Good morning members of the fourth annual Mannes Institute for Advanced Studies in Music Theory, and welcome to New York. Each of you is a distinguished scholar coming together with your peers not as a passive listener to a select roster of papers but as equal participants in a musical think tank. We’re gathered here from around the country, the continent, and the world to teach, challenge, and intrigue each other through an open exchange of ideas, doubts, and discoveries.

This year’s topic of musical form is a fitting one, because the idea of form has a lot to do with the Institute itself. The function of the Institute is not simply to convey information, but engage in a distinctive mode of interaction. In other words, the significance of our gathering lies not merely in its content, but in its form and our manner of relating to each other while we’re here.

We’re about to embark on an intense and strenuous journey together that is as different from typical conferences as possible. Over the next four days, we’ll cease to be a mere aggregation of separate individuals, and become a close knit, unitary organism in which all members are contributory and subordinate to the welfare of the whole. This is an egalitarian community of scholars, a town meeting in an intellectual democracy whose goal is shared exploration, unfettered inquiry, and spirited debate. Our workshops, plenary discussions, even our meals have a lesson to teach in the art of form.

Consistent with our Quaker meeting approach, there are a few simple guidelines I’ll ask you to observe. First, other than my morning chats, the modality here is dialogue, not monologue. We’re here not just to learn from our faculty, but from each other as well. We’ve all come both as students and teachers, and even our group leaders are our peers. It’s collective discourse we’re after, not soliloquies. So I urge each of you to roll up your sleeves and assume responsibility for actively contributing what you know, what you doubt, what you don’t know, and what you want to learn. The success of the Institute depends on everyone’s generous participation.

Second, while we discourage bystanding, we also frown on grandstanding. We’re all expected to talk, but also to listen. So please don’t sit back passively and observe, but don’t filibuster either. You can challenge and even confront, but never antagonize. Be collegial.

Third, in order to fulfill our collective mission, you need to commit yourself fully without reservation, both intellectually and socially. You should eat all your meals together except as noted, be on time to all events, including breakfast and these morning sessions, and direct your entire time and energy toward maximizing the experience. Stick with the program, don’t pick
and choose, sleep late, or wander off physically or mentally. We’re strengthening the collegial bonds of our profession, and staying the course has a cumulative effect. Four days from now, you’ll have the satisfaction of helping to create something unique that none of us will soon forget.

Enough for the ground rules. Now, for those of you who don’t already know, just a few days ago, after over a year of planning and preparation, both Warren Darcy and Jim Hepokoski found themselves unable to come because of extenuating personal circumstances. They are both extremely disappointed, as am I, and everyone else. Their absence is our loss. Nonetheless, the dedicated members of their Sonata Theory workshop have decided to plunge ahead without what Jeff Perry called “the founding fathers.” Dan Harrison has graciously assumed the reins as the convener (that’s his term) of what will be more like a real study group among equals. And that, I think, is the silver lining in Warren’s and Jim’s absence. Their workshop will not only be a test of Sonata Theory, but of the Institute as well. Through its uncharted process of discovery, it may be that very group, among all the others, that best fulfills our mission of collaborative learning.

As in the past, I’ve reserved some time in these early morning sessions for a few fleeting reflections of my own. This is not intended to be self-indulgent, but rather a way for me to set our tone each day, ease us into the heavy lifting of the workshops, and personalize my own planning of this event beyond the realm of pure logistics.

In addition to music theory I also teach legal theory, and I’ve been thinking about their relationship. They’re both normative regimes, regulative enterprises concerned with the structure, pattern, and intelligibility of ordered interactions—one between notes, the other between people. Given this conceptual nexus, what lessons can jurisprudence teach us about musical form? Just as many of our contemporary ideas about musical form have blown down from Canada—McGill to be precise—there’s an innovative Canadian scholar in Toronto, Ernest Weinrib, whose legal Formenlehre I’d like to transpose into music today.

The study of musical form, from this perspective, is the study of music’s intelligibility. This refers to a specific kind of relationship between form and content. When we assert the intelligibility of something, a particular law or piece of music, we purport to know what that something is. This apprehension of “whatness” presupposes that the something constitutes a this and not a that. In other words, it has what can be called determinate content. Determinate content is what distinguishes one piece from other pieces, and prevents it from falling back into the chaos of unintelligible indeterminacy that its identification as a specific piece, a this and not a that, denies. Content thus has both a positive and negative significance: it makes the thing in question what it is, and at the same time differentiates it from what it is not.

The set of properties that renders particular musical content determinate constitutes the piece’s form. Form is the ensemble of characteristics that define it as an entity similar to other entities of the same kind, and thereby distinguishes it from entities of a different kind. Form is therefore not separate from content, but represents those aspects of content that make it determinate, and to that extent define the content as content. Form makes content determinate as a this and not a that, and thus differentiates it from the indeterminacy of featureless existence.

The formal characteristics that make the content of a tree, for example, determinate as a tree include its size, shape, color, branches, and so on. By reference to these characteristics of treeness, we understand all the embodiments of this form as constituting the same sort of entity, while recognizing each individual tree as a separate thing. The ensemble of characteristics that constitute its form is what makes the object intelligible as a tree. It has the determinate content of what we call a tree inasmuch as it is the embodiment of a generalized form. The extent to which
each individual tree is different or unique represents gaps between the common form of treeness and its instantiation in a particular tree.

Form and content are therefore reciprocal interpenetrating phenomena. Content can’t be entirely formless, because it would lack the very determinativeness which makes it intelligible. To understand anything particular necessitates some formalization of its characteristics. Otherwise, it would just be an indeterminate something or other, or simply nothing in particular. Conversely, if a form had no content at all, it would not be a form of anything and therefore wouldn’t be a form at all.

Form is that which embodies or discloses the intelligibility of the content. Form is intelligible content, and content is determinate form. We understand something when form and content are congruent, that is, when the characteristics that define the form represent what the content really is and, equivalently, when the content adequately expresses a particular form. Form is the organizing idea latent in musical content, and the test of musical content is its adequacy to the form it expresses.

The notion of form provides an internal standpoint of intelligibility, defined by the interpenetration of form and content. Whatever falls in the gap between content and form—for example, a characteristic of a piece that is not a component of its form or a characteristic of a form not found in a piece—can be viewed as a stylistic error, discrepancy, idiosyncracy, or some other distinguishing departure from a normative congruence of content and form.

The intelligibility of music as a function of form entails three fundamental aspects: character, unity, and genericity. First, to talk about the form of a piece is to regard it as having a determinate character or ensemble of characteristics that allows us to define it as the sort of piece it is. There is no such thing as no form, but form is not identical to the content of the piece itself. The analysis of form entails a meaningful selection of a piece’s individual attributes sufficient to truly characterize it. This requires differentiation between general attributes definitive of its form and those that are merely incidental. In inquiring about the form of a piece, we ask “what elements of form are for this piece and others like it logically determinative?” The specification of these characteristics is never an exhaustive description of all its individuating attributes, since that would be as unilluminating as a detailed map drawn to actual scale that reproduces the topography it’s supposed to outline.

Second, the notion of musical form is predicated upon a postulate of unity. The piece that has a form is by definition a single entity, characterized by the ensemble of attributes that make it what it is. In analyzing a piece’s form, we construe it not as a mere aggregate of independent properties, but as an integrated whole that is not reducible to, but is greater than the disparate sum of its parts. The characteristics that define a musical form are understood as interrelated through the internal coherence or consistency of the piece itself. This is manifested through a configuration of elements on the basis of repetition, its opposite, or change, and their hybrid, variation.

Third, musical form defines the piece’s genericity. We regard all the manifestations of a particular form as comprising a class or genre possessing the same fundamental character, setting it apart from pieces of a different character. Because defining a form involves distinguishing essential from inessential qualities, form refers not to a piece’s individuated particularity, but to a more general rubric under which it falls. Form is thus the principle that allows the grouping or classification of different things with others of the same sort. Different musical forms represents alternative justificatory structures or ordering schemes through which intelligibility is grasped. The set of properties that makes something a sonata, for instance, is found in all or most sonatas,
and constitutes the genericity of what it is to be a sonata. Each specific sonata has individual features unique to itself, but which are inessential from the broader perspective of form.

It is through these three aspects of form—character, unity, and genericity—that we grasp music’s fundamental nature or intelligibility. The purpose of formal analysis is to distill this essential nature or intelligible essence, and thereby understand what music is. As scholars, music for us is largely constituted by thought rather than sound, an exhibition of intelligence whose content is comprised of concepts that utilize tones as a vehicle to inform abstract relationships.

Musical creativity is essentially cognitive; the sound is a symbol. Music is a way of imaging or thinking, congruent with the ideas of which it is comprised, and its intelligibility lies in discovering the rational order and connection of these ideas. Like law, it specifies the patterns and principles of coherent relationships, but through the medium of sound rather than society. To understand music as the manifestation of form is to discern that internal dimension of intelligibility or lawfulness in its content. Musical form is the intelligibility of musical content, and musical content is the lawful realization of intelligible form.

That concludes a hopefully not too somnambulistic discourse on the jurisprudential nature of musical form, extrapolated from contemporary legal theory. I doubt if any of you imagined that’s what lawyers think about. Now, before we take a break, I’d like to pause and say a few words about our colleague, Jonathan Kramer. Jonathan was going to be with us today, but passed away unexpectedly a few weeks ago. I’ve known Jonathan for thirty years since our student days at Yale, he a junior composition faculty member and me a meshuggah law student who spent most of his time in the music school.

Jonathan was very excited about coming to the Institute, and I was excited about it too. I’d like to read a passage from the preface to his book, The Time of Music, not only to pay tribute to him as a scholar and friend, but because it ironically captures the sense of what I think this Institute is all about. In introducing his book, Jonathan wrote [with some emendations]: “Rather than a chain of causally related ideas, I try to present a field of information, opinion, speculation, and strategies. My thoughts are interrelated as they are diverse. My aims are not to prove hypotheses nor develop theories, but rather to challenge through suggestions. I am more interested in asking the right questions than in finding the right answers. Questions can open up discussions, avenues of thought, and modes of perception; answers tend to close off such things. I enjoy sudden shifts of tone or subject matters, and finding less than obvious relationships between apparently contradictory thoughts. My approach is alternately speculative, theoretical, informal, analytic, scientific, and personal. My purpose is to encourage you to be creative, involved, and vital.”

Although Jonathan’s no longer with us, his words describe exactly the spirit and manner of how I think we should operate here. So on that note, I propose we take a ten minute coffee break before reconvening to begin our opening plenary session which Bill will lead. We’ll go all morning and then have lunch together upstairs on the third floor. The men’s bathrooms are floors 1 and 4, and the women’s are on 1 and 3. Janet’s and Scott’s workshops, and the Sonata Theory study group begin this afternoon on the third floor in the rooms indicated on the schedule in your packet, together with a map, an evaluation form which you’ll eventually hand in, information about forthcoming programs, and your personally designed Mannes Institute lapel pin.

Each workshop will take a ten to fifteen minute break or so in the middle, and there will be coffee and snacks on the mezzanine on this floor. Tonight right after the workshops is the buffet at my house, which as you can see on your map is only a few blocks away and easy to get to. My wife Nancy and I have been cleaning up all week, so you really don’t want to miss that. Now if
any of you have any questions or problems and you can’t find me, just look for Ilya, the blonde
Russian pianist who’s our administrative assistant, or one of his helpers. Other than that, we’re
ready to go. Any questions?

Greek Form

As far as I can tell, the origin of our idea of form, like most ideas I like, is Greek. The Greek
word eidos means form, type, species, or constitutive nature. Its earliest reference in Homer and
the pre-Socratics, Democritus and Empedocles, is to the appearance or shape of what one sees.
The plural, eide, is the source of the word “idea.” From the beginning then, the notion of form is
closely related to the notion of an idea, of some conceptual and constructive shaping of reality.
Form is an idea which gives order to things.

Over time eidos became broadened and abstracted to mean characteristic property or type.
The earliest Greeks no doubt had a clear understanding of the form of things apart from their
outward appearance, based on some general trait of inner intelligibility. Herodotus refers to a
particular eidos or type of leaf which acts like a dye, and tells us when the Lydians suffered a
famine, they invented different forms of games to divert their hunger. Thucydidus uses eidos to
describe the essential nature of a disease. But it’s Plato, of course, who canonized the concept of
form, so let’s revisit his theory, which itself forms the foundation of all further discussions of
form.

Whenever a plurality of things have a common name, they share what Plato calls a form.
This is the universal nature or quality inherent in the concept of the thing itself. There are many
rondos, for example, but a single concept of a rondo. Plato’s forms are not subjective, but the
embodiment of objective essences. We discover forms instead of inventing them.

Plato calls these objective essences eide, meaning ideas or forms, which he uses
interchangeably. Although idea in ordinary parlance refers to a subjective concept in the mind,
Plato uses it to refer to the objective content of universal concepts. Platonic forms exist apart
from any particular thing, and apart from the mind that apprehends them. They are transcendent
exemplars or objective prototypes. Essentially whatever has a name as a species has a form.
Plato’s forms are also hierarchically arranged, so that some forms are more important that others.
He has ethical forms, natural forms, mathematic forms, relational forms, and by inference,
musical forms as well. There are forms of existence, the same, the different, motion, and of rest.

Sensible or empirical things are mere copies of ideal forms, and participate in them. Since
these are invariably subject to change, they are always becoming and therefore never truly exist.
The purpose of science, or music theory, is the study of universal archetypal forms or patterns,
because these alone constitute the only true and enduring musical reality. The relationship
between form and content in Platonic theory, that is between the normative eternal forms and
their transient sensible content, is a bilateral or reciprocal one. The form causes the appearance
as it were, and the appearance participates in it as an actualization of the form. The sensible
object is a copy, or eikon in Greek, of its universal model, paradeigma in Greek, which is the
form.

Plato’s forms are somewhat akin to Kant’s noumena or things in themselves operating
behind the phenomena of perception. Noumena comes from the Greek nous, meaning mind or
intelligence, which for Plato is the faculty by which the forms are comprehended. The Greek
word for law, nomos, shares the same root as nous and noumena, suggesting a connection
between the ordering function of ideas and the notion of law as a means of ordering and shaping
reality. This in part is what I explored yesterday.

What might be the source of Plato’s elaborate theory of form? One likely influence is Socrates, his teacher, who sought to define absolute ethical qualities of virtue to refute the moral relativism of the Sophists. The Socratic definitions may have evolved into Plato’s forms. While Plato accepted the relativism of *immanent* reality like the Sophists, he denied the relativity of knowledge and virtue like Socrates by postulating an absolute in the transcendent world of forms. Given the fluctuating nature of sensible phenomena, true knowledge would be impossible unless there were some stable, eternal reality beyond the merely sensible. Plato’s forms are that suprasensible reality, and thus the object and cause of all knowledge. The study of form Platonic form is the key to Socratic virtue, which is an idea I will have more to say about tomorrow in a slightly different context.

The great difference between Socrates and Plato, of course, as Kierkegaard’s emphasizes, is that Socrates was grounded and concerned with subjective existence, whereas Plato engaged in flights of abstract speculation. There’s a wonderful passage in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* where Kierkegaard says that Socrates’ ugly physical appearance was actually a great asset, because it repelled his students from admiring and imitating their teacher, thus inducing them to discover the truth on their own. This same principle no doubt applies in some of our own teaching as well.

Nietzsche accused Plato of being an enemy of the world, setting up an ideal realm of pure form as a refuge from reality in reaction to the strife of Athenian politics. But if Plato was disillusioned with life, it was only insofar as it is disordered and fragmentary, out of harmony with what he believed to be stable norms of true value and universal significance.

When Aristotle came along, he rejected his mentor’s concept of form as impossible and meaningless. How could something that exists apart from an object contain its essence? If the world of appearances is merely an imitation as Plato claims, it has no objective reality and therefore can’t be the subject of knowledge. The main difference, therefore, between Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories of form is that for Plato the forms are transcendent while for Aristotle they are immanent—that is, the form of something is indigenous to the thing itself.

Form for Aristotle is an immanent essence contained within the sensible object itself, which thus becomes a composite of content and form. The individual object therefore participates in the general form or pattern, but contains its own real immanent form embodied concretely within its own physical structure. Form represents the intelligent essence of an existing object.

Both Plato and Aristotle, of course, believed that form was the proper object of study, as opposed to the particular. True knowledge resides in the universal element in things, i.e., their specific similarity, and not their individual particularity. The particular is relevant only to the extent it participates in and reveals the general form. The scientist or philosopher therefore is not concerned with individual leaves, for example, but with the essence of all leaves, with “leafiness” or that identity found in all individual leaves as members of a species.

The form of an object becomes the proper object of knowledge because it is the essential element and has a higher reality that than which is merely particular. The individual perishes, yet the species persists. One horse dies, yet the nature of horses remains the same, and it is the nature of horses, like the nature of sonatas, that we must consider, not any individual horse or sonata. That which makes the object an individual of this or that kind, that which is the chief element in the thing and the object of analysis, is the universal element, the form of the thing, which the mind abstracts and conceives in terms of its generality.

That which particularizes and thus distinguishes the thing as a specific entity in its own
right, on the other hand, however fascinating, represents the inevitable gap between form and content, that is, between a general norm and its manifold manifestations. The slavish adherence to abstract rules and forms at the expense of variegated reality is an authoritarian reaction to the chaos of experience, a childhood memory of paternal omnipotence. But by the same token, to unduly prioritize the incorrigible concreteness of existence over any postulate of essence whatsoever is to reject rational thought out of an equally infantile sense of disappointment by the inevitably deviation between idea and reality. Without the possibility of abstract form, one is lost in the chaos of particular instances. Everything becomes merely itself, an existential tautology and nothing more.

The scientist, or the music analyst, therefore, extracts the universal element of form from a piece, concretely yet imperfectly embedded within its content, while still celebrating their incongruence. Music is thus compound, consisting of both content, the individual structure, and form, its essential defining element that embodies its species. By replacing Plato’s transcendent forms with immanent ones, Aristotle shifted the object and method of knowledge to the empirical and demonstrative rather than the metaphysical and intuitive, and thus marks the beginning of rational science.

In the hands of Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, however, Plato’s older transcendent forms were reconstrued and reconfigured as the thoughts or ideas of God. Nature emulates the models of the deity, its creator, as the ultimate craftsman. Philo’s spiritual interpretation of form as divine conception revived Plato’s metaphysics as against Aristotle’s empiricism, and eventually blossomed into a resurgence of neo-Platonism with Plotinus at the dawn of Rome. And as antiquity evolved into medievalism, and Hellenism waxed into Christianity, the ancient Greek dialectic between Platonic transcendence and Aristotelian immanence—filtered now through the Judaic prism of messianic theology as the dialectic between God and man—becomes embodied, if not resolved, in the incarnation of Christ.

Sometime last year I gave a paper at the New York AMS meeting about the positive effect Schenker’s legal training had on his musical thought. Scott Burnham chaired the session, which also included a paper by Richard Kramer. Having gone to law school myself and spent years studying jurisprudence, it was important for me to consider how this might have been a good thing for Schenker rather than a total waste of his time and mine. If I ever put a period on my dissertation, this is what it will be about.

When I finished reading my paper, some guy in the back row who I could barely see and didn’t know proceeded to tell me in the gruffest voice and bluntest of terms that I had it all wrong, and that law school was a bad thing for Schenker—and presumably me too—and that it explains all the rigidity in his personality—and in mine. It was a triple-barreled attack: anti-Schenker, anti-law, and it seemed anti-me. Calling upon the very legal skills he impugned, I fended him off as best I could, but later wondered whether my inquisitor was right. Maybe I was just projecting, trying to rationalize my own aborted efforts at the bar. An ominous cloud settled over my presentation, let alone my entire thesis.

Scott, as session chair, sat completely inert and declined to bail me out, either in deference to the mysterious prosecutor in the back row, or operating under his understanding of the Heisenberg principle of conference management. When the ordeal ended, I asked Scott who this prickly fellow was, and why he didn’t throw me a life line. With that sheepish look Scott can
sometimes muster, he confessed sympathetically that any rescue effort would have been futile: I was in the grips of vintage Rosen. Although I had read Charles’ books, I had never met him in person and until then had absolutely no idea who he was. My introduction was ordeal by fire.

After the conference, Richard Kramer and I shared a cab back to the upper west side. Perhaps sensing my bruised ego, he altruistically invited me to a cocktail party at his house. Richard’s wife is a lawyer, so I always felt like I was some sort of marital hybrid in their presence. Scott, David Cohen and Maynard Solomon eventually showed up—and of course, so did Sir Charles. I was hoping to meet Sigmund Levarie, who was supposed to come in from Brooklyn but never materialized. I had recently read his Dictionary of Musical Morphology, and discovered he’s Rick Cohn’s uncle, which made things a lot clearer.

I ended up instead sitting by the hor d’ouerves next to Scott. Still practicing strict noninterference, we sat there together in silence listening to Charles hold court on an astonishing range of topics. I became mesmerized. I gradually realized not only that his critique of me wasn’t personal at all, but more importantly that this guy knew more about the inner workings of music than just about anyone I’d ever met. I was actually happy that he had taken an interest in my paper, albeit critical. After a few glasses of vino and a couple cheeseballs, I found myself liking Charles more and more. And from that moment on, I’ve always seen him in a charming and almost endearing way. And I suspect a lot of other people do too.

Charles is charismatic and extremely entertaining. He told a joke that night about a terrorist who hijacked a plane, grabbed a stewardess and demanded, “take me to Detroit.” The stewardess said, “that’s where we’re going.” I didn’t tell Charles I’m originally from the Motor City. Last night at the reception, after I showed Charles by dog Lucy, a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retreiver, he asked me why the French were such poor duck hunters. When I confessed I didn’t know, he said, “because they can’t throw the dog high enough.”

Charles is also profound. At one point during Richard’s dinner party he entered a prolonged and almost catatonic silence for nearly 8 seconds, and then suddenly burst out in a total nonsequitur, “Paul Valery wanted to find out where ideas came from, so he asked Albert Einstein. Einstein said he thought best while walking in the woods. Valery replied, ‘so you carry a notebook to write down your ideas?’ Einstein laughed and said, ‘no—ideas are very rare.’”

The fact is, Charles himself is very rare. Most of all, he’s a complete musician. Who among us has so brilliantly combined serious scholarly work with a vibrant performance career? Charles’s books on the Classical Style, Sonata Forms, and The Romantic Generation have a coveted place on everyone’s shelf. The size of his repertoire is only outmatched by his energy and enthusiasm. In the course of planning this event, when I couldn’t get a response from anyone else, I would have phone conversations and messages saying, “this is Charles, I’m in Genoa for the moment,” or “I’ll be in Paris on Monday and back in New York on Thursday,” or “I took a 7 hour train to Ferrara,” or “Ghent is getting slightly better.”

Like all of you, I’ve always considered Charles to be an outstanding scholar and musician. But now, I can say I also consider him a friend. I’m absolutely delighted he’s here, and so it’s my great pleasure and privilege to welcome and introduce our good colleague, teacher, and my friend, the distinguished and enchanting Charles Rosen.

Schenker, Morality, and Zimmermann

We’re not really here to talk about Schenker, but it would be foolish to deny, particularly at Mannes, that his ghost is lurking around in our halls. As Joel is fond of pointing out, even our
elevator is Schenkerian, since it stops at 1, 3, and 5. For those of you who may be uncomfortable in your sojourn in our Schenkerian Mecca, I assure you that four days in this humble shrine is insufficient exposure for either conversion or contagion. Nonetheless, if only out of fidelity to our patron saint, I feel some moral obligation to acknowledge Schenker as the spiritual leader of this place, and perhaps of our entire profession.

I say moral obligation, because there is, after all, a fundamental connection for Schenker between music and morality. As Oswald Jonas once noted, Schenker’s conception of music is “tantamount to an acoustical perception of moral law itself.” Music’s highest purpose in his eyes is not simply to entertain or even uplift, but to educate and instruct. The Tonleben encode moral values laden with the power to heal. Like the ancient Greeks I spoke about yesterday, Schenker conceived of music as nomos, a guide to the well-ordered life, or what Benedetto Croce calls the “triad of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.” Music is not only a conveyor of emotion and reason, but of virtue; music has “moral beauty.” How then did Schenker’s conception of music get so wrapped up with morality?

Some accurately discern an affinity between Schenker’s musical ethics and Eduard Hanslick—I’m thinking of Nick Cook and Alan Keiler—though these two both acknowledge there’s no evidence they were ever acquainted. While personal contact is certainly no guarantee of intellectual influence—many of you whom I know have had absolutely no influence on me whatsoever—it would nonetheless be interesting if Schenker actually knew someone who shared this ethical orientation. And the fact is, he did.

During his early legal studies at the University of Vienna Schenker took a course in Practical Philosophy with a man named Robert Zimmermann. While the great 19th-century jurist Georg Jellinek was Schenker’s most influential law professor, it was Zimmermann who first introduced Schenker to the fundamental idea that music and morality share a common bond through the structural intermediary of form. Zimmermann presented Schenker with an ethical and aesthetic Formenlehre, an integral doctrine of universal forms governing music, morality, and law.

Artistic decisions according to Zimmermann implicate the same underlying cognitive mechanisms as ethical ones, differing only in their content. Structurally coherent form is “morally beautiful;” incoherent form is “morally ugly.” By demonstrating a common foundation for musical form and moral form, such that the norms of beauty are analogous to those of virtue, Zimmermann laid the cornerstone for Schenker’s moral conception of music.

Zimmermann’s own equation of music and morality derives from Johann Friedrich Herbart, generally regarded as the founder of 19th-century aesthetic formalism. Herbart’s ideas about the underlying laws of human cognition and development had a significant influence on Freud as well. Zimmermann, Herbart’s greatest disciple, introduced Hanslick, his friend and colleague, to Herbart’s ideas and exerted a determinative influence on his thinking. On the Musically Beautiful is in fact a concise articulation of Herbartian philosophy transmitted to Hanslick by Zimmermann, to whom Hanslick himself gave credit. In asserting that the value of art lies in its intrinsic structure rather than its extrinsic expression, Hanslick applied the same formalist approach found in Zimmermann’s own monumental work, General Aesthetics as a Theory of Form.

Practical Philosophy, the title of Schenker’s course with Zimmermann, refers to the philosophy of practical action, a term derived from Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason, as opposed to the more abstract metaphysics of his Critique of Pure Reason. The goal of theoretical philosophy is knowledge, while the goal of practical philosophy is the application of knowledge
to action. Law is practical philosophy or ethics in action; music is practical philosophy or aesthetics in action. Zimmermann held that ethics and aesthetics are two branches of a unified science of the mind. They both invoke common norms, forms, and concepts, or what he called the “law-governed interaction of mental events and correlations between external data and our subjective response governed in accordance with apriori forms of cognition.”

For Zimmermann these recurrent forms of thought process the raw input of experience into coherent mental objects, no matter the context or content. Cognition is ultimately “aesthetic” in the sense of being “creative,” since we dynamically “create” our conception of reality through the operation of these fundamental forms. What appears or is contained in these forms, that is, their particular content in either law or music, is extrinsic to their essential character, which is determined solely by their internal relationship and configuration.

Zimmermann’s fundamental forms enshrine a harmonious state of affairs as normative standards or preferences. These include such things as agreement, balance, closure, correctness, perfection, and the characteristic. These abstract formal relationships govern all judgments of good versus bad, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, regardless of their medium, because in each case the specific content is extrinsic and subordinate to the underlying forms of relation themselves. According to Zimmermann, we have an innate formal preference for agreement over disagreement, balance over imbalance, closure over nonclosure, and so on, hardwired into our cognitive apparatus. As in Schenker’s approach to music, these structural forms are distanced from and prioritized over the particularized empirical content they contain. And like Schenkerian analysis, Zimmermann’s formal analysis entails the reduction of ethical or aesthetic content to its apriori conceptual forms, piercing through the surface to reveal what he calls the structural “morphology of the beautiful.”

Zimmermann’s forms, like Schenker’s, are universal, immutable, and objectively valid. Thus, he says, “the development of art concerns only the material, while aesthetics has the task of seeking out the forms. Which tonal connections are pleasing, for example, is decided by the ear, but the forms by means of which they please can be determined only by thought.” Analysis for Zimmermann, therefore, is the process of evaluating both musical and moral conduct in accordance with ideal forms. That which is musically pleasing, and that which is ethically right, both elicit our preference because they each evoke a favorable cognitive form. The musically flawed, as well as the ethically wrong, elicit our disfavor because they both conflict with a normative form.

Aesthetics and ethics are two parallel departments of a unified Geschmacklehre or theory of sensibility. Ethical and aesthetic judgments each entail cognitive acts of organizing data in accordance with the same set of underlying forms. Virtuous conduct partakes of an essential “moral beauty” analogous to musical beauty. The task of practical philosophy is to clarify the operation of these apriori forms in a coherent system, either in law or music.

At a formative stage of his intellectual development, Schenker encountered a comprehensive theory of ethical and aesthetic formalism that resonates in his conception of music as a moral compass. Robert Zimmermann’s course in Practical Philosophy in the fall of 1884 established this affinity between music and morality as manifestations of the same underlying forms. Although different endeavors activate different material content in implicating these universal norms—music via tones, painting via colors, ethics via thoughts, law via actions—the apriori forms which process this data and guide our evaluations are inherently the same.

Even today, law students are required to take a course in legal ethics. What was different in
Schenker’s case, because of Zimmermann, was that ethics were intimately related to aesthetics, and, for our purposes, that this relationship was a function of form. This correlation between music and morality through the intermediary of form was outlined in an explicit and compelling way to Schenker as a young and impressionable law student in the foothills of his ascent to becoming the greatest musical mind of the modern era, let alone the spiritual founder of the school in which our latter day Institute is housed. And whether we subscribe to his theories or not, it with this same impulse of a higher and nobler purpose that our own explorations ought to proceed.

But don’t we already feel that by elucidating the masterpieces to our students, we are somehow instructing them in the finer virtues of life, as well as art? When you play the Well-Tempered Clavier, don’t you share my sense of something incredibly beautiful, but also inherently right? And is there anyone among us who listens to the Ninth Symphony, or even the First, who doesn’t feel like they’re brushing shoulders, not just with a genius—but a hero?

Banquet Speech

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the greatest legal mind America has ever produced, told a story about a butter churn. An old dairy farmer in Vermont would rise each morning, milk his cow, and churn the milk into butter. One night while the farmer was asleep, his neighbor’s mule broke into his barn and smashed up the butter churn. So the farmer went to the local justice of the peace and filed a lawsuit against his neighbor. Two weeks later, the judge called the parties into court to announce his decision. “I’ve looked through all the regulations of the village,” he said, “and the statutes and cases across the state of Vermont. But I can’t find anything about butter churns. Case dismissed.”

Holmes’s story teaches us a lesson not only about the form of law, but about the law of form. Form is the generalization of the particular, and the particularization of the general. It’s like a loose fitting shoe. Form is a two-way conversation between an idea and reality. And so is this Institute. I had an idea, and now its a reality. It has a definite shape, but each time it’s different. Semper idem sed non eodem modo. This year we churned butter—next year, who knows—maybe tomatoes.

Gotthold Lessing once said that if God held all truth in his right hand, and in his left hand the lifelong pursuit of it, he would choose the left hand. The Institute is about that pursuit. I hope sharing it has in some way invigorated you as a scholar, inspired you as a teacher, and enriched you as a person. And I hope its form as well as its content has left its mark, not only by stimulating ideas, but by offering an alternative and more humanistic way of working with each other.

If the tragic death of Jonathan Kramer and the sudden misfortune of Jim Hepokoski and Warren Darcy on the eve of the Institute can teach us anything, it’s that life is too short and precarious, and our profession too small and obscure for us not to value and affirm each other as human beings and soulmates, simply because we all share a deep and abiding love of beauty and learning. In this world, that’s rare enough. I’ve worked hard to make this experience meaningful, elegant, and gracious for you all. But beyond that, the task is yours. If even a handful of you have glimpsed that lesson and kindled that spark, then the Institute’s mission, its benefactors’ intent, and my own aspirations have all been achieved. Thank you.
Stoic Form

The other day I explored the roots of musical form in classical Greek philosophy. As you already knew, or may recall, Plato believed that physical reality exhibits rational order insofar as it manifests transcendental forms. From a Platonic perspective, our observations of musical form entail an abstract intuition of general properties imperfectly embodied in individual pieces. Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that form is immanent, contained in or arising out of the physical objects themselves. From his perspective, we attempt to discern formal properties inherent within music through empirical scrutiny and analysis of specific pieces. I was somewhat afraid that discussing Plato and Aristotle before a heady crowd like this might be presumptuous. No matter — I’m going to risk it again today by adding a footnote about the Stoics, who you perhaps may not know so well.

Stoicism was the dominant philosophical school of Hellenism after Alexander the Great established the first empire of the west. A pupil of Aristotle, Alexander expanded the boundaries of Attic culture beyond the circumscribed Greek polis to the distant lands of Persia, India, and the Orient. By the age of 25, he had conquered the known world, and changed the entire course of history. The name Stoicism comes from Stoa, meaning “porch” or the “painted porch” of murals where Zeno, its founder and his disciples gathered in Athens.

What’s fascinating is that Stoicism is intimately related to the cultural and political conditions of Alexander’s empire and the expansionism during which it arose. Plato’s and Aristotle’s Athens was an insular, homogenous community with a single language and unitary way of life. Under Alexander, however, the Greeks suddenly came into contact with the alien cultures and unintelligible languages of barbarians or non-Greeks. This unprecedented internationalization shattering the insularity of Greek society had two polar impacts on western thinking about form that were reflected in Stoicism.

Confronted with radical and shocking cultural diversity, Stoicism postulated a universal order or natural law governing all times and places as a way of rationalizing and explaining differences encountered in particular instances and circumstances. This Stoic idea of universality, or universal form if you will, became even more influential as the Roman empire expanded beyond that of Alexander’s. This was especially manifested through the notion of Roman law as a universal code of conduct to govern the disparate tribes and cultures subsumed within the realm of the empire.

At the same time, however, the Hellenistic encounter with alien cultures through Alexander had a profound effect in the opposite direction. While these new and unfamiliar horizons necessitated the affirmation of universality on one hand, they also gave rise to a heightened sense of cultural relativity on the other. And it is this aspect of relativism that impacted significantly upon the older Platonic and Aristotle conceptions of form I discussed the other day.

Despite the fact that one was transcendent and the other immanent, both Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of form were absolute and realistic, in that they asserted the objective existence and veracity of formal properties. Plato’s and Aristotle’s forms are inherently true and real, establishing a one-to-one correspondence between perception and reality. During the Hellenistic period, as Sextus Empiricus explains, this classical view was perpetuated by the Epicureans.

The Stoics, however, were the first to consider forms as purely mental constructs, subjective functions of the mind, interposed as a filter between perception and reality. And the key area is which this happened was the realm of language. Through the expansion of Alexander’s empire,
the Greeks came into contact with barbarians who spoke unintelligible languages, to whom Greek words were meaningless sounds or utterances. In modern semiotic terms, the experience of linguistic unintelligibility led Zeno and others on the painted porch to conclude there was no intrinsic connection between the signifier and the signified. Zeno’s famous paradoxes, like Zen koans, all underscore the inherent meaninglessness of language as a conveyor of truth. For instance, if I continually cut a distance in half, says Zeno, I will never reach the other side, because no matter how small, half will always remain. The “disconnect” arises out of the lack of congruence between the mental concept of halving and physical reality.

The Stoics developed a sophisticated theory of language and cognition to explain this disassociation which prefigures our own postmodern deconstructionism. According to Derrida, the breakdown of language as a signifier of meaning causes a certain cognitive dizziness or vertigo, comparable to the free fall tonal disorientation of a harmonic sequence. This contemporary disintegration of language as a mode of rational discourse parallels the collapse of traditional form and syntax in music as well, where each is deprived of rational structure and reduced to a transient stream of simple sounds and utterances. The surface of the painting becomes flat and the image abandoned. Perception supersedes comprehension.

As a footnote, the purpose of legal education, particularly in the first year, made legendary by television shows and movies like the Paper Chase, is to deliberately induce this Derridian dizziness or skepticism by unhinging the law student’s naïve faith in the rationality of language and logic itself, a sort of conceptual brainwashing to wipe the slate clean of cherished convictions of ingrained truth as an essential predicate to the later acquisition of rhetorical skills of argumentation and persuasion. The Socratic method, contrary to its founder’s own belief in absolute truth and virtue, is utilized precisely to foster the agile situational relativism of his opponents, the Sophists. And it is precisely this sophistical relativism which the Stoics’ theory of language and cognition seeks to justify and explain.

In between words and things lay what they called the “motion of the intellect,” that is purely mental operations or interpretative forms which are overlaid on top of reality and mediate between our perception of things and the things themselves. These interpretative mental constructs do not actually exist like Plato’s and Aristotle’s objective forms, but merely subsist as incorporeal products of the mind. The Stoics called them lekta, meaning “that which is said” or “that which is thought.” Unlike Plato and Aristotle, Stoic form is a mental or linguistic phenomenon, a lekton, that speakers of a common language share, but speakers of different languages do not.

Instead of the binary connection of Plato and Aristotle, meaning for the Stoics filters through a three-part process, a psychic chain reaction between perception and reality, with the cognitive act of interpretation interposed in between—thus severing the verifiable correlation between either end. The idea of musical form is just that, nothing transcendent or immanent, but simply an idea in the mind and nothing more.

This Stoic concept of form as a mental image represents the first serious crack in the objective, realistic worldview of the Greeks, by interposing a subjective and culture bound lens between us and the things around us. By encountering the otherness of non-Greek civilizations and dialects through the revolutionary conquests of Alexander, the Stoics came to recognize the structure of reality not as a transcendent or immanent verity, but as something more relative and evanescent, ultimately existing within and shaped by the mind itself.

Plato’s and Aristotle’s foundationalism, spawned in the golden age of Pericles, was out of joint with the culturally diverse and fragmented Hellenistic world of Alexander. Stoicism
embraced fluid and multiple perspectives engendered by the destabilization of the relationship between language and reality in an age of conquest and expansionism. Since language was indeterminate and lacking in fixed meaning, alternative meanings and cognitive structures were possible. Ideals of universally applicable truths gave way to provisional, decentered, local perspectives which pointed only to other ideas as cultural artifacts, themselves subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. Knowledge was construed according to our own relative subjective or subcultural experience, not measured by conformity with all encompassing, standardized structures or canonical forms of meaning and value.

For Plato and Aristotle, speaking confidently in the homogeneous insularity of Periclean Athens, form represents the true and trusted nature of things, the verifiable object of real knowledge about the world. But for Zeno and the Stoics confronting a more diverse, heterogeneous, and uncertain reality created by Alexander, yet prefiguring our own, truth became merely that which is said or thought, postulated or imagined, a hazy reflection of our own selves, interposed as a prism or even a mirror between us and that which surrounds us.

What if the musical forms we so proudly claim to discern in our humble Institute are neither transcendent absolutes nor immanent realities, but just our own created images, paintings on the walls of our own mind? If so, it is Zeno and the Stoics, pondering paradoxes and murals on their painted porch in that innocent age of cultures colliding, who first turned their gaze inward, toward what Einstein called “the brain’s little attic,” and lit our path as we grope for meaning in our own uncertain age of discovery. And though it may be heresy in company such as this, in the house that Schenker built, who knows? Somewhere on that journey, like a latter day Alexander, we may one day look up, flushed with vertigo, and gaze at the smile of Buddha—for whom form was emptiness, and emptiness form.

**Thank You Speech**

Before we start our plenary session, I’d like to dispel the gratifying illusion that I accomplished this all on my own, and acknowledge some important people who helped make it happen. First, I’d like to thank our two administrative assistants, Ilya and Kate, for doing a tireless job in keeping things running smoothly. They are both extremely talented Mannes students, but beyond that, they are dedicated and cheerful. I had fun working with them, and I think we all own them a round of applause.

Second, I want to thank Joel Lester, the dean of Mannes, for putting us up and providing a congenial home for the Institute. The Institute is proud to revive Mannes’ historic legacy as an epicenter for musical scholarship in addition to its reputation as a conservatory. It is important to have someone like Joel at the helm, who is a member of our community and understands that this is a feather in Mannes’ cap. And although the Institute is independently funded, our relationship is crucial to its ongoing success.

Next, I’d like to thank and congratulate our absolutely superb faculty, Jonathan, Bill, Bob, Scott, and Janet—not to mention our pinch hitter, Dan Harrison, who took Warren’s and Jim’s game plan and hit a home run. There’s no question that the Institute’s success in attracting outstanding scholars like you is attributable to their intellectual stature and collegial rapport. They bravely confronted the challenge of leading workshops before an intimidating group of peers, and have done it with panache. Dan in particular picked up the flag from his fallen comrades and carried under heavy fire—sometime friendly fire—from the trenches over the top. I’d like to ask them to stand, including Dan, so we can give them a hearty round of applause.
Within their ranks, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Bill and Janet. As co-chairs of this year’s faculty, they helped me organize this event from the ground up, selecting the faculty and participants, and making innumerable decisions along the way. I discovered why these two are not only outstanding scholars, but leaders in our field. They are sensitive, committed, down to earth, calm under crisis, and both have a wonderful sense of humor. They are good friends, and make a good team together. To be honest, I simply could not have done this without both of them. We’re all indebted to them, particularly me.

In the midst of all the planning, which included some real moments of turmoil, there was nothing quite like sharing what I can only describe as a prolonged belly laugh with Janet. As all of us know, she brings a very contagious enthusiasm and sparkle to everything she does, and we’ve all been blessed by that spirit. And now I’d like to turn to Bill. The very idea of an Institute on musical form was his and his alone. When the Institute first got off the ground a few years ago, and we were still unsure of our footing, Bill took the initiative of approaching me and proposing this topic, and then proceeded to make it happen. His faith in me and his endorsement of what I was trying to accomplish gave me confidence that this could actually work.

Bill is also to a large degree personally responsible for the revival of formal studies in a period when they were somewhat neglected. This, I think, is a significant scholarly achievement. But above all, Bill is a mensch, and that carries a lot of weight with me. One of the great rewards of this Institute has been the friendships I’ve developed not only with Bill, but with Janet, Scott, Jonathan, Bob, and all of you here. So please, let’s give it up for Bill and Janet as the Lone Ranger and Tonto of this year’s program.

Finally, I’d like to express my deepest appreciation to each of you for trekking to New York and making the considerable investment of time, energy, and money to make this a success. The Institute is by nature a collective beast, and it just won’t run without you. I truly think this is the best group we’ve ever assembled. You have all been so gracious and open with your warm expressions of gratitude.

In addition, I’ve learned something from so many of you here in your remarks, conversations, and demeanor. My only problem is by the next day, I can’t remember what it was. But in any event, to everyone here, I tip my hat for taking the plunge, doing the work, pushing yourself through this, and making it a rich and memorable experience for us all. Now I’ll turn the floor over to Janet, and we can begin our closing plenary session.

Closing Ceremony

It’s time to bring the fourth Mannes Institute to a close. This was an incredible experience, and one that I’m delighted not only to have made possible, but be part of myself. I thank you all once again for participating and contributing to its success. Before we disband, I have four things to do.

First, I’d like to remind everyone again to fill out your Institute Evaluation Sheet in your conference packet and be sure to give it to me or Ilya before you leave. If you enjoyed this experience, please take the time and effort to share your thoughts. It would mean a lot to me and the others who made this happen. Second, if you don’t already know, next year’s 2005 program will be an Institute on Rhythm and Temporality co-chaired by Harald Krebs and Justin London, along with Pieter van den Toorn, Chris Hasty, Kofi Agawu, David Cohen, and our special guest Steve Reich.

In 2006 we’ll have a Chromaticism Institute co-chaired by Dan Harrison and Pat
McCreless, along with Charles Smith, Deborah Stein, Richard Kramer, David Kopp, and a special guest to be announced. Plans are percolating for 2007 and 08 as well. Each year a different subject is explored, and other proposals are always welcome. What we need is a core group of outstanding scholars working in a particular area of broad enough interest to form a faculty and attract our peers.

Third, I’d like to ask each of you, and especially the musicologists, to tell your friends and distinguished colleagues about the Institute, and encourage them to join us in the future. Our purpose is to establish greater communication and collegiality throughout all branches of our profession, and to give all scholars an opportunity to come together in an interdisciplinary context. We’ve already outgrown our birthname as the Institute for Advanced Studies in Music Theory, and until I’ve come up with a better name, we mean musicology too.

Before I move on to the last order of business, I’d just like to open the floor again for a moment to see if anyone has any final comments, questions, or observations they’d like to make about the Institute. Anybody have any unfinished business?

OK, my final task is to present each of you with your diploma evidencing your membership in the Institute, which I’ll try to do as theatrically as possible, by summoning each of you to come up and walk across the stage. Although we’re all teachers we’ve never stopped being students either. So even though it’s corny, we like to graduate. I am certain it will embarrass some of you. Nonetheless, as Director of this noble enterprise, I hereby call the roll of newly admitted fellows into our ranks. As I read your name aloud in groups of four, please come up to receive your diploma: