aesthetics. Lippman (1992, 331) devotes a few paragraphs to Köstlin.

84 Further, “Tones are tones a sign of life that comes to us from an object. . . . [I]t is . . . a natural fact that tones represent for us the objects from which they come. . . . [I]f we go into detail, on hearing tones, as a result of their quality we also see their sources” (Köstlin 1869, 565).
such an animatedly 'allusive' mental visualization of objects which specifically possess those forms as a characteristic of their type, that when we hear those forms, we can believe we also envision, perceive those objects. (321–22; italics original)

All tones, Köstlin holds, call to mind their sources. Consequently, we hear a “life of movement and . . . therefore see things moved and movement” (566). There is nothing particularly new about that idea, and few would argue with it. However, Köstlin goes a step further by proposing that the law of ideational association applies to things beyond the sound source, to other objects and images as well.

Tones bring with them not only an image of that which produces them but rather also embody the *images* of other objects, namely the *images of objects that have a specific similarity with them*, or more precisely with the design in which they appear. Just as all things similar remind of one another by force of the law of association of ideas . . . , so too here. Tones can awaken in our minds the mental image of every object with which it is relatedly shaped. . . . Indeed, as we have seen, tones are so rich in designs that the sphere of those things that they can portray and model for us by way of association of ideas is a very large one. (566; italics original)

By “specific similarity” and “relatedly shaped” objects, Köstlin means tones produced by materials that are wooden or metal, more sonorous or less, more elastic or less, and so forth. Hearing tones emanating from such sources recalls objects materially, physically, and, in sound, timbrally related to those sources (565).

Our mind [*Geist*]—the formalists oversee and underestimate it, or reckon it as a fault of human nature that it possesses such a lively association of ideas, and a fault of art for counting on it—our mind is not so narrow, so small, so lethargic and dull, so dense, so numb, that it perceives only form, that it does not also perceive things together with form, of which the form reminds the mind. (323–24)

In this sense, then, through the law of psychological association, tones do have contents other than their formal configurations. “Who dares perchance to set borders for imagination,” challenges Köstlin. “Who dares to take memory [or] association of ideas from humanity?” (1869, 568). A musical work possesses beauty by virtue of formal organization and clarity, to be sure, not just by mere depiction. This Köstlin concedes to Hanslick. However, musical beauty goes beyond form. Through ideational association, music alludes to extramusical contents familiar to listeners, and in that way, the exterior world may be reflected in variously designed characters, combinations, and movements of tones (568).

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85 Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994, 20, offers a slightly different translation.

86 “Every piece of music will also be able to allusively present to the mind a specific content not unfamiliar to the consciousness of listeners. So far as the world can be portrayed through tones and movement of tones . . . the world with all single and multiple movements is reflected in the . . . element of tone” (Köstlin 1869, 568).
No one can agree more than we with Hanslick when he requires that music aim primarily at independent and wholly musical beauty rather than merely or predominantly at portrayal of feelings. . . . We even concede that music cannot depict specific feelings . . . but rather can only portray the mood and movement of mental conditions. . . . But we consider it incorrect that representing the mind’s moods and its movements should not be a main objective of music, that a feeling-laden music should be no more than a merely artful construction. (576)

The associations that tones stimulate lead beyond images of objects related or similar to the material sources of tones. Owing to the vibratory movements inherent in tones, the associations lead involuntarily—“irresistibly” (unwiderstehlich), Köstlin says—to the arousal of feelings through spiritual sympathetic vibration. On hearing tones, we are surrounded by sound’s objectivity, which penetrates our being and sets our lives into sympathetic vibration with it. We find ourselves in a “reciprocal relationship” with something external. “Sounding tone fosters mediation between subject and object” (522, 523).

Tone penetrates into the interior of the listening subject. It does not stop in front of us, does not remain standing before us, like shape, light, and color. Rather, tone approaches us and enters within us. . . . Tone embraces and penetrates into us . . . we are in its power. The sounding object controls us. . . . We flow along with it. It lives within us. It transports us into it, and itself into us. . . . The feeling ego, the I, in which the world resonates, is animatedly affected as well as engaged in animated reciprocity with the object. (523, 524; italics original)

Owing to inherent sonic properties of tones, to psychological association, and to natural, irrepressible characteristics of perception, the notion of form in music cannot be exhausted in tonal designs. “Form, and in particular beautiful form,” Köstlin contends, “cannot solely be the aesthetic object” (49; italics original). If that were the case, he reasons, musical content could conceivably be aesthetically indifferent, merely “beautifully treated.” But aesthetic value and appreciation are not limited to, let alone exhausted in, such beautiful treatment. Such value and appreciation hinge on the spiritual relationship established between perceiver and aesthetic object. A merely beautiful content that is “not also humanly related to us and does not move us, leaves us cold and therefore has less aesthetic quality than another, less beautiful content with which we animatedly empathize [sympathisieren]” (49).

87 Further, “Tone can touch life, the heart, the soul. It is a “vital sign” [Lebenszeichen], which sets a second life incomprehensibly, irresistibly (magically) into direct sympathy” (Köstlin 1869, 524).

88 In a similar line of thought, Dahlhaus ([1967] 1982, 35; 1967, 53–54) remarks, “To judge that a succession of tones is ‘perfect’ as theme for a fugue or sonata implies not at all that this succession belongs to those melodies that evoke the epithet ‘beautiful’. . . . Correspondingly, a melody may be felt and judged as beautiful with no need for the listener, who enjoys it and expresses pleasure in it, to entertain any concept of a formal function to be fulfilled by the melody. . . . A ‘good’ theme need not be a ‘beautiful’ melody, and vice versa.”
Further, “The feeling ego, the I, in which the world resonates, is animatedly affected as well as engaged in animated reciprocity with the object” (Köstlin 1869, 524).
Reiterating that formal properties cannot be the sole criteria for beauty and aesthetic judgment, that without the necessary component of human relatedness formal beauty alone leaves us cold, Köstlin draws attention to symbolic meanings: “Forms of things do not merely have meaning for beauty and lack thereof, for pleasure and displeasure, but rather also have objective symbolic meaning. Form is both: design of the distinctive impression of beauty, and representation, expression, symbol of certain objects” (325–26; italics original).

Köstlin acknowledges that, although tones may be associatively expressive and symbolically representative in the above-described manner, they by no means can express or symbolize everything in the world, nor even uniformly well the things that they can express and symbolize. Like Hegel and Vischer, he recognizes that tones most effectively convey inwardness. Music is “wholly sonic communication of the soul to the world!” Köstlin proclaims. In tones, he affirms, there “resounds primarily (although certainly not exclusively) the world and life of the interior, the sphere of feeling and the circle of its moods and movements.” The “true province” of music is the life of feeling (1869, 1015, 569, 574; italics original).91

[A composer] is only in his actual and music’s element when he directs the unseen undulating, internally surging flow and current of feeling itself into tones, chords, rhythms, and melodies, when he gives musical utterance to the life of feeling in all of its . . . movement. (574)

In summary, Köstlin advocates for an aesthetic of content (Inhaltsästhetik) in all fine arts. The beautiful cannot be reduced to and evaluated solely on the basis of formal properties. Aesthetic behavior is not accounted for as the experiencing of the beautiful as an objective given but rather exists in humankind’s natural need for structuring experience (Allesch 1987, 262).92 He acknowledges and values music’s formal aspects and confirms their significance for musical beauty but considers form alone insufficient as a basis for beauty. Psychological mechanisms that operate unavoidably in perception stimulate a richly varied array of associations between tones and the objects and events of the world as well as, more important, between tones and human

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90 Further, “The qualitative and spiritual properties of form are more intimately intertwined with the nature of things to which they attach than the quantitative and sensuous properties that also inhere in them. They do not have merely formal significance but just as much material-aesthetic significance” (Köstlin 1869, 324).

91 “But only the life of feeling is its true province because, in part, external life cannot be sufficiently expressively portrayed in tones, in part does not include the unseen and delicate interior and intimate mental domains that is the specific property of tone, and makes it, accordingly, the suitable symbol of interior life” (Köstlin 1869, 574).

92 Allesch points out (1987, 263) that, while Köstlin’s may not often get beyond sensitive descriptions of the aesthetic world, his verbal sensitivity to the obscurities of aesthetic behavior yields a greater understanding of it than is the case with his formalist contemporaries. Allesch considers Köstlin’s work quite important in the history of aesthetics and therefore unjustly neglected (1987, 262).
Langer’s idea of art (1953, 40, 27), generally, as “the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling” and of music, specifically, as a “tonal analogue of emotive life” clearly agree with Köstlin. Langer (1942, chaps. 3, 4, 8; 1953, chaps. 3, 8) lays out a theory of “non-discursive” symbolism. Victor Zuckerkandl (1956, chap. 6) discusses music as a “dynamic symbol.” Gordon Epperson (1967) devotes a book to the subject of musical symbolism. Symbolism in music depends on a reciprocity between the musical stimulus and the listener, Epperson says, such that an emotional “echo” or “recognition” is awakened. Listener recognition of, and echo response to, musical stimuli occur because of its generality and because “art speaks to our common humanity” (10). For Epperson as for Köstlin, the basis of symbolization in art is emotional, not at the level of personal feelings but rather generally.

behaviors and their underlying psychic conditions. The strongest associations are with feelings. In music, they remain nonspecific and without referents, to be sure. Nevertheless, in the element of tone “resounds primarily (although certainly not exclusively) the world and life of the interior, the sphere of feeling and the circle of its moods and movements” (Köstlin 1869, 569; italics original). Tones are “the most articulate means of expression of the interior. . . . The ‘musically beautiful’ is nothing if it is not permeated with the pulse of sonic motion from within” (573). In everyday communication, we project our states of mind and feelings into tones, and others understand the communication by empathetically introjecting themselves into those tones. Joining with Köstlin’s proposal of a vital linkage of feeling with creative activity and aesthetic experience and the allied notion of empathy, is his idea of symbolism. Through the law of ideational association and empathy, music acquires symbolic content, in part expressive (symbolic feelings), in part formal (form symbolism).93 Robert Vischer (1847–1933) picked up where Köstlin left off in developing the notion of empathy and symbolism in art and attempted to set them on a firmer basis than association.

Robert Vischer

A few years after Köstlin published his Ästhetik (1869), and within a few years of F. T. Vischer’s self-revising Critical Paths (Kritische Gänge, 1861–73), the two men found themselves occupied, as mentors, with Robert Vischer’s innovative dissertation on empathy. The study, “Über das optische Formgefühl” (“On the Optical Sense of Form”), closely examines the behavior and its bases. The topic was suggested by Robert’s father in 1872, and the document, written under Köstlin’s supervision, appeared in 1873, a year before the fourth edition of Hanslick’s treatise. At its publication, Robert Vischer entered the aesthetic fray, with its formalist faction (Kant, Herbart, Hanslick, Zimmermann) and empathist challengers (Herder, F. T. Vischer, Köstlin). Stimulated by ideas published in his father’s aforementioned self-critical essays, Vischer advanced his theory of empathy as a refutation of Herbart and Zimmermann but also, in a larger sense, as a thoroughgoing reconceptualization of the basis and mechanics of perception. We do not see just with our eyes, with the brain registering the sensations, he claims. Rather, we see

93 Langer’s idea of art (1953, 40, 27), generally, as “the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling” and of music, specifically, as a “tonal analogue of emotive life” clearly agree with Köstlin. Langer (1942, chaps. 3, 4, 8; 1953, chaps. 3, 8) lays out a theory of “non-discursive” symbolism. Victor Zuckerkandl (1956, chap. 6) discusses music as a “dynamic symbol.” Gordon Epperson (1967) devotes a book to the subject of musical symbolism. Symbolism in
as feeling beings, with our entire personality and imagination (Allesch 1987, 329).  

When Robert Vischer proposed these ideas, it was the dawning heyday of scientific research in Germany, when psychology moved from the realm of philosophy to that of experimental science, when Gustav Fechner’s notion of psychophysics and Hermann von Helmholtz’s findings on hearing and vision were still new. His groundbreaking “On the Optical Sense of Form” outlines a theory of empathy based on the interaction of sensation (Empfinden) and feeling (Fühlen) and on the instinctive self-projections of the mind as a mode of experiencing and understanding objects. Aesthetic behavior, for Vischer, begins with “immediate” sensory responses (Zuempfindung), which stimulate “responsive” motor sensations (Nachempfindungen). These in turn may deepen and crystallize into enduring “empathetic” sensations (Einempfindung). Here, we have penetrated to the interior of an object. “The form becomes . . . clarified—spiritualized—by being internal,” he explains. Having achieved independence from the “narrow constraints of reality,” the perceived object in imagination may become “doubly effective” ([1873] 1994, 96, 101–2; [1873] 1927, 10, 17–18).

Sensation predominates in the initial phases of perception, but it does not rise to the level of a truly emotional contact with objects (Seelenkontakt). Through ideation—activity of the imagination—it evolves to the stage of “psychic feeling” (psychisches Gefühl) when a “spiritual value” or “vital force” inheres in perceived objects. Sensation gives only limited access to objects; feeling gives access to their “spiritual core” (geistiger Kern) (R. Vischer [1873] 1994, 102, 103; [1873] 1927, 18–19). Involuntarily interwoven with the progressive stages of sensation are complementary stages of feeling: “immediate feeling” (Zufühlung), “responsive feeling” (Nachfühlung), and “empathetic feeling” or, simply, “empathy” (Einfühlung), a “turning toward the interior of the phenomenon.” Fully immersed in the interior of an aesthetic object, through empathy we trace a path from the interior back to the exterior. Empathy is thus not a “feeling-into,” as the German Einfühlung suggests, but rather a “feeling-out-of” ([1873] 1994, 108; [1873] 1927, 26).

Empathy traces the object from the inside (the object’s center) to the outside (the object’s form), whereas the immediate feeling and responsive feeling proceed from the outside (the object’s form) to the inside (the object’s center.

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94 Thirty years later, hermeneuticist Hermann Kretzschmar (1848–1924) would say, similarly, “When the ear hears and the eye sees, the remaining human being is not dead. The spirit always hears and sees with them” (Kretzschmar 1902, 50–51).

95 Fechner (1801–87), believed that the world was invested with soul (Seele), similar to his philosopher contemporary, Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807–77), for whom the world was imbued with spirit (Geist). Fechner published Elemente der Psychophysik (Elements of Psychophysics) in 1860; Helmholtz, Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musik (On the Sensations of Tone) and Handbuch der physiologischen Optik (Treatise on Physiological Optics), in 1863 and 1867, respectively. David J. Murray (1988, 162–98) discusses the significance of Fechner, Helmholtz, and others for the growth of the field of psychology.
empathy), but they can also altogether disregard the inner quality of an object. ([1873] 1994, 108; [1873] 1927, 26)

An artist’s creative path runs in reverse. “Every work of art reveals itself to us as a person harmoniously feeling himself into a kindred object, as humanity objectifying itself in harmonious forms.” Then, by means of an “inner, dynamically emulating process,” the artist transforms inscrutable mental life into “striking objectivity.” The content of a work of art, Robert Vischer affirms, “is precisely the artist.” Through the above-described process of empathetic contemplation of that objectivity, we encounter those harmonious forms that please not because of numerical relations (Zahl) or proportion (Maß) but rather “because they favorably induce the approach, access, and projection of my imagination, because they evoke in me a harmonious emotive process” ([1873] 1994, 27; [1874] 1927, 52).

The ideation that gives rise to feelings also activates our will, which influences our perception of objects. Those acts of will, Vischer explains, link the inner and outer worlds, bridging the gap between imagination and art. The volitional bridge connects the creative will of the artist with the psychic will of the perceiver. Further, a will resides within perceived images. It arises owing to a “friendly and well-behaved or of a jarring and rude relation of forms to one another . . . we mentally participate in that relation.” Through our acts of will, responding to those interior to the perceived object, we tend to strengthen the external will, to “intensify the expression of its striving,” enhancing positive forces and weakening negative ones ([1873] 1994, 113, 114; [1873] 1927, 32, 33). These acts are not “pathological.” Vischer insists, using the very word Hanslick had used to characterize the “reprehensible kind of musical hearing” that focuses on feelings. Proper aesthetic engagement does not alter anything about its objects, Vischer says: “we disturb no fiber, no breath of reality” ([1873] 1994, 114; [1873] 1927, 33–34).

Paradoxically, despite Hanslick’s persistent efforts to exclude emotional responses to music as a basis for music-aesthetic understanding and discourse, and to focus instead on music’s objective, formal properties (order, proportion, architectonic design), the very phrase he formulates to characterize music’s quintessential content—“tonally moving forms”—relies on just such responses. The tones constituting music do not literally move. Their movement is metaphorical, a mental construction. That metaphor originates in analogies not only with experiences of objective, physical motion in the


97 Robert Vischer [1873] 1994, 114: “It is decidedly an act of will, but it is completely unpathological in nature: we disturb no fiber, no breath of reality. We simply organize and intensify the essential and weaken the inessential in order to safeguard the whole.” Compare Hanslick [1854] 1986, 60. Payzant (2002c, 18, 143) remarks that Hanslick uses the term “pathological” historically correctly, in its derivation from the Greek pathos, referring to undergoing (suffering) the experience of feeling.
external world but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, with experiences of the subjective, mental flow in the internal world, including the flow of our psychic and emotional life (as Langer held). It is through the metaphors of physical and psychic motion that music exhibits Hanslick’s tonally moving forms. Those sonically moving forms cannot therefore be analytically severed from exterior or interior motion. As aesthetician Roger Scruton observes, Hanslick gives us “no alternatives to the theory that he criticizes: on the contrary, he has tacitly accepted its most important claim—that music is the object of a metaphorical perception, whereby it is lifted from the physical realm of sound and placed in the intentional theatre of our sympathies” (1997, 353). At bottom, even Hanslick’s supposedly formalist aesthetics is not an empathy-free zone.

Robert Vischer bases his theory of empathy on Karl Albert Scherner’s pioneering study Das Leben des Traums (The Life of the Dream, 1861), a forerunner of Freud’s Die Traumdeutung (Interpretation of Dreams), published thirty-eight years later (Scherner 1861). Vischer’s overall goal in invoking Scherner’s ideas on bodily projection in dreams is to explain all psychic stimulation as reflexes to physical (bodily) stimulation. He therefore posits that external sensations—originating in colors, lines, curves, shapes—transform directly into internal ones in a “direct mental sublimation of the sensory response” ([1873] 1994, 92; [1873] 1927, 5, 4). Vischer adaptively extends Scherner’s ideas on the subconscious, dream world to the conscious, wakeful one. In the process, he distinguishes between sensory and kinesthetic stimuli, which led to differentiating immediate feeling and kinesthetic responsive feeling, and ultimately to empathy.

Robert Vischer read in Scherner’s study that in dreams the mind represents its contents—thoughts, feelings, ideas—as spatial objects, which he interpreted as subconscious projections of the body-ego. The body “unconsciously projects its own bodily form—and with it also the soul—into the form of the object.” From this idea, Vischer explains, he derived his concept of empathy ([1873] 1994, 92; [1873] 1927, 4). Dream images are thus mental self-images (Selbstvorstellungen), body-ego projections, in various, often surprising forms. Vischer hypothesizes that visual phenomena stimulate such self-images, in motor form, which are then projected back into the phenomena.

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98 Scruton (1997) touches on the point several pages earlier when he notes that “the metaphor of movement, which Hanslick innocently employs, gives the lie to his analysis. For it shows that the formal organization of music can be understood only by the person who relates it, through a metaphorical perception, to the world of life and gesture” (341–42). Scruton goes on to describe music as a “truncated dance”: “When we listen we may tap our feet and sway subliminally; our whole being is absorbed by the movement of the music, and moves with it, compelled by incipient gestures of imitation. The object of this imitation is life—life imagined in the form of music” (355–56).

99 Freud referred often in his study to Scherner’s pioneering research (Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994, 24). Robert Vischer mentions in a footnote that he learned of Hermann Lotze’s Mikrokosmus, which discusses the idea of sympathetic projection (Lotze 1869, 199), only after finishing his dissertation. Lotze writes, “No form is so modest that our imagination cannot project itself into it.” A different translation is offered in Lotze 1894, 584.
The structures of experienced phenomena become analogies for our mental structure. Just as Scherner hypothesized that the subconscious mind represents its contents (images, thoughts, experiences) in dreams as concrete objects, Vischer hypothesizes that, in deep aesthetic contemplation, we project a form symbolizing our body ([1873] 1994, 101; [1873] 1927, 17). We symbolically relate perceived images to the body, as our imagination “seeks to experience itself through the image.” We instinctively “project and incorporate our own physical form into an objective form. . . . It is . . . our own personality that we project into it [supponieren]” ([1873] 1994, 104; [1873] 1927, 21).100

As in a dream, I stimulate, on the basis of simple nerve sensations, a fixed form that symbolizes my body or an organ of it. Conversely, an objective . . . experienced phenomenon always provokes an idea of the self [Selbstvorstellung] in sensory or motor form. It does not matter whether the object is imagined or actually perceived; as soon as our idea of the self is projected onto [an object], it always becomes an imagined object: an appearance. The way in which the phenomenon is constructed also becomes an analogy for my own structure. I wrap myself within its contours as in a garment. ([1873] 1994, 101; [1873] 1927, 17)

In Vischer’s view, form becomes, therefore, a “means by which the body can enjoy itself” (Vischer [1873] 1994, 107; [1873] 1927, 24). His speculation on the link between the appreciation of form and bodily form resembles the line of thought developed by Janna Saslaw (1996), Larry Zbikowski (1998), Candace Brower (2000), Arnie Cox (2001), and others on “embodiment” but lacks the benefit of the ideas and methods of literary criticism and the findings of modern cognitive psychology or other sciences.101

In regarding an object intently, forms seem to move owing to the direction and contour of their outlines and the shape of the mass they define. In imagination, “we move in and with the forms,” through whose coherent, unified movements we experience a sense of “human wholeness” (R. Vischer [1873] 1994, 101, 107; [1873] 1927, 17, 24). Reframing Kant’s philosophical ideas about the harmony between understanding (Verstand) and imagination (Einbildung) giving rise to pleasurable aesthetic experience, Robert Vischer ventures a psychological explanation: we respond favorably to the “congenial movements” that arise when an object of aesthetic perception has a “harmonious form and formal effect” that corresponds to bodily harmony ([1873] 1994, 95; [1873] 1927, 9).102 Laws governing regularity, symmetry, and proportionality are for Vischer “nothing other than subjective laws of the normal human body and, as such, must have some value for aesthetics” ([1873] 1994,
Similarly, Schering (1914, 169) remarks that music’s dynamic forces “are ordered by the artists such that the imaginary viewing of this drama of forces [Kräfteschauspiel] is delightful.”

In Volke's (1921) writings, he identifies the role of symbolism in art and the evolution of nascent psychological aesthetics found in the writings of Herder, the Visschers, and Köstlin. He is the last representative of empathetic aesthetics in the nineteenth-century speculative-philosophical tradition before Theodor Lipps (1851–1914), whose aesthetics builds on the then rapidly growing field of scientific, that is, cognitive psychology.

Johannes Volkelt

Volkelt was the leading late-nineteenth-century proponent of an empathetic approach to form and content. He began university studies in 1867 in Vienna, where through the lectures of formalist Robert Zimmermann Volkelt encountered Herbart’s ideas, which at the time dominated philosophy in Austria. Unreceptive to Herbart and Zimmermann, Volkelt moved after one year to Jena, where on studying Hegel his intellectual development turned a corner. That influence grew in Leipzig, where Volkelt completed his university training. As he developed ideas on aesthetics, the concept of the symbol (Symbolbe-
Volkelt’s philosophical evolution began with a doctoral study in 1872 on Pantheismus und Individualismus im Systeme Spinozas (Pantheism and Individualism in Spinoza’s System). It continued from there with research into the unconscious, resulting in a volume titled Das Unbewußte und der Pessimismus (The Unconscious and Pessimism, 1873) based on Volkelt’s study of Eduard von Hartmann’s Philosophie des Unbewussten (Philosophy of the Unconscious, 1873). Volkelt’s next work focused on dreams (Die Traumphantasie, 1875). That inquiry led, in turn, to research on symbolism, published as Der Symbol-Begriff in der neuesten Aesthetik (The Concept of the Symbol in Most Recent Aesthetics, 1876). There, Volkelt rejects Fechner’s reliance on the theory of association as the basis for aesthetic perception. For Volkelt, association merely identified an adjunct phenomenon, an exterior mechanism. Instead, he places symbols and symbol making (Symbolik, Symbolisierung) at the root of aesthetic perception (Allesch 1987, 336).107 Expounding and expanding on ideas of Hermann Lotze and Robert Vischer—the latter’s dissertation on empathy appeared just two years earlier—Volkelt traces symbol making to spatial, bodily, and kinesthetic empathy (chap. 5). Ultimately, he proposes a psychological basis for symbolizing behaviors in aesthetic perception (chap. 6). As we observed in connection with Robert Vischer, Volkelt’s work also foreshadows that of modern-day embodiment theorists.

Volkelt’s path to symbolism reaches back to its beginning, pantheism, the basis for unity between the outer world (nature, the particular, individual), and the inner one (spirit, Geist, the universal, transcendent).108 According to Volkelt, our instinctive pantheistic tendency causes us to find a reflection of ourselves everywhere in nature. In aesthetic perception, symbolization
arises from that same tendency to find reflections of ourselves symbolically in the form of objects regarded aesthetically. “Symbolization is unthinkable,” he explains, “without a pantheistic tendency in the human mind, without a pantheistic shaping of the world.”109 A reliance on pantheism seems naive today, and even in the 1870s, in an age of critical positivism and accelerating scientific enlightenment, it would have been considered outmoded by some. But in the nineteenth century, those who sought to explain the world along idealist lines considered pantheism a valid and powerful means for understanding nature and human behavior.110

Volkelt objects to Zimmermann’s views, which reduce aesthetic objects to a “dehumanized, meaningless surface.” Like Robert Vischer, he rejects the possibility of a purely formal beauty arising solely from properties such as order, regularity, symmetry, and proportionality. While such properties do, of course, satisfy our need for interior harmony and, through inner imitation, reinforce conditions of “psychic well-being,” they do not alone yield a fulfilling aesthetic experience. The purely formal experience is indifferent, does not “touch the soul.”111 The form of aesthetic objects must contain and convey a human content; in fact, it first engages us owing to that content. The human element, the “hub of beauty . . . arises only through the concord of the human element represented in the object with the human element in the perceiver’s state of mind.” That human element can address us only through form. Thus, Volkelt concludes, form must possess “a human design,” must “appear to us with human physiognomy” (Volkelt 1876, 23–24).112 Form communicates that human content to us symbolically, and it is through such

109 Volkelt 1876, 109: “Symbolization is unthinkable without a pantheistic urge in the human mind, without a pantheistic shaping of the world” (“Symbolisierung ist nicht denkbar ohne einen pantheistischen Drang im menschlichen Gemüthe, ohne eine pantheistische Gestaltung der Welt”). Volkelt (1876, 27) also speaks of the human spirit containing a “pantheistic desire” (“pantheistisches Verlangen”) to “find itself everywhere in the external world, to see its own self peering back warmly from all shapes in nature” (“sich überall in der äußeren Welt wiederzufinden, sich sein eigen Selbst aus allen Gestalten der Natur warm entgegenblicken zu sehen”). Robert Vischer also acknowledged the role of pantheistic tendencies in artists’ creative work (1873) 1994, 116; (1873) 1927, 36).

110 Critical positivism and metaphysical idealism are, according to Mandelbaum (1971, 5–20), the predominant streams of philosophy in the last half of the nineteenth century. Theodor Lipps (1851–1914), in the next generation of aestheticians, developed the notion of empathy on a scientific psychological basis, replacing Robert Vischer’s and Volkelt’s metaphysical, pantheistic speculations (Lipps 1897, 1899, 1901, 1903/6). On this point, see Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994, 28–29, and Stern 1898, 16–26. Stern, a student of Lipps writing at the close of the nineteenth century, was highly critical of Volkelt. Klaus-Peter Lange (1971) focuses an essay on the empathy theories of Lipps and Volkelt. See also Allesch 1897, 329–38, on Lipps and Volkelt.

111 Volkelt 1876, 2 (“entseelte, sinnlose Oberfläche”), 40 (“psychischen Wohlgefühls”), 41 (“gleichgültig, berührt nicht die Seele”).

112 Further, “With the beautiful, the human content can speak to us only through the form. For form, the requirement thus arises at the outset that it have a human shape, confront us with human physiognomy” (“das Menschliche ist der Angelpunkt im Schönen, nur durch die Form zu uns sprechen. Zunächst wird sich daher für die Form die Forderung ergeben, daß sie menschliche Gestalt habe, uns mit menschlicher Physiognomie anblicke”) (Volkelt 1876, 23–24); “with the beautiful, the human aspect is the linchpin. The beautiful arises only through the accord of the human aspect represented in the [esthetic] object with the human aspect in the mind of the perceiver” (“das Menschliche ist der Angelpunkt im Schönen, nur durch das Zusammenklingen des im Objekte sich darstellenden Menschen mit dem Menschen in des Betrachters Gemüthe entspringt das Schöne”) (24).
symbolism that formalist aesthetics can be overcome: “The concept of symbolism is the means by which the aesthetics of content achieves victory over aesthetic formalism” (Volkelt 1876, 1; italics original).

Volkelt, following Hegel, bases his notion of symbolism on the “incongruity” (Unangemessenheit) between the object, represented as a mental image, and its meaning. An associative link (Vergleichungspunkt) mediates the two and results in an unconscious substitution of the meaning for the image, leading to a fusion of the two in imagination. Thus fused, one symbolizes the other. Awareness of the associative link remains suppressed, enabling us to view inanimate objects, symbolically, as spiritually animated (Volkelt 1876, 20, 26). We may, for instance, animate the image of a tree trunk as symbolizing strength or rootedness, or the image of a rock as symbolizing stability or dependability. Through a similar mental act of symbolization, Volkelt speculates, tones may symbolize moods, as Friedrich Theodor Vischer (through Köstlin) had maintained (Volkelt 1876, 26, referring to F. T. Vischer, 1846–57, 6:7): “The vague surging and swelling in one’s own mental state is reflected in both [colors and tones] as in a mirror, in the obscure shapes of nature that resemble the human form (clouds, mountain-range profiles, trees, etc.), and, as in those moods, in the unanalyzable, peculiar sensations of color and tone.”

Our inclination to view art symbolically arises from the activity of imagination (Phantasie), which fuses materiality and spirituality, and from natural, empathetic impulses. As in the pantheistic view of the world, in aesthetic contexts we intuitively project ourselves into objects of interest. “Nothing exterior confronts us in the world,” Volkelt holds, “without involuntarily inviting us to view it as the expression of an interior.” Our environment takes on significance only when it “sheds its abstract exteriority and becomes a disclosure of an interior.” Viewing events in nature and in art as outcomes of forces is a more advanced stage of the empathetic processes that lead to, and end in, symbol-making (Volkelt 1876, 116)

In aesthetic perception, the inanimate becomes symbolically animate based on our sense of bodily form and organization, which serve as mediators—“associative links”—in symbol making. More specifically, forms we contemplate in nature and art appear to embody

113 In connection with symbolism in art, Hegel speaks of an inherent “incongruity” (Unangemessenheit) between the aesthetic object (the “immediate artistic expression”) and its meaning in 1991, 1:309. Knox also translates “Unangemessenheit” as “incompatibility” (1:318) and the similar “Nichtentsprechen” as “non-correspondence” (1:303).

114 Volkelt 1876, 17: “Das dunkle Drängen und Quellen im eigenen Gemütethe findet sich in Beiden wie in einem Spiegel wieder: in den dunkel an die Menschengestalt anklingenden Naturgestalten (Wolken, Berglinien, Bäumen, u.s.w.) und in den . . . unzerlegbar eigenartigen Farben- und Tonempfindungen”).

emotive conditions because they simulate our bodily organization, form, and motions. “Solesly because our material body is permeated through to the surface with spirituality is it possible for our imaginary body, projecting itself into natural objects, to ascribe human-like spirituality to those objects” (Volkelt 1876, 79; italics original).116

Empathy and its spontaneous reflex, symbolism, remained at the heart of Volkelt’s ideas on aesthetics, which he eventually summarized in a three-volume System der Ästhetik (Volkelt 1905–14) during his years at Leipzig University—his last post before retiring. He ultimately came to believe that in aesthetic behavior feelings dominate over semantic and conceptual meanings (1:177–78).117 While symbolization originates in empathetic responses to objects of aesthetic perception, empathy, he speculates, arises from a fusion of perception and feeling (1:250). In aesthetic perception, we encounter both actual and symbolic meanings. Aesthetic behavior chiefly involves responses to symbolic meanings. These can take the form of images or concepts, as they do in sculptural, graphic, and literary arts. In music, most abstract of the arts, the predominant symbolisms are those of feeling and mood (Gefühlssymbolik, Stimmungssymbolik) (1:117, 208). Music, unlike other arts, dispenses with mediatary concepts, which are otherwise necessary for symbolic meaning. “Disregarding all mediation,” Volkelt says, “certain melodies and harmonies, apart from all mediation, have in and of themselves similarity with cheerful, melancholy, impish, yearning, and other moods.” Here we have instances of “pure acoustical empathy,” which begins with kinesthetic sensations, and ends in symbolic moods.118

116 “Nur weil unser materieller Leib bis an seine Oberfläche durchseelt ist, gelingt es unserem imaginären Körper, sich in die natürlichen Gegenstände hineinzubilden und ihnen menschliche, künstlerische, beseelende Eigenschaften zuzuschreiben.” Further (Volkelt 1876, 57), “Those natural shapes seem to reflect those emotive conditions that likewise recall only vaguely and approximately full, clear humanness because they remind distantly and approximately of the extensions and motions of the human shape” (“jene Naturgestalten darum, weil sie von fern und ungefähr an die Erstreckungen und Bewegungen der menschlichen Gestalt gemahnen, jene Gemütshzustände widerzuspiegeln scheinen, die ebenfalls nur dunkel und ungefähr an die volle, klare Menschlichkeit anklingen”).


118 Volkelt, 1905–14, 1:280: “Gewisse Melodien und Harmonien haben an und für sich, abgesehen von aller Vermittlung, Ähnlichkeit mit heiteren, schwermütigen, schelmischen, sehnsüchtigen und anderen Stimmungen.” Further, “Irrespective of rhythm, it is precisely acoustical empathy that is of decisive significance for the effect of musical tones” (“Gerade die rein akustische Einfühlung ist, wenn man vom Rhythmus absieht, von entscheidender Bedeutung für den Eindruck der musikalischen Töne”). Koopman disqualifies Volkelt’s ideas on empathy in the case of music because, for Koopman, music is not an external object into which listeners can empathetically introject themselves, as Volkelt and other empathists presuppose, but rather a subjective product of reflection, something that we actualize within ourselves. Koopman 2001, 331: “We do not introject ourselves into music. Rather, music achieves reality through our processing of the acoustical stimuli emotively (and naturally also cognitively and corporeally)” (“Wir fühlen uns nicht in die Musik ein, sondern in dem wir die akustischen Reize fühlend [und natürlich auch kognitiv und körperlich] verarbeiten, gelangt die Musik zur Realität”). Further, Koopman 2001, 336: “Music as a living reality exists first and only in the subject. Therefore, there can be no talk of empathetic projection into music or identification with the musical process as an a priori preconditon of an intensive musical experience” (“Musik als lebendige Wirklichkeit gibt es nur und erst im Subjekt, deshalb kann von Einfühlung in die Musik oder Identifikation mit dem musikalischen Prozeß als a priori-Bedingung einer intensiven musikalischen Erfahrung nicht die Rede sein”).
Summary Reflections and Conclusion

Our journey over seldom-traveled byways of nineteenth-century aesthetics has been a long one, covering more than 100 years, beginning with Kant in the 1790s and ending with Volkelt in the early 1900s. En route, we have encountered different paths of inquiry stimulated by Kant’s Critique of Judgment, one path leading in a formalist direction, through Herbart and Zimmermann, and the other in an empathist direction, from Herder’s rejection of Kant through Hegel, the Vischers, Köstlin, and Volkelt. Hanslick, in arriving at his destination, travels some distance on both paths, collecting along the way, on the one hand, Kant’s rigorous focus on the phenomenon and purposive form, eschewing “charms and emotions”; and on the other hand, Hegel’s focus on art’s spirituality, its “ideal content,” in characterizing the specifically musical, which for Hanslick embodies a “full share of ideality.” Clustered ideologically around Kant, Hegel, and Hanslick in closer or more distant orbit, are the aforementioned authors whose writings chronicle the fortunes of formalism in the 1800s.

When Kant spoke of form as the ordering of a content “under certain relations” (in gewissen Verhältnissen); of a pure judgment of taste as hinging on “purposiveness of form” (Zweckmäßigkeit der Form), where purposiveness dispenses with any actual purpose (Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck); and of the necessity to ignore “charms and emotions” (Reize und Rührungen) in such judgments in order that they be universally valid, he prepared the ground for the kind of detached, abstract formalism cultivated by Herbart and brought to full maturity by Zimmermann. Hanslick was no Herbartian formalist as was Zimmermann, a long-time friend, but he did reject the open sentimentality of philosophers who empowered music to express or represent feelings—in fact, elevated that power to its chief goal and function as an art. Hanslick dismissed such “decayed aesthetics of emotion” (verrottete Gefühlsästhetik) in the first edition of Vom Musikalisch-Schönen (Hanslick [1854] 1986, v).119 Anticipated by Nägeli’s “play of forms” (Formenspiel), he argued aggressively and, for many, persuasively that “tonally moving forms” (tonend bewegte Formen) were the sole content of music, were “the music itself,” not feelings, personalities, ideas, or images. But Hanslick did acknowledge music’s affective nature and emotional qualities, albeit as nonspecific affects and emotions:

The intense feelings which music awakens in us... we by no means wish to minimize. Indeed it belongs to the most beautiful and redeeming mysteries that... art is able to call forth such otherworldly stirrings in us. It is only against unscientific exploitation of these facts as aesthetical principles that we lodge our complaint.120 ([1854] 1986, 7)


120 Hanslick points to the “reproductive act,” that is, to performance, as the source of the “emotionally cathartic and stimulating aspect of music.” Hanslick concedes, however, that performers “can deliver only what is already
The reception of Hanslick transformed and thereby distorted the argument about confining the domain of aesthetics to matters of form into one that casts suspicion on or dismisses assertions about music’s affective-emotive properties.

For all of Hanslick’s focus on the music itself, even he concedes that “it is difficult to describe [its] specifically musical, autonomous content.” He, too, resorts to analogies with concrete images—arabesque and kaleidoscope images ([1854] 1986 29, 30). Notwithstanding his call for an “exact’ science of music after the model of chemistry of physiology,” when describing music Hanslick steals into the empathists’ world of metaphor where musical themes unfold over the course of a work like characters in a novel cast “into different situations . . . surroundings . . . and moods,” where “thoughts and feelings run like blood in the arteries of the harmonious body of beautiful sounds” (35, 82). Such descriptions are to be taken figuratively, to be sure, as recreations of the imaginary world of composers, who think in untranslatable tones “at a remove from all objective reality” (80). Nevertheless, allowing for differences in respective emphases, formalists and empathists are not as far apart as we might think.

A decade prior to Hanslick, Friedrich Theodor Vischer had struck a blow at Herbart’s formalism by emphasizing the Hegelian notion that music is “subjective deep feeling” and that its value, as for all arts, resides in its expressive content, in its “what,” not just in its “how” (form). Form and content are inseparable, synthesized in a Hegelian Aufhebung of their separateness. Our enjoyment of music arises from hearing its spiritual content, just as we detect the latent dynamics in nature, even in static forms. Vischer, following Herder, postulated humankind’s native sympathy (Sympathie), acts of mental self-projection that permit access to interior forces. Through such sympathy, the movements and effects of those forces reverberate in the minds and bodies of perceivers. Vischer’s student, Köstlin, developed the idea of mental projection into the notion of form symbolism (Formsymbolik), and Vischer’s son, Robert, into the notion of empathy (Einfühlung). Relying on the work of the Viscers and Köstlin, Volkelt expanded on empathy and symbolism and made them the nucleus of his aesthetic theories. Symbolism, he claimed, was the key to overcoming formalist aesthetics, the “means by which the aesthetics of content achieves victory over aesthetic formalism” (1876, 1; italics original).

Nägeli, Herbart, Hanslick, and Zimmermann countered claims for music’s pictorial and programmatic capacities by stressing what they considered the only autonomous, concretely demonstrable property of music: design (form), the structure of musical themes, and their functional integration into a unified dynamic design. They acknowledged that such a structured whole and its constituents may contain nonspecific, indefinable affective properties in the composition.” They “reveal the spirit of the composer” ([1854] 1986, 49).

Maus (1992) offers a speculative, sociologically gendered interpretation of Hanslick.
qualities and that they influence listeners’ aesthetic experience of delight and displeasure—for Zimmermann, in the form of a supplement (Zusatz). However, compared to definable structural traits, those qualities resist precise definition and uniform interpretation among listeners and therefore cannot be the basis of artistic value or aesthetic judgment. Köstlin’s and Volkelt’s breakthrough was to recognize content as symbolic, understood through perceivers’ inescapable symbol-making behavior, and to view content as fused with form. The “how” cannot exist without a “what,” and the manner and shape of that “what” constitute form. Hanslick agrees about such a fusion—“an obscure, inseparable unity,” he says—but argues that the content is movement, nothing more, nothing less, while the Vischers, Köstlin, and Volkelt reserve a place for emotive content and symbolic mood through empathy.\footnote{122} Friedrich Theodor Vischer puts it this way:

Where the form is fully quantifiable, it acquires the qualitative character through a peculiar type of symbolism, a type of unconscious empathy of the soul [Einfühlen der Seele] . . . the inner nature and life of the object, as it is, reveals itself in the form, after the mind of the perceiver (of the viewer and artist) has projected himself into the object and made it his own. The What has been absorbed into the How—expressive form, expression become form.\footnote{123} ([1897] 1907, 61, §5)

Nineteenth-century authors on aesthetics of music and other arts speculated on the relationship between form and content, and between formalist and what is here called empathist approaches to understanding art. They tended to stress, on the one hand, an aesthetic object’s autonomous structural properties or, on the other, perceivers’ empathetic and symbolizing behaviors stimulated by and reflecting an object’s structural properties. Analogous differences of perspective continue in modern times in lively discussions about what the basis of aesthetic appreciation and valuation ought to be, as well as, accordingly, what the focus of analysis ought to be. In recent years, some authors have directed attention through analysis to music’s social origins, agendas, and reception, to its conscious and subconscious political and gendered motivations. All such analytical endeavors assume music’s semiotic properties and intrinsic narrativity, themselves subjects of reflection and analysis leading in various directions. Other authors have deemphasized or dismissed such extramusical aspects and have concentrated instead exclusively on intramusical processes as the only reliable criteria for appreciation and judgment.

\footnote{122} Hanslick [1854] 1986, 80; 1854, 99 (“dunkle, untrennbare Einheit”). Köstlin 1869, 319: “Form, finally—and here we arrive at a main tenet of all aesthetics—can be separated from content as little as content from form.” Robert Vischer ([1874] 1927) clarifies and summarizes his ideas on form, content, and empathy.

\footnote{123} Further, “Analysis is a matter for science, but in the case of pleasure from beauty, we always have in and with form also expression, soul, life, the ‘What dissolved in the How’” (F. T. Vischer [1897] 1907, 78).
In a book that explores the interdependence and reciprocity of music, imagination, and culture, Nicholas Cook addresses the issues and problems involved in music analysis and, by extension, in aesthetics. He argues for the essential role of the listener in the (subjective) constitution of musical events, and asserts, accordingly, that the notion of structural coherence in music is a metaphorical construction lacking objective reality apart from perception (1990, 11). As does philosopher-aesthetician Roger Scruton, Cook considers our understanding of and analytical writing about music to be based on music as an intentional object, formed “from the infinitely ambiguous instructions implicit in a sequence of sounds,” understood inescapably through metaphor (20, 21). As Scruton observes,

Metaphor cannot be eliminated from the description of music, because it is integral to the intentional object of musical experience. Take this metaphor away and you take away the experience of music.

For Cook, then, nineteenth-century formalists’ expectations turn out to be aesthetic ideals, not perceptual facts (1990, 40).

The assumption of objectivity notwithstanding, music was for formalists no less an intentional object, and their formalism no less dependent on metaphor than it was for empathists, who while explicitly referring to pantheism as a foundation, implicitly viewed music as a metaphor for body, forces, movement, or emotion. The difference between formalists and empathists rests on their respective responses to, and aesthetic conclusions drawn from, their respective assessments of the intentional object and choices of metaphor: sonic structure and design, or sonic embodiment and communiqué. The “few leaves” of Hanslick’s modestly sized pamphlet, published at the divide of its century, are poised between the two aesthetic stances, balanced on the tenets of both. No wonder, therefore, that it stimulated and continues to inspire so much engaging discourse about our understanding of the aesthetic mysteries of music.

124 Further, “The structural wholeness of musical works should be seen as a metaphorical construction, rather than as directly corresponding to anything that is real in a perceptual sense” (Cook 1990, 5). Philosopher Roman Ingarden (1986, 26) accepts that a musical work is “subjective” but even on that assumption holds nevertheless that “there is no reason to assert that it is something mental or an element in some conscious experience.” In the book, Ingarden explores the question of what exactly a musical work is (its identity). He concludes that a work is identical neither with its performances (23) nor with its score (35), nor is something mental (33). At one point, in discussing “The Musical Work and Conscious Experiences” (chap. 2), Ingarden poses the widely accepted, commonsense notion of a musical work as being “something ‘mental’: a cluster of imaginings and auditory experiences” (24). While intuitively obvious, Ingarden considers the idea ultimately untenable: “The work of music . . . is neither mental nor subjective, that is, belonging to the elements or moments of the perceiving subject” (33).

125 Further, “Much of music criticism consists of the deliberate construction of an intentional object from the infinitely ambiguous instructions implicit in a sequence of sounds” (Scruton 1983, 108–9).

126 Dahlhaus (1987, 221) speaks of the “restricted validity” of Hanslick’s aesthetic expectations.
Works Cited


