

## CHAPTER 3

# WHAT VARIATIONS DO

## *Toward a Methodology for Analyzing Tonal Variation Sets*

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THIS chapter furnishes a framework for analyzing sectional variation sets of the high-Classical period. Some of the ideas herein, however, should apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other variation forms (e.g., continuous, alternating, and even “fantasy”) and to sectional sets of other periods (e.g., Baroque and even modern).

For a given set, I recommend exploring three basic parameters: (1) the formal design and Schenkerian structure of the theme and the piece as a whole; (2) the type of each variation—its primary melodic function (e.g., to decorate a melody, to supply a new melody, etc.); and (3) the interpretive function of each variation—what a variation “says” about the theme, what thematic aspects it elucidates. In this chapter, I will first elaborate on those parameters and then analyze the penultimate movement of Mozart’s *Serenade in B-flat*, K. 361/370<sup>a</sup> (“*Gran Partita*”) in terms of them.

Variation sets prior to Beethoven’s middle period have traditionally been maligned for (supposedly) being mainly decorative in function and additive in construction. Charles Rosen, for one, opines that, “essentially static and decorative, almost always in one key . . . variations presented a problem to the dramatically conceived classical style” (1997, 437). He argues that it was Beethoven who dramatized this (allegedly) inert form—in *Six Variations on an Original Theme*, op. 34; “*Eroica*” Variations, op. 35; and the second movement of the “*Appassionata*” Sonata in F minor, op. 57, among other works.<sup>1</sup> On this view, variation form is more valid when it is more sonata-like—in particular, when it employs thematic working [*thematische Arbeit*], true development over and above mere decoration. By these lights, one might assume a variation movement couched in the fairly airy, pastoral genre of the wind serenade to be especially decorative, additive, and anti-dramatic—just one embellishment after another.

Yet, generally, Mozart’s variations are not always decorative (and, conversely, Beethoven’s and Brahms’s et al. sometimes are). And even when Mozart’s are, they routinely illustrate the theme’s properties and actualize its potentialities. Decoration and explication are *not* mutually exclusive; Mozart’s particular diminutions (and also new melodic inventions) often turn out to highlight some structural or motivic feature of the theme. The very filigree with which Mozart delights *Liebhaver* contains nuggets of knowledge about the theme

that cater more to *Kenner*.<sup>2</sup> In the process, he generates over a set, if not development in the strict sense, certainly motivic through lines; these belie the disjointed form with which sectional sets are commonly associated. And that is so, I will show, even in such relatively entertaining environments as K. 361's.

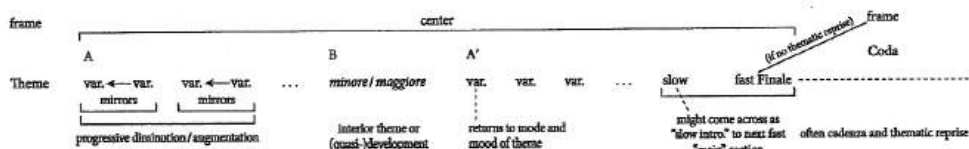
This chapter thus has a twofold purpose: to outline a broadly applicable method for analyzing variation sets and to argue for the capacity of even comparatively "light" sets to grapple with the nature of their respective themes and to unfold structural narratives. I begin by enumerating the principal parameters the variation analyst should consider, drawing on a range of examples.

## STRUCTURE

The main mantra for variation composers and analysts alike is, or should be, "know thy theme!" (just as that for contrapuntists is, "know thy cantus firmus!"<sup>3</sup>). For, the theme will erect the basic formal and tonal scaffold to which *strict variations*—the kind usually practiced by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms et al.—are beholden. (So-called *fantasy* or *free variations*, by contrast, fixate on particular motives without concern for preserving the scaffold.) Of course, one must also take stock of the theme's motivic, topical, and schematic content; its use of counterpoint, chromaticism, and other techniques; and its metric and rhythmic processes. For the moment, however, I attend solely to thematic structure and its implications for the structure of the set as a whole.

The theme is usually cast in binary form, simple or rounded. The variations typically adhere to the theme's form, though sometimes loosening it with interpolations or extensions, most commonly right before and in the finale. Whole sets often trace some sort of ternary design, that alone contravening the stereotype that variation form is strictly paratactic—its semi-independent modules just strung together—and thereby impoverished (especially in comparison with sonata form, the hypotactic form *par excellence*). Within such a broader design, certain consecutive variations will form low- and mid-level groups.

Mozart's sets tend to follow a particular pattern (Figure 3.1), where the first several variations are grouped by virtue of *progressive diminution* (or its converse, *progressive augmentation*). Where consecutive variations use ever quicker surface rhythms but not all do so in the service of embellishing the theme's melody—that is, where some use them in the service of a new melody, or in the accompaniment—I use the term *progressive rhythmic animation*. Within that group, pairs are often formed by the exchange of material between the upper and lower parts; Mies (1937, 478 and passim) terms such textural inversion *mirroring* [*Spiegelung*]. Somewhere near the middle a *minore* ensues (or *maggiore* if the set is in minor, which is fairly rare in the Classical period). When the *minore* is melodically different enough from the theme, it can, William Caplin (1998) remarks, "resemble" the interior theme of a ternary form (1998, 218); I would say that it can actually *function* as such a theme. In other words, a distinctive *minore* usually serves as a fulcrum on which a three-part structure pivots.<sup>4</sup> (An example of a *minore* interior theme is Variation 5 of Mozart's Variations in G on "Unser dummer Pöbel meint" by Gluck, K. 455; an example of a *maggiore* interior theme is found in mm. 168–203 of the third movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 24 in C minor, K. 491.) Alternatively, where the *minore* fragments a thematic motive, it can function



Where theme and variation share the same underlying structure (as they do in Schenker's standard account), one might ask: How perceptually salient is that structure in the theme, and how salient in the variations by comparison? And what are the various high-level motives in the theme, and which do the variations play with, and how? I return to these questions below.

## TYPES

The most rigorous recent typology of variation is Elaine Sisman's (1993, 2001) (for a less recent typology, see Nelson 1949). Yet, whereas her categories vacillate among melodic, harmonic, and formal points of reference, I prefer to use a single one—melody—since that, to my mind, is the most central parameter where it comes to variation. Hence, I will offer my own typology, one centered around melody, though also relying upon some of Sisman's rhetorical analogies, which are quite compelling.

What, from melodic and rhetorical vantages, do variations do? Proceeding along a continuum from least to most melodic alteration, they variously

- (A) *retain* the theme's melody as other parts counterpoint it—decorate it from without; alternatively, the retained melody might be strikingly reharmonized, as with Variation 6 of Beethoven's "Eroica" Variations, op. 35;
- (B) *decorate* the theme's melody, a process Sisman likens to the rhetorical technique of *pleonasm* (adding "superfluous" words for emphasis); more specifically, this is *internal pleonasm*, in contrast to the *external pleonasm* of the previous type (Sisman 1993, 43);
- (C) *transform* the theme's melody. Franz Liszt invented the term, but hardly the technique of, *thematic transformation* [*thematische Verwandlung*]; examples date back to Mozart and earlier. This tends to occur in the finale, where the theme is often treated with a different meter and tempo;
- (D) *develop* the theme's melody; *development* admits of multiple definitions, but here I equate it mainly with motivic fragmentation and sequencing; variations (and groups of them) may even exhibit bona fide developing variation;<sup>6</sup>
- (E) *substitute* a (largely) new, usually more intricate melody over a (largely) unchanged basso-harmonic scaffold; Sisman likens this to *periphrasis*, "the substitution of many words for one in order to amplify" (2001).

The terms I use for these five types of variation, respectively, are

- (A) *externally decorated melody*—in lieu of Sisman's *constant melody* or *cantus firmus*, because the point of such a variation is to decorate the retained melody from without (or to reharmonize it);
- (B) *internally decorated melody*—more specific than Sisman's *melodic outline*;
- (C) *transformed melody*—in lieu of Sisman's *characteristic variation*. The latter, in her words, "take[s] on the character of different dance pieces [or of] national styles"

or even acquires “programmatic associations” (Sisman 2001); that often entails changing the meter of the theme from duple to triple (and thus, I submit, conduces to thematic transformation). While Sisman rightly rejects the problematic term *character variation*, “characteristic” may be vulnerable to the same charge: just as all variations have something characterful about them, so most have some characteristic or topical feature. In the Classical style, at least, one is hard-pressed to find a passage that does not boast some topic in one form or another.<sup>7</sup> Besides, the unsuspecting reader might assume that “characteristic” refers merely to generic “character”;

- (D) *developed melody*—Sisman does not recognize this as a distinct type;
- (E) *new melody*—in lieu of Sisman’s *constant harmony*, since the latter is usually a pretext for generating new melodic material.<sup>8</sup>

The boundaries between types can be fuzzy. For instance, decorate a melody thickly enough, or transform it sharply enough, it will probably sound fairly new. Likewise, decorated melody and new melody variations might feature development. In the case of an ambiguous variation, the decision to assign it a single type is likely to be more performative (e.g., “hear this variation *as if* the melody were entirely new”) than disinterestedly analytical.

## INTERPRETIVE FUNCTIONS

The above types are useful, but only as a first step. After all, they inform us about each variation’s basic relationship with the theme, but nothing about what each variation “says” about the theme. My contention is that well-crafted variations typically elucidate the theme, analytically gloss it, interpret it—in the medium of pure tones (cf. Kofi Agawu [2009, 28–29]).<sup>9</sup> And that happens whether the variation decorates the theme’s melody, develops it, replaces it, or what have you. Little has been said about this interpretive function in the literature (although see Bandy 2022; Ivanovitch 2008); my chapter aims to remedy that lack. I will outline five such functions (though there are likely more): *exemplification*, *extension*, *actualization*, *disambiguation*, and *transformation* (not to be confused with thematic transformation).

My guiding questions about a given set are, first, how does each variation illuminate or interpret the theme’s structural organization and motivic (and other) content? And second, which of these interpretive maneuvers span multiple variations (adjacent or not), thus weaving threads across sections that are otherwise discrete and self-contained? Simply put, what do variations reveal about the theme, and what cross-variational processes arise as a result?

To adequately spell out the relation of variation to interpretation would require a separate essay. However, I will at least broach that relation in what follows.

To start, a principal function of interpretation is to highlight certain features of the object being interpreted (a text, historical event, artwork, theme, etc.). Interpreters/interpretations select aspects of an object and apprehend that object—and persuade others to apprehend it—through the filter of those aspects. Variations portray the theme in a certain light by seizing on some of its features.<sup>10</sup> I term this function *exemplification*. A variation exemplifies





middleground parallelism of the *Urlinie* in the tonic key followed by one in the dominant key, the latter anticipated in m. 5—the fifth-progression in mm. 7–8 grows out of the gesture tossed off in m. 5. The theme also brings that melodic structure to the fore (lightly decorated) in the last few measures (see the bracket).

Variation 1 (Figure 3.3C) one-ups the theme by couching a compressed  $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{1}$  descent within the very first measure, where the listener's attention is likely to be especially piqued, her perceptions especially acute (see Yudkin 2020, 30–41). The lick even captures the middleground's upper-neighbor embellishment of  $\hat{5}$ , in fact amplifying that feature by gracing *every* note of the gesture with its own upper neighbor (escape tone). Hence, what may seem like boilerplate diminution is actually a canny encapsulation of a structural span. Mozart could have embellished the theme's first measure in any number of ways, but the figure he chose felicitously foregrounds the thematic structure.

In a previous publication (Swinkin 2004), I approached exemplification from a semi-otic stance, building on some intriguing remarks Nelson Goodman once made about musical (and painterly) variation. The fact is, there are many ways to view this phenomenon. Like most things variational, exemplification arguably has a rhetorical source: Quintilian's device of *amplification*, which, in Sisman's paraphrase, “reveal[s] in ever stronger terms

Figure 3.3 consists of three parts: (A) Schenkerian graph of the theme, (B) theme (one-staff reduction), and (C) Var. 1, m. 1. Part (A) shows a Schenkerian graph of the theme, with a compressed  $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{1}$  descent and upper neighbor embellishments. Part (B) shows the theme in a one-staff reduction, with dynamics like 'Andante grazioso' and 'dolce'. Part (C) shows Variation 1, measure 1, with a trill and a 'pedal point'.

FIGURE 3.3 Mozart, Sonata for Violin and Piano in A, K. 305, mvt. 2: (A) Schenkerian graph of theme; (B) theme (one-staff reduction); (C) Var. 1, m. 1

the importance of the subject" (Sisman 2001). A specifically musical precursor is Vincent d'Indy's *amplified variation* [*variation amplificatrice*]. Briefly, d'Indy abhorred the decadence to which he thought early-nineteenth-century variation had succumbed, and deemed Beethoven's *variation amplificatrice* the antidote. He cites the first variation in the third movement of Piano Sonata in E, op. 109 as the inaugural instance of this technique; he also cites the "Diabelli," several variations of which amplify the theme's brief tonicization of the subdominant (look ahead to Figure 3.6A).<sup>12</sup>

I offer two quick caveats about salience, the slippery notion on which exemplification depends. First, salience is obviously a relative term—it is a matter of degree, not either/or. Hence, themes, as we saw above, might exemplify their own substructure to some extent; what is noteworthy is when a variation does so even more pointedly and thus stands in a marked relation to its relatively unmarked theme. Second, I am presupposing that salience is *perceptual* salience, aural actuality; others might presuppose a more score-based and conceptual notion. John Rothgeb (1997), for one, argues that the traditional notion of salience, which favors surface rhythmic and sequential parallelisms, should be expanded to include, or even prefer, higher-level parallelisms, ones deriving from Schenkerian analysis. Indeed, a broad motivic expansion might strike some analysts as more salient than an extreme motivic compression, of the sort I cited in Variation 1 of K. 305. Still, I prefer my aural criterion, since variation, perhaps more than any other form, stimulates the listener's capacity to *hear* one thing in relation to another (that is, variations in relation to a theme and sometimes also to previous variations). As such, one cannot discount perceptual salience.<sup>13</sup>

That said, granting greater structural import to a feature is something else variations valuably do—they sometimes expand a thematic element over a greater length of time. This I call *temporal extension*. (Variations are also known to grant *different* import, a different sense, to a feature; this I call *metaphorical extension* and discuss it below.) Temporal extension (motivic enlargement) is the converse of exemplification, at least to the degree the latter relies on motivic compression. The extended feature retreats from the thematic surface to the variational subsurface; it may even enter into tonal relations spanning multiple variations (where secondary-key variations are involved). Hence, though the thematic feature recedes in perceptual salience, it increases in structural importance.

A vivid example is Schubert's Impromptu in B-flat, op. 142, no. 3, a theme-and-variations set. As shown in Figure 3.4, the theme sports several  $\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$ s. Later in the set, that motive suffuses the tonal structure, and in chromaticized form: Variation 4 is in G-flat major (the modal borrowing is prepared by the B-flat minor of Variation 3), which resolves via a German augmented-sixth chord to  $V^7$  (and that, in turn, to I at the start of the next and final variation). The  $\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$  motive is thus enlarged in altered form, the enlargement lending that thematic feature greater structural substance. Incidentally, its diatonic form is restored near the end of the finale, creating symmetry and resolution.<sup>14</sup>

In metaphorical extension, a variation extends the feature not in time but in *sense*—function or meaning. The notion that a variation stands in a metaphorical relation to its theme is a very tantalizing one, and warrants separate treatment. (See Thorau 2003 for one such treatment.) Here I touch on only one aspect of it, using an example from outside variation form (variational processes can obviously be found in all musical forms).

Briefly, Michael Spitzer (2008) aims to elucidate the relation between primary and secondary themes (or groups) in sonata form from different metaphorical perspectives. In one, "the second glance [the secondary theme] . . . reflects upon previous music in such a way



(A)

Andante

*p*

nb. motive

9

*mf*

14

*cresc.*

*p*

(B)

Theme + Var. 1, 2, 3 4 5 "corrects" (reprise of theme/coda)

(m. 15)

(h) 8-7-6 8-7 8-7 8-7 8-7

(m. 19) 5 6 5 4 3 5 4 3 5 4 3

I i VI Gr. V I V V I

FIGURE 3.4 Schubert, Impromptu in B-flat, op. 142, no. 3: (A) theme, excerpts; (B) Schenkerian graph of entire set

as to bring out its 'materiality'. That is, material is initially assimilated into function, so that it is 'transparent'. It is then showcased as an object of interest in its own right, becoming 'opaque'" (Spitzer 2008, 190). Spitzer elsewhere relates this idea to Paul Ricoeur's that when a word or phrase flouts its conventional referents, as in metaphor, it takes on a kind of physical presence. No longer transparent to the meaning it typically conveys, it becomes

corporeal stuff: “Once it is liberated from its first-order, referential level, language can be appreciated as a material in its own right” (Spitzer 2004, 95).

Spitzer (2008) offers an example at the phrase level: the sentence that opens Mozart’s Piano Sonata in G, K. 283 (not pictured). The presentation features a Meyer schema,<sup>15</sup> where  $\hat{1}-\hat{7} \hat{4}-\hat{3}$  in the soprano is supported by  $\hat{1}-\hat{2} \hat{7}-\hat{1}$  in the bass. The continuation, rather than treating these pitches as “abstract signs,” reinterprets them as “expressive *pianti* figures” (Spitzer 2008, 194). The F $\sharp$  and C, in particular, are transformed from schematic placeholders into a dissonant dyad, with F $\sharp$  an accented passing tone against C. These pitches become opaque, materially dense. Unmarked convention gives way to marked expression. What obtains here in the relationship between two parts of a theme we will see, in the “Gran Partita,” in the relationship between a variation and a theme.

Like metaphor—whether as a linguistic trope or as a cognitive operation (cross-domain mapping)—interpretation often goes beyond the object’s original sense. In interpreting an artwork, we often find meaning in it that the author may not have intended and that the author’s audience would not have been inclined to ascribe. This meaning might well reflect our own perspectives and values more than those of the period in which the object was created. We place the object in a different context, shedding new light on certain features, or exposing hitherto undetected features altogether. What we do to artworks as a whole, some variations do to their themes.

*Actualization* refers to variations realizing certain implications of a theme. As I argued in Swinkin (2012), this process is often retrospective, in that many thematic details and relationships are so minute and nebulous that, if not for the variations, they would scarcely be noticed, much less deemed significant. Such variations, in other words, animate dormant features of the theme, features of which we might not otherwise be aware. (Ivanovitch 2010 also emphasizes theme-as-potentiality.)

Such actualization may be either very localized or more dispersed across a variation or even several. The former case is evident in the first movement of Mozart’s Piano Sonata in A, K. 331 (Figure 3.5A). Leonard Meyer (1973) maintains that the rhythmic feet in the opening are trochaic, not iambic. The last eighth note in m. 1 certainly has the *potential* to group with the start of the next measure (likewise the last eighths of mm. 2 and 3); however, such “asymmetric irregularity” (as reflected in the erroneous phrasing of the Peters edition) “seems at odds with the basic simplicity of the tune and the harmony. Moreover, variations are to be based upon this theme, and . . . complexity will probably come later” (Meyer 1973, 31). That potential is partially realized in m. 4, whose E–D in the melody leads into C $\sharp$  on the fourth eighth. It is then more distinctly realized in the consequent phrase, whose “final eight[h]-note, D . . . is a strong, unambiguous anacrusis” (Meyer 1973, 35), due especially to the *sforzando*. “The decisive upbeat at the end of measure 7 is the realization of a potential which was latent, *but not actualized*, in the preceding weak beats. When it finally arrives, the clear anacrusis is experienced as a kind of achievement—a psychic satisfaction” (37, his emphases). The potential iambs are even more fully actualized in Variation 1, where unambiguous anacrusic gestures abound from the start.

If E at the end of m. 1 is only a potential upbeat, then the perfect fourth, E–B, across the bar line is also only a potential; in other words, it is, for the moment, largely inoperative (in Hugo Riemann’s terminology, it is a *dead interval*). In Variation 1, however, that and the subsequent fourths are heard as syntactically operative as a direct consequence of the iambic figures. The fourths “become aural actualities” (37).<sup>16</sup> Note—and here I suspect

(A) *Andante grazioso*

Peters edition:

etc.

clearly anacrusic

(B)

etc.

(simile)

might have been

or

(too strong a parallelism with previous measure; would counteract the iamb)

FIGURE 3.5 Mozart, Piano Sonata in A, K. 331, mvt. 1: (A) theme, mm. 1–4 (after Meyer 1973, Example 7, 31) and mm. 7–8; (B) Var. 1, mm. 1–3 (after Meyer 1973, Example 15, 38)

I diverge from Meyer—the actualization is dependent solely on the anacrusic figures, such that, even if there were no E<sub>5</sub> on the downbeat of m. 2, the perfect fourth would still materialize. Mozart’s supplying a “redundant” E on the downbeat (it could have been otherwise, as shown in Figure 3.5B) serves to exemplify the actualization! Awakening the previously dormant interval is one thing; making that awakening exquisitely audible is quite another, and that Variation 1 does.

An important point emerges from this example: the iambic feet start to become activated in the theme itself (mm. 4 and 7); accordingly, Variation 1 is but an extension of the process of actualization begun in the theme. We saw something similar in Variation 1 of K. 305: it further exemplified a feature that the theme itself had already begun to exemplify. Both cases show how utterly attentive expert variation composers are to their themes’ niceties. After all, any theme, no matter how simple, will have innumerable implications that can be realized (or features that can be exemplified). However, a variation set, especially a short one, can realize (or exemplify) only a relatively small number of them. Thus, it makes sense that a composer would seize upon precisely those implications whose realizations are suggested by the theme itself. In short, variations often continue the variational processes begun in the theme.<sup>17</sup>

Actualization can also occur on a larger scale. Consider, for instance, Beethoven’s “Diabelli” Variations. The very first chromatic note in the theme, C<sup>♯</sup> (see Figure 3.6A) is barely a blip on the radar—until, that is, the variations home in on it. Variations 5, 9, and 30 (among others) develop that (seemingly) negligible detail, lending it ever greater intricacy and substance. In the theme’s second half, the sequence starting at m. <sup>+</sup>29 (pick up to m. 29) raises its model a whole step (F major to G major); the comparable sequence in

Variation 5 drops a major third (F to D-flat). That D-flat is the Neapolitan, which could be understood to enharmonize and expand (or at least to be motivated by) the theme's C♯. The Neapolitan becomes more stable in Variation 9 (the first of several *minore* variations), where Beethoven broaches it earlier on and explores it at greater length. Hence, the Neapolitan that in Variation 5 arose almost incidentally (as the byproduct of an

(A)

**Vivace**

This musical score is for a piano piece in 3/4 time, marked 'Vivace'. It consists of five systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various dynamic markings: *p* (piano), *f* (forte), *sf* (sforzando), and *ff* (fortissimo). It also features crescendo and decrescendo hairpins. Measure numbers 6, 13, 20, and 26 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. A 'model' bracket is placed over measures 20-21, and a 'sequence up by M2' bracket is placed over measures 26-29. The notation includes chords, single notes, and slurs.

6

13

20

26

*p* *f* *sf* *cresc.* *model* *f* *sf* *ff* *sequence up by M2*

**FIGURE 3.6** Beethoven, 33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, op. 120: (A) theme; (B) Var. 5, mm. <sup>+</sup>17–29; (C) Var. 9, second half; (D) Var. 30, mm. 1–7



(B)

17

24

model

sequence down by M3

*pp*

*sf*

*V* *Np.*

*V* *I*

(C)

*p*

*sf* *sf* *p*

*V/Np.*

*f* *Np.*

*p*

*pp* *cresc.*

*f* *sf* *sf* *sf* *ff*

FIGURE 3.6 Continued



(D)

Andante, sempre cantabile

sempre legato

una corda

sequence

4

cresc.

6

p

FIGURE 3.6 Continued

altered sequence) is now more centralized. The Neapolitan is even more centralized in Variation 30, another *minore*, whose opening phrase in C minor is sequentially repeated in D-flat major (m. +3), undermining C's authority (D-flat is tonicized in the second half as well). Tellingly, that D-flat now occurs in the spot corresponding to where C $\sharp$  initially occurred in the theme, thus confirming the connection between D-flat and the theme's C $\sharp$  that previous variations had led us to suspect. In short, Beethoven's variations tease out a tiny detail from the theme and actualize it in a progressive way, with C $\sharp$ /D $\flat$  reaching its apotheosis in Variation 30. (This is an excellent example of Beethoven generating in variation form the sort of goal-oriented process that one more readily associates with sonata form.)

Some thematic latencies are more obvious than others. For instance, in m. 12 of Schubert's *Moments Musical* in A-flat, op. 94, no. 6, E $\flat$  exudes incompleteness due to its failure to resolve to F, a failure underscored by the *subito* drop from *forte* to *piano* (Cone 1982). In other words, E $\flat$  telegraphs a latent or suppressed resolution to F (the resolution eventually transpires at m. 47). Other latencies are not at all obvious; the C $\sharp$  in Diabelli's theme falls into this category. It resolves properly and immediately, and bears no dynamic or accent marking that would call attention to it. If it is a potential, it is one so faint as not to register as a potential until it is actualized by the variations. Between these two extremes lies the

iambic subtext of K. 331's theme. Variations thus run the gamut from seizing upon a clearly advertised potential to essentially creating one *ex post facto*.

Interpretations likewise run the gamut from drawing out something clearly (but incompletely) present in the work to drawing out something that no one would have otherwise suspected to be there, or to be noteworthy. Indeed, much successful interpretation *constructs* new meaning rather than exhumes preexisting meaning.<sup>18</sup> In such a case, the meaning the interpretation affords the feature is in a sense circumscribed by the feature but only as the *result* of such interpretive intervention. Lawrence Kramer articulates this idea peerlessly: to interpret is "to enunciate a meaning that has always already been inscribed by (or through, never in) the object *but only after* the interpretation has intervened" (2011, 8, his emphases). And, "potential meaning is not a latency that may or may not be realized but a pressure to realize meanings that may or may not have been latent" (74). Diabelli's C♯ inscribes the prospect of the Neapolitan but only *because* Beethoven's audaciously interpretive variations made a compelling case for C♯ doing so.

Interpretations are also known to clear up ambiguities in the object. Variations, too, occasionally perform such *disambiguation*. Consider, again, Mozart's K. 331 theme, which is ambiguous as to whether its melodic structure is a  $\hat{3}$ - or  $\hat{5}$ -line.<sup>19</sup> Different analyst-interpreters have argued for one or the other reading. Meyer seems to prefer a  $\hat{3}$ -oriented line on the basis of his trochaic construal (1973, Example 14, 37), although his analysis is not strictly Schenkerian. Schenker himself opts for a  $\hat{5}$ -line (1979, Example 157), with Forte and Gilbert following suit (1982, Example 154, 167)—partly on the basis that m. 4 encapsulates  $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{4}$ - $\hat{3}$ - $\hat{2}$ .

Suppose that the (partial) parallelism Forte and Gilbert cite were insufficient to affirm the theme's structure, as I believe it is. One might then look to the variations for clarification. Variation 5, mm. 13–14, echoes  $\hat{5}$  and  $\hat{4}$  in the highest register of the piece and the coda twice retraces  $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{4}$ - $\hat{3}$ - $\hat{2}$ - $\hat{1}$  (starting seven measures from the end). Forte and Gilbert view both of those events as confirming their  $\hat{5}$ -line reading of the theme (322–323). I instead view those events as a basis on which to *attribute* a  $\hat{5}$ -line structure to the ambiguous theme.

To be clear, by "disambiguation," I do not mean that the theme, beneath its polysemous surface, really is, in fact, a certain way, and that a variation comes along and reveals the way it always in fact has been. On the contrary, I mean that the theme is, in certain respects, *irreducibly* polysemous and that a univocal variation portrays it *as if* it weren't ("hear this theme *as if* it were an unambiguous  $\hat{5}$ -line"). Such a variation clarifies the theme provisionally, not once and for all. Again, this is what I take interpretations generally—analytical, hermeneutic, performative—to do to the artwork, which is polysemous by nature.

My final category is *transformation*. A variation can transform the theme's formal functions—say, a compound basic idea into an antecedent; it rarely alters the overall form. It can also transform the theme's middleground—say, a third-progression into a fifth-progression; it rarely alters the background. We will find both of these particular transformations in Mozart's "Gran Partita."

To be precise, transformation is not strictly a species of interpretation (though, as we will see, it can be used in the *service* of variational interpretation). Interpretation, to my mind, seizes on something fully, faintly, ambiguously, or potentially present in an object and then extends, exemplifies, clarifies, or actualizes it. Transformation stands apart from these functions in that it does something *to* the object rather than works with something *in* the object. Think of the common quip that this or that performer transformed a poor piece into a good one, or vice versa. Likewise, I suppose a variation could turn a poor theme into

a good one, so to speak—to redeem a theme somehow (as Beethoven’s “Diabelli” variations, collectively, have often been said to accomplish). That would be significant, obviously, but not interpretive *per se*. In any event, I am less interested in inversions of value than in specific structural transformations, as described above.

There is some fluidity among the interpretive functions I have laid out, just as there is among the variation types. In certain cases, what one person considered the exemplifying of a faint feature another might consider the actualizing of a potential. In addition, there might be a fine line between metaphorical extension and actualization. Spitzer, as we saw, discusses the K. 283 sentence mainly in terms of metaphor—the sentence-continuation projects  $\hat{7}$  and  $\hat{4}$  beyond the schematic into the material realm. But at one point, he alludes to that material sense being latent within the presentation: the continuation “reveal[s] features which were *immanent within* the schema of bars 1–4, but assimilated into its syntax, and thus transparent” (2008, 194, my emphases). Likewise with disambiguation versus actualization: do Variations 5 and 6 in K. 331 disambiguate the theme’s *Urlinie* or rather actualize its potential  $\hat{5}$ -line (the latter being merely potentiated on account of the competing emphasis on  $\hat{3}$ )? Which term is most apt, therefore, is itself a matter of interpretive judgment, and the categories should be viewed more as heuristic tools than as cut-and-dried distinctions.

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I have already started to show how these five functions do not merely distinguish variations but generate dynamic processes that tie multiple variations together. The extension of a thematic motive might well link one variation to the next tonally, as we saw in the Schubert B-flat Impromptu. Also, the varying degrees to which successive variations exemplify, actualize, or disambiguate a given feature might create associative threads that *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, as it were, and even lead to major goals, as we saw of “Diabelli’s” treatment of the Neapolitan. What counts, therefore, is not only the thematic work each variation does individually but also the thematic work variations do collectively.

Indeed, many sets can be shown to thrive on the exploitation of certain tonal/motivic features and on the interrogation and resolution of certain problems or tensions, in much the same way that sonata-form works are more commonly thought to do. Variation works, no less than their sonata-form counterparts, can be quite conducive to such Schoenbergian investigations, to uncovering a compositional *Idee* (or multiple *Ideen*)—and this not only with overtly dramatized instances, à la Beethoven and Brahms, but with more lyrical ones, à la Mozart, as well. This I aim to show in my analysis of the “Gran Partita.”<sup>20</sup>

Table 3.1 culls from the above a concrete template or method for analyzing variations, one I shall more or less follow in my exploration of K. 361.

## MOZART’S K. 361: THEME

Though Mozart’s set<sup>21</sup> is delightfully theatrical, here I will focus more on the structural than the hermeneutic, aside from some brief allusions to topical content.

Figure 3.7A analyzes the theme. The form is obviously continuous binary; less obvious is the degree to which the form is (a) rounded and (b) balanced (having “rhyming cadences”).



Table 3.1 A template for analyzing variation form.

## 1. Examine the Theme

*Analyze*

- the formal design and formal functions
- the tonal structure and voice leading
- the motivic, topical, and schematic content; use of counterpoint, chromaticism, and other techniques; and metric and rhythmic processes

## 2. Take Stock of the Theme

*That is, of*

- the structures, outer and inner, that variations are likely to *replicate* or *instantiate*; inner structure is also something variations might *exemplify*; it is even possible that variations will *transform* structures;
- the features that variations might variously *replicate*, *exemplify*, and *extend* (temporally or metaphorically);
- the questions or ambiguities that some variations might (provisionally) *disambiguate*;
- the potentialities that some variations might *actualize*, keeping in mind that many such potentialities will be evident only in retrospect.

Be alert to any *self-interpreting activity* on the theme's part, because, as we have seen, such activity will sometimes forecast what will happen, to a greater extent, in the variations.

## 3. Whole: Peruse the Variations

*Assess*

- the entire structure, inner and outer. Are there compelling reasons to assert a thoroughgoing *Ursatz* across the entire set (e.g., a theme with an incomplete melodic structure or the presence of secondary-key variations)? Are there compelling reasons to assert some sort of ternary design?
- the smaller groupings, as generated by progressive diminution/augmentation, mirroring, similar motivic content, registral connections, linkage technique, etc.
- the basic disposition of each variation. Does each decorate the theme's melody externally, decorate it internally, transform it, develop it, or replace it?

## 4. Part: Analyze Each Variation

Consider the interpretive work each variation does on the theme.

## 5. Whole, Again

- In the final analysis, what essential facets of the theme have come to light and
- what larger through lines arise as a result? That is, does a certain feature come into increasingly sharp focus across multiple variations (adjacent or not)? Do variations progressively exemplify a feature, clarify an ambiguity, or actualize a latency?

While there is a clear sense of tonal return at m. 13, the melodic idea there is somewhat distinct from that which begins the theme. For, although the a' section recycles the opening's triadic and gavotte-like cells, it does so in reverse order. (I thus base the a' designation more on tonal return than on thematic return.) Likewise, the last two measures of each half are similar but not (transpositionally) identical. Hence, this theme raises the question of just how symmetrical its binary is, with regard to both the beginnings of sections a and a' and their endings. Perhaps some variations will weigh in on this question or ambiguity.

In mm. 4–5, the bottom voice (bassoon 2), reminiscent of a tetrachordal lament bass (in shape if not in affect), serves to link the two halves of the phrase. Note that it causes the cadence to be evaded, if not for which mm. 1–4 would comprise an antecedent rather than a compound basic idea. Thus, perhaps a real (non-evaded) cadence is potentiated in m. 4, as is an antecedent leading up to it.

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## WHAT VARIATIONS DO 93

Diagram illustrating musical variations and their structural components:

**Structural Components:**

- a'** (Section 11)
- sentence (8)**
- presentation (4)**
- basic idea: a/b amalgam (2)**
- tridic and gavotte in reverse order**
- tridic mixed with sing**
- contrasting continuation (4)**
- c fragmented (2)**
- cadence (2)**
- (1)**
- (1)**
- (2) (liquidation)**

**Musical Score (Measures 11-16):**

The score is written for piano (p) and features a variety of musical textures and dynamics. The first system (measures 11-16) includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking and a *f* (forte) dynamic. The second system (measures 17-22) includes a *p* (piano) dynamic and a *f* (forte) dynamic. The score is divided into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system (measures 11-16) includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking and a *f* (forte) dynamic. The second system (measures 17-22) includes a *p* (piano) dynamic and a *f* (forte) dynamic. The score is divided into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system (measures 11-16) includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking and a *f* (forte) dynamic. The second system (measures 17-22) includes a *p* (piano) dynamic and a *f* (forte) dynamic.

FIGURE 3.7 Continued

(B)

(a) The *comes* retains the *dux*'s rhythm and contour but not its pitch

(b) The *comes* is clearer because it retains most of the *dux*'s pitches; still, it is metrically offset and thus obscured

(c) The *comes* is metrically parallel to the *dux* but does not retain all of its pitches

(d) (Cl. 2) The *comes* is the clearest yet because it retains all pitches; still, it is slightly obscured by Cl. 1's continuation having the same rhythm

(e) (Hns. in Bb, Bns.) The *comes* is now completely clear because not only does it retain all pitches but now the texture is more rhythmically differentiated—the *comes*'s quarter note stands out again the clarinet's eighth notes

(Cl. 1) 13

(Hns. in Bb, Bns.)

FIGURE 3.7 Continued

Figure 3.8A graphs the theme's middleground. A  $\xi$ -line *Urlinie* is paralleled by a fifth-progression in the first phrase and also by a superficial five-note gesture at the very end (that gesture straddles two distinct *Stufen* and is thus *contrastructural*). The theme is thus somewhat self-exemplifying. A third-progression within V, mm. 5–8, continues to prolong the *Kopftón*  $\xi$ . Figure 3.8B (downward stems) registers subtle continuity across the fifth- and third-progressions—a latent octave span, which potentiates a more continuous, less perforated octave descent (perhaps even a full-fledged octave-progression); so, for that matter, does the descent  $Bb_5$ – $Bb_4$ , as also shown in the example (upward stems).

The theme is a fairly slow contredanse, a topical milieu hosting other, more local *topoi*, as specified in Figure 3.7A. Motives *a* and *b* each consist of three topics, or at least topic-like figures.<sup>22</sup> Motive *c*, in the contrasting continuation, is a march-like riposte to the dainty dance and *empfindsam* vocal topics of the previous module. Most of these topical motives return in the *a'* section, as noted, albeit in varied form. The folkish, quaint canon of section *a'* magnifies the piece's inherent pastoral quality (by virtue of its *Harmoniemusik* ensemble). Will variations further amplify this topic? Interestingly, that canon is the terminus of a subtle contrapuntal process spanning the entire theme: as illustrated in Figure 3.7B, each imitation is incrementally more patent than the previous. It would be surprising if some variations did not capitalize on and continue that process.

The theme is somewhat processive as to meter as well: within the first four-measure hypermeasure, the metrically weak, even-numbered measures are rhythmically accented, especially due to the attacked dissonances on the downbeats. That accentual scheme across mm. 1–4, —  $\downarrow$  —  $\downarrow$ , is reflected microcosmically in m. 2, whose second beat (analogous to the measure as a whole) receives an accent (*sfp*). The next phrase favors odd-numbered measures, since m. 5 initiates a new idea and m. 6 merely repeats it. This is also reflected microcosmically, since the phenomenal accents within mm. 5 and 6 now occur on the downbeats. Nonetheless, the whiff of a strong second beat/measure lingers and, sure enough, in section *a'*, the canonic echoes afford even-numbered measures (nearly) equal standing with the odd-numbered ones. The theme thus partially realizes its own earlier metric latency, just as the theme of K. 331 partially realizes its own earlier rhythmic latency. One might wonder whether a variation of K. 361, like Variation 1 of K. 331, will apply that realization to the original spot, granting hypermetric stability to even-numbered measures in the *a* section as the theme does in the *a'* section. As it turns out, no variation will.

Our analysis of the theme, then, has established (a) *structures*—an overall binary form and a  $\xi$ -line *Urlinie*, both of which one can only assume (most) variations will replicate; the *Urlinie* is also likely to be exemplified, especially since the theme itself has already begun to exemplify it; (b) *features* amenable to exemplification, such as polyphony (especially since, again, the theme has already set that wheel in motion), and to extension, such as the Meyer schema; (c) *ambiguities*, especially pertaining to structural symmetry, that variations might clear up; and (d) *potentialities* ripe for actualization, such as the potential for greater cadential closure in m. 4 and a more continuous or stable octave line in the first half. There are doubtless countless other potentialities, but, as we have discussed, many might be detectable only in retrospect, once they have been actualized. It will be interesting to see if there are any incidental details to which Mozart's variations retrospectively grant import (as with our "Diabelli" example).



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## OVERVIEW OF THE VARIATIONS: STRUCTURE AND TYPES

Since the theme unfolds a complete  $\xi$ -line, there is no lingering structural pitch that would suggest an ongoing *Urlinie*. Thus, I am inclined to view the variations as reiterating the theme's *Urlinie* rather than as unfolding a piece-wide *Urlinie*.

As to formal design, the *minore* develops the neighbor motives that pervade the theme's melody (at, for instance, mm. 4–6 and 9–10); therefore, the B section demarcated by the *minore* is a small development, not an interior theme. The following Adagio variation is not elaborately periphrastic, as would be more typical, but pleonastic—fairly transparent to the theme's melody. The finale, by contrast, transforms the theme into a very different animal—a light, vivacious minuet that strips the theme's melody down to its bare-bones essence. Thus, to my ears, the Adagio functions as a reprise, the finale more as a paragenetic coda (see Figure 3.9).

Unlike the finale, the theme is an integral part of the ternary form; the theme belongs to it rather than precedes it, for at least three reasons. First, the theme and Variation 1 are tightly bound because a fifth-gesture (*Urlinie*-parallelism) both ends the theme and begins the variation (see m. 1 of Figure 3.10), in the manner of *linkage technique* [*Knüpftechnik*]. Second, they are also interlinked because of the pattern shown at the bottom of Figure 3.9: Variation 1 decorates the theme's melody just as Variation 3 (at least its beginning) decorates the fairly new melody of Variation 2.<sup>23</sup> Finally, progressive rhythmic animation spans the theme and the first four variations. That process begins in the theme, mm. 1–5 (see Figure 3.7A); Variation 1 continues it with sextuplets. Then, however, Variations 2 and 3 waver between continuing to progress with thirty-seconds and starting to regress with sixteenths. (Variations 2 and 3 are thus paired not just by the aforementioned pattern but also by having similar rhythmic profiles.) Regression wins out with Variation 4, which is replete with eighth-note subdivisions.<sup>24</sup>

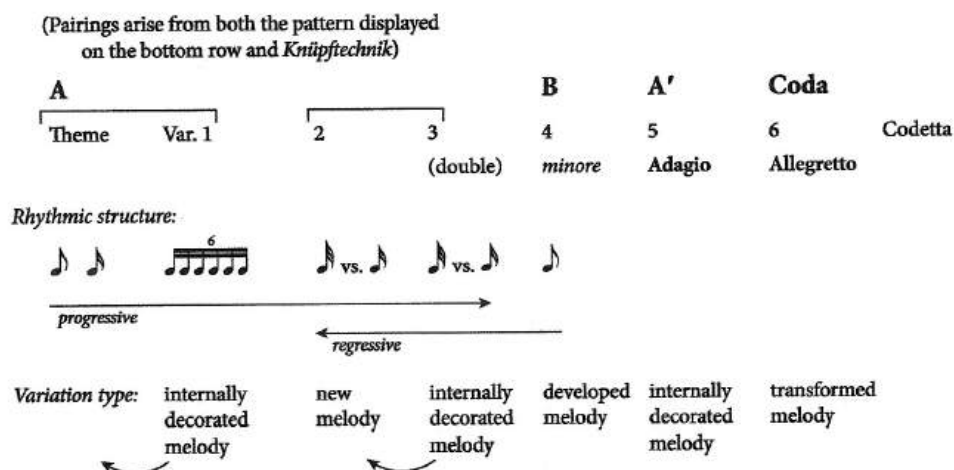


FIGURE 3.9 Formal overview of Mozart, K. 361, mvt. 6





FIGURE 3.10 Mozart, K. 361, mvt. 6, Var. 1, mm. 1-8: middleground graph

## INTERPRETIVE WORK IN THE VARIATIONS

**Variation 1**, as mentioned, exemplifies the theme's  $\hat{5}$ -line (or "fifthness") right off the bat with a pitch-specific parallelism in m. 1; that is followed by quasi-parallelisms at other pitch levels, as shown by the brackets in Figure 3.10. Variation 1 even alters the theme's middleground to further exemplify fifthness in mm. 5–8, changing what was a third-progression into a fifth-progression (consequently, mm. 5–8 are now more analogous with mm. 1–4). Mozart does so by conspicuously prolonging the melody's C: in the theme, C in mm. 5 and 6 was a mere neighbor to B; here it is fleshed out and operates as a local head-tone. The variation thus exemplifies fifthness due both to foreground proliferation and to middleground transformation. (Here lies the promised example of transformation in the service of interpretation.)

If mm. 1–4 and 5–8 are now parallel in voice-leading structure, so are they in motivic makeup: the continuation retains the opening's distinctive sextuplet figure (the  *motive of the variation* ) and so is no longer of the  *contrasting*  variety. Measures 1–4 and 5–8 are also now isomorphic, in that mm. 1–4 are grouped, like the continuation, as 1 + 1 + 2; both modules are micro-sentential. Hence, whereas the second module now mimics the melodic structure and motives of the first, the first now mimics the grouping structure of the second. The result is that the two modules are much more thoroughly integrated.

Such symmetry is found on a larger formal scale as well: the overall form is minutely more rounded than it was in the theme, again due to the retention of the sextuplet, in mm. 13ff. (Notice, the birdsong figure heightens the pastoral quality of the canon. Hence, if the theme's canon amplifies the pastorality of the theme, the birdsong furthers that process by amplifying the pastorality of the canon.) The cadences are also more parallel than they were before. Variation 1 thus waxes more symmetrical than the theme and partially disambiguates the theme's form on that account. Again, that does not mean the theme was  *always at bottom*  rounded and rhyming beneath an obfuscatory surface; rather, it means that Variation 1 provisionally depicts the theme  *as if*  it had been. Alternatively, one could say that the theme comes close to and thus potentiates formal symmetry, and that Variation 1 partially actualizes that potential.

The theme, as noted in Figure 3.7A, opens with a Meyer schema. In contrast with K. 283, here the opening  $\hat{1}$  and  $\hat{4}$  are no sooner stated as chord tones than become expressive dissonances:  $\hat{1}$  forms a suspended seventh above the bass in m. 2,  $\hat{4}$  a suspended fourth in m. 3.<sup>25</sup> In Variation 1, that happens not at the beginning but near the end (Figure 3.11), where  $\hat{1}$  and  $\hat{4}$  are recast as piquant appoggiaturas. To my ears, at least, these pitches achieve even more expressive salience here than in the theme, simply because they are transplanted to a different, unexpected spot and partially comprise a novel countermelody. The Meyer is thus materialized.

In sum, Variation 1 parses the theme in multiple respects: it exemplifies its fifth-based structure to a much greater degree (in the a section, at least); it disambiguates its form in favor of greater symmetry; and it extends the Meyer.

**Variation 2**, like its predecessor, points up the  $\hat{5}$ -line with a surface parallelism in m. 1 (basset horn 1 and bassoon 1). Although the variation has fewer such parallelisms thereafter, it emphasizes fifthness in another way: a descant, played by clarinet 1, lingers on  $\hat{5}$  for over

FIGURE 3.11 Mozart, K. 361, mvt. 6, Var. 1, mm. 17–end

two measures, thus accentuating the *Kopftön*; it is as if the clarinet were making sonically explicit the otherwise implicit prolongation in the theme of  $\hat{5}$  across mm. 1–2 (and beyond). Then, for good measure, the clarinet does the same thing in the secondary, dominant key. Variations 1 and 2 exemplify fifthness with comparable vividness, but they do so in different and complementary ways: the former's a section makes the structure obvious through complete yet fleeting foreground parallelisms; the latter's a section does so through elongations of  $\hat{5}$  (within tonic and dominant keys) yet without walking it down to  $\hat{1}$ .

Variation 2 one-ups Variation 1 in making the binary decidedly rounded, for now the figure at m.  $\hat{+}13$  shares several pitches with the incipit:  $F_4$ – $E\flat_4$ – $D_4$ – $F_4$ – $B\flat_4$ – $D_5$ – $F_5$ . Variation 2 also makes the imitative counterpoint in the b section more lucid. For one, there are more imitations than in the b section of the theme and of Variation 1. For another, in those earlier sections, the *dux*'s counterpoint contained the same rhythms as the *comes*, thus partially concealing it. In Variation 2, by contrast, the rhythms of the *dux* and *comes* are different—the *comes*' thirty-seconds stand out clearly against the *dux*'s eighths. Hence, if the theme made the imitations increasingly vivid, especially through rhythmic differentiation in a' (revisit Figure 3.7B), Variation 2 exploits that conceit by applying such differentiation not only to a' but to section b as well.

In section a', the bass diverges from the theme's, fixating on B $\flat$  and A, which support I and a neighbor V $\sharp$  respectively. Whence this fixation? Consider that this dyad (in the tonic key)



is found only once in the theme's bass—mm. 2–3 (bassoon 2). Perhaps Variation 2 is hinting that the dyad there has some significance. Indeed, it might now dawn on us that these notes always harbored latently imitative content, as the inversion of the upper voice's  $\hat{1}-\hat{7}$  (and also that, in m. 1 of the theme, the bass's  $B\flat-D$  inverted the soprano's  $D-B\flat$ ). It might also dawn on us that the subtle polyphony we previously detected in mm.  $^{+}3-4$  grows out of the even subtler polyphony of the preceding measures. As we will see, this reading is bolstered by the beginning of Variation 3.

In sum, Variation 2 does important interpretive work, exemplifying the fifth-oriented structure in a complementary manner to Variation 1; exemplifying polyphony to a greater extent than Variation 1 did; further disambiguating the theme's binary form; and starting to actualize the melodic import of  $B\flat-A$ .

**Variation 3** picks up where Variation 2 left off, emphasizing  $B\flat-A$  straightaway, thus affirming that the previous passage did indeed have something to do with the role of  $B\flat-A$  in the first phrase. (*Knüpftechnik* thus bonds Variations 2 and 3 just as it did the theme and Variation 1.) While the  $B\flat-A$  in oboe 1 (doubled by basset horn 1 an octave below) stems from the theme's melody in mm. 1–2, the answering  $A-B\flat$  stems from the theme's bass in mm. 2–3. That is a consequence of invertible counterpoint, which also transfers  $\hat{4}-\hat{3}$  from the theme's melody to the variation's bass (see Figure 3.12). In other words, Mozart is using invertible counterpoint to “retroactivate” the theme's  $A-B\flat$  in mm. 2–3 (bass) as a melodic answer to the preceding  $B\flat-A$ . Placing both figures in the top voice makes their correspondence patent. This variation thus evidences actualization, in the process peeling away yet another layer of Mozart's nuanced contrapuntal concoction. To that degree, one might also say that the variation exemplifies polyphony. What is more, one begins to suspect, on the basis of the end of Variation 2 and the start of Variation 3, that  $B\flat-A$  is emerging as a motive *in and of itself*, apart from its role as  $\hat{1}-\hat{7}$  within the Meyer. In this way, the variation evidences extension as well. In short, the retrospective actualization of  $A-B\flat$  as a melodic entity, the exemplification of polyphony, and the extension of Meyer all go hand in hand.

The invertible counterpoint also accounts for  $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$  in the soprano of m. 4. The result is a melody that nests a quasi-Prinner within the Meyer, the two converging at  $\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ .<sup>26</sup> Granted, the Prinner prototypically employs  $\hat{4}-\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  in the bass, moving in parallel tenths with  $\hat{6}-\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$  in the soprano. Here, however, that schematic consideration evidently takes a backseat to ending the phrase with a  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$  bass and thus an imperfect authentic cadence. Indeed, this spot realizes the aforementioned potential of the first four measures to achieve cadential closure and, as a direct correlate, to comprise an antecedent. (Those measures started inching toward greater self-enclosure in the previous variation, by dint of lacking the  $D\flat$  at the end of m. 4, where instead the bass came to rest on  $D$ .) The next phrase continues to play around with the Meyer scale degrees in the dominant key, in inversion and *recte*.

Variation 3 is a double variation, such that each section-repeat is written out and recomposed. The varied repeat of section a offers the clearest, most linear descent from  $B\flat_5$  encountered thus far, a straight shot to  $D_5$ ,  $\hat{3}$ ; after that,  $\hat{2}$  is delayed and somewhat concealed by decoration and finally  $\hat{1}$  lands on beat 2 of m. 12.2 (see Figure 3.13A). The latent octave span we discerned in the theme, then, is starting to come to fruition (albeit in a decorative rather than structural way).

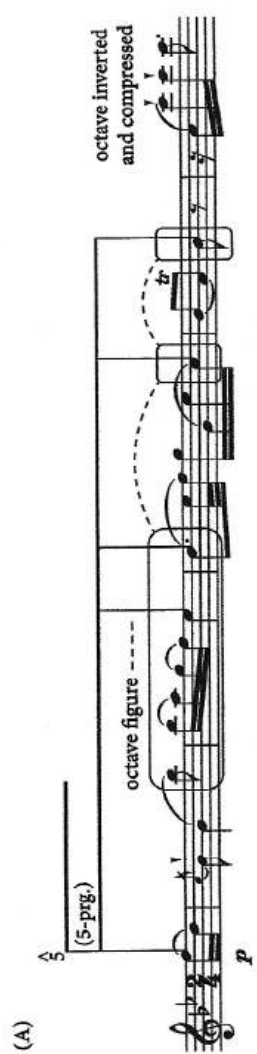
The image displays a musical score for Mozart's K. 361, movement 6, Variation 3, measures 1-8, superimposed over the theme, measures 1-6. The score is written for piano in 2/4 time. The top system is labeled 'Var. 3' and the bottom system is labeled 'Theme'. The 'Var. 3' system includes annotations for 'MEYER' (measures 1-2), 'quasi-PRINNER' (measures 3-4), and 'CADENCE' (measures 5-6). The 'Theme' system includes annotations for 'inverts' (measures 1-2, 3-4, 5-6) and 'V:' (measures 1-2, 3-4, 5-6). The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'sf' and 'p'.

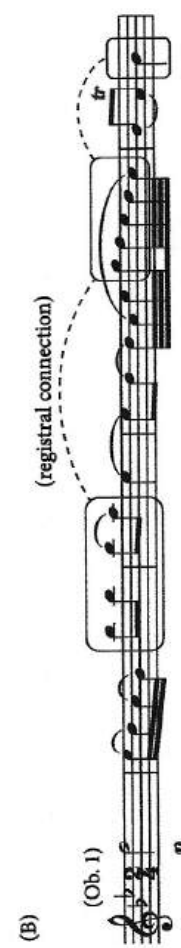
FIGURE 3.12 Mozart, K. 361, mvt. 6, Var. 3, mm. 1–8, superimposed over theme, mm. 1–6

Measures 33–36 retrograde the lament-bass figure first seen in mm. 4–5 of the theme (as if compensating for its absence in mm. 4–5 of this variation). That figure lends the imitative counterpoint seriousness of tone (it is redolent of the solemn *Well-Tempered Clavier* fugues that feature chromatically dense subjects, such as the D-minor Fugue from Book 2). Since this peroration is not remotely like anything else in this variation, the variation is decisively non-rounded; it disambiguates the theme's form in the negative, as it were.

To sum up, Variation 3 is mostly about actualization—of the potential for the A–B $\flat$  to be a melodic (even motivic) entity, for the first four measures to achieve cadential closure and formal self-enclosure, and for a more cohesive octave descent. In addition, it extends the Meyer and disambiguates the form in favor of non-roundedness.



(A)  (5-prg.)  
octave figure ----  
tr  
octave inverted and compressed  
p

(B)  (regstral connection)  
tr  
p

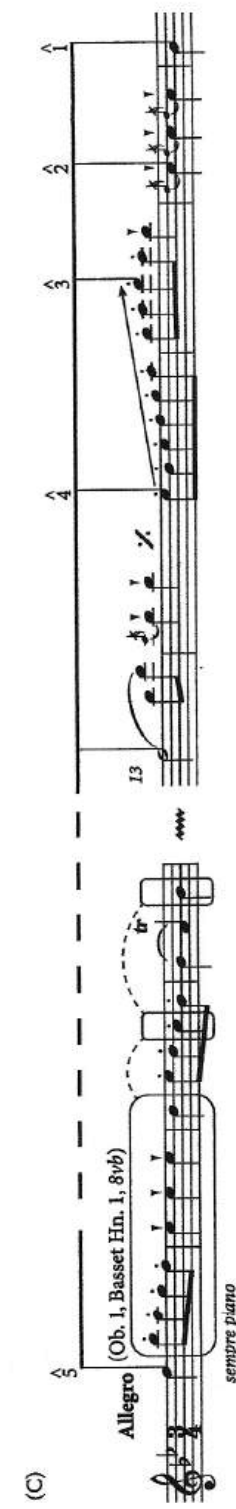
(C)  (Ob. 1, Bassett Hn. 1, 8vb)  
Allegro  
sempre piano  
13

FIGURE 3-13 Mozart, K. 361, mvt. 6: ascendancy of octave-motive: (A) Var. 3, mm. <sup>+</sup>9–13; (B) Var. 5, mm. 2–6; (C) Var. 6 (finale), mm. 1–4 and 13–20

FIGURE 3.14 Mozart, K. 361, mvt. 6, Var. 4, excerpts: developing variation

**Variation 4**, the *minore*, is developmental, as mentioned, focusing for the first twelve measures on neighbor figures, both complete and incomplete. (Put another way, this variation exemplifies the neighbor component of the theme.) If the opening of Variation 3 homed in on the B $\flat$ –A neighbor motion in particular (mm. 1–2 and 6), the opening of Variation 4 enlarges the piece's purview to encompass neighbor motions more generally. Indeed, the pool of semitonal dyads now expands beyond  $\hat{1}$ – $\hat{7}$  (and also  $\hat{4}$ – $\hat{3}$ ) to include  $\sharp\hat{4}$ – $\hat{5}$  and  $\flat\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$ , the latter in both tonic and dominant keys. (Note that the minor-mode  $\hat{6}$  was foreshadowed in Variation 3, mm. 31–32, in the bass.) Hence, if the close of Variation 2 and start of Variation 3 culled B $\flat$ –A from a more schematic configuration (the Meyer), hypostatizing it as a motive in its own right, this variation does the opposite, resorbing it into yet another generic class, that of semitonal neighbor motions. Over the theme and Variations 1–4, then, the B $\flat$ –A dyad comes into and goes out of focus.

Variation 4, though distinct, modally and melodically, from Variation 3, nonetheless enacts a very similar process involving the bass; it rehearses how Variation 3 brought to light the contrapuntal import of the theme's opening bass. In Variation 4, the bass's gestures in the first (sub)phrase are nascently imitative, just as the theme's A–B $\flat$  was: as shown in Figure 3.14, the bassoons faintly reiterate the clarinets, but only rhythmically (the bassoons metrically displace the clarinets' amphibrach), not diastemically. In the second phrase, the upper winds alter their initial gesture in accordance with the previous bassoon part, now starting on B $\flat$  and rising a third rather than falling a semitone. In an instant, the bassoons' melodic potential is realized, a fact the bassoons themselves affirm by dutifully imitating (in inversion) the part to which they gave rise. Finally, section a' resituates the motive of m. 5 in the tonic key, metrically displacing it and adding a suffix. The result is a fairly new-sounding idea, but one that demonstrably evolved from the opening idea through a series of alterations. Indeed, the *minore* exhibits its own internal process of developing variation, even as it develops the neighbor motive of the theme. It is autonomous and servile simultaneously.

Two events directly prepare for **Variation 5**, the Adagio: an added measure at the end of Variation 4 that restores the major mode and an introductory measure at the start of Variation 5 that liquidates the neighbor motive, demoting it to a quivering accompaniment. Both events, together with an elongated anacrusis (m. 2), gently loosen the theme's form for the first time.

The Adagio, as mentioned, exudes a sense of return because its melody is very similar to the theme's (and also, of course, because it reverts to major). The slow tempo imbues that return with the quality of a wistful remembrance; in fact, not only does Variation 5 remember the theme but its opening oboe line remembers the oboe melody that starts the third movement (also Adagio).

In mm. 3–6, the octave comes into focus (Figure 3.13B). In that regard, it is similar to mm. 9–12 of Variation 3, but there the octave contour was more linear at the beginning, more broken up at the end; here the opposite is true. The two statements are thus in a sense complementary.

The finale, **Variation 6**, is, to reiterate, more an afterthought than a culmination, but it does bring two features to a head. First, it has the most compressed, linear, and thus perceptible octave gesture in the piece (Figure 3.13C). Second, it endows m. 4 with the strongest cadence yet—a perfect authentic—and thus endows the first phrase with the most autonomy and self-enclosure. Indeed, if Variation 3 transformed the theme's compound basic idea into an antecedent, the finale transforms it into a functional consequent! Also note that it eschews symmetry: the linear progression in V (mm. 5–8) traces a third, not a fifth (as in Variation 1); and the form is decidedly non-rounded. Finally, the coda (like that of K. 331, first movement) emphatically affirms the 5-line structure: behold the triplet flourish four measures from the end.

## CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, is Mozart's movement especially noteworthy among his (and Haydn's and early Beethoven's) variation sets? Not really, and that is precisely the point. Mozart's set absolutely typifies the density of motivic work and thematic thought found in almost all sets by the Classical-era triumvirate, no matter how light in character and modest in dimensions. It equally typifies how such sets tend to transcend the form's paratactic predisposition. They do so not only by creating broader groups by means of progressive rhythmic animation, the medial *minore*, and other factors, but also by generating dynamic processes that course across such groups. Some of those processes in K. 361 are summarized in Figure 3.15, which shows features waxing and waning, surging and receding in presence and emphasis.

To that extent, the comment by Rosen cited near the start should give us pause. He voices the conventional wisdom that most pre-“Eroica” variations instantiate thematic features with different accoutrements; and that fact, in conjunction with all variations being in one key, results in a static form anathema to the drama of the Classical style. I hope to have shown that, though K. 361 may not lead to a single telos—different parameters peak, as it were, at different times—it is nonetheless demonstrably process-driven. It may not be dramatic, but it is definitely dynamic.<sup>27</sup> That is not to say Beethoven did not eventually bring to variation form a greater sonata-form ethos—more developing variation, tonal diversity, connective passages, and goal-orientation and resolution. It is only to say that he was building on the dynamism with which Mozart, for one, suffused the form.





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## NOTES

1. Also see Klauwell (1906) and Müller-Blattau (1950, 40–53).
2. Mozart deploys such double entendres in sonata form as well, as Byros (2013) shows with respect to the first movement of Piano Sonata in C, K. 279.
3. Korsyn (2018, 229).
4. Batta and Kovács (1978) emphasize this point, and even suggest that the *minore* sometimes (as in some of Beethoven's early sets) constitutes an axis around which the surrounding variations symmetrically revolve.
5. Mozart's preferred formal design is but one way in which the form's paratactic bent has been countered. Vivaldi, for instance, arrived at other ingenious solutions, as Lockey (2006) enumerates. Many of Vivaldi's sets—fairly atypically for their time—evinced a sense of progression and even goal-orientation, to which extent “they look forward to the preoccupations of later generations” (62).
6. Theorists of variation form have tended to assume that development of thematic motives occurs only (or mostly) in variations that do not abide by the theme's tonal-formal framework—in other words, in free variations. Yet, there is no reason why development cannot occur within the strict structure of the theme. In K. 361, we will witness such a variation—its *minore* develops a thematic motive and, in addition, undergoes its own, internal process of developing variation.
7. Here I concur with Wye Jamison Allanbrook, who basically equates expression with topicality and insists that, in Classical music, “no moment is ever ‘expressively neutral.’” That is, none is ever entirely devoid of topical content, “even if a particular *topos* does not have a convenient name or obvious historical association” (2002, 214). For the record, Danuta Mirka disagrees, holding that “some passages of eighteenth-century music may display no topics” (2014, 22).
8. Sisman's other categories are not relevant to my present enterprise: *ostinato* is not, since I am dealing with sectional variations; *fantasy* is not, since I am concentrating on strict practice; and *serial* is not, since it postdates the period with which I am concerned (as does, for the most part, *formal outline*).
9. Here and elsewhere, I align analysis more with interpretation than with explanation per se, but that is a different story, one told, in part, in Swinkin (2016, Chapters 1 and 2).
10. On musical interpretation as “aspectual representation,” see Thom (2007, *passim*).
11. Schoenberg's *motive of the variation* (1967, 169–172).
12. d'Indy (1899–1900, Part I, Chapter 6). Also see the helpful discussion of d'Indy's stance toward variation in Cummings (1991, 29–34).
13. Nicholas Cook states, “it is probable that much, if not all, of whatever more complex structural organization is found in the [variation] set is there for a directly phenomenological purpose—that is . . . it has been written *to be heard*, rather than simply because things are conventionally done that way” (1990, 60, my emphases).

14. For a remarkably parallel process, see Schumann's "Widmung" (the first song of *Myrthen*, op. 25): the motivic diatonic neighbor,  $\hat{6}$ , is expanded in the contrasting middle section as  $\flat VI$  (enharmonically respelled  $\sharp V$ ). The coda then restores the diatonic  $\hat{6}$ , conjoining it with its chromatic counterpart.
15. Spitzer refers to it by Robert Gjerdingen's first appellation, the " $\hat{1} \hat{7} \dots \hat{4} \hat{3}$  schema" (Gjerdingen 1988), which Gjerdingen (2007) renamed after its discoverer, Leonard Meyer, who had himself originally called it the *changing-note archetype* (Meyer 1980).
16. Dahlhaus (1967) proffers a very similar reading with respect to the bass's C–G that opens Diabelli's theme and to Beethoven's treatment of it in Variations 1 and 9. With both Meyer and Dahlhaus, an interval is made functional as the direct result of accentual alteration.
17. Another example of this phenomenon is found in Swinkin (2012, 47–49), which analyzes Brahms's Variations on Schumann's *Albumblatt*, op. 9. There I submit that the polychords of Variation 2 can be understood to actualize the subtle polychordal implications of the grace notes in the theme, and that such actualization begins in the theme itself, in m. 19. Variation 2 thus picks up where the theme left off.
18. Two authors that pursue a constructivist approach to interpretation are Margolis (1995) and, more radically, Fish (1980).
19. The theme of the finale (a variation set) of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A, K. 581 is strikingly similar (in structure if not in affect) and comparably ambiguous.
20. To be more precise, my analytical procedure relies on Schenkerian and Schoenbergian methodologies in almost equal measure. In this respect, I join Matthew Arndt (2019), Jack Boss (1999), David Epstein (1979), and Janet Schmalfeldt (1991), among many others, who deem these two schools, however distinct, compatible and complementary in principle, and who combine them in practice, in the belief that doing so can yield analytically fruitful results.
21. Some brief backstory on the Serenade: (1) The title "Gran Partitta" [*sic*] was assigned not by Mozart but possibly by Johann Traeg (a Viennese music copyist and publisher) between 1792 and 1799 (Leeson and Whitwell 1976/77, 109–110). Mozart entitled no other piece "partita," so it is unlikely he did so here. (2) The work is a study in abundance, with no fewer than seven movements: Largo–Molto allegro, Menuetto (with two trios), Adagio, Menuetto: Allegretto (with two trios), Romance: Adagio–Allegretto–Adagio, Theme and Variations: Andante, and Finale: Molto allegro. (The last is a rondo—in fact, a special form of it that Hepokoski and Darcy [2006] call the "expanded rondeau," where "one or more of the couplet sections . . . [are] enlarged to include a . . . cluster of two or more characteristic ideas" [396].) By comparison, the other two wind serenades, K. 375 in E-flat and K. 388 in C minor, have five movements (with two minuets) and four movements, respectively. K. 361 is more elaborate in scoring as well, with twelve winds (two oboes, two B-flat clarinets, two basset horns in F, two horns in F, two horns in B-flat, and two bassoons) and a double bass (for which a contrabassoon is sometimes substituted). By comparison, K. 375 and K. 388 are scored for six and eight winds, respectively. Incidentally, K. 361 is Mozart's first piece to use the basset horn, which was invented in 1770 by the Mayrhofer brothers. (3) The dating and genesis of K. 361 is disputed and convoluted. Long story short, evidently the latest date at which it could have been composed is March 23, 1784 (Leeson 1997, 182). There is some evidence that it was composed in the summer months of 1781 for an event of which there is no extant record. It might have originated as two different works or have been composed in two distinct stages (Rustowicz 1980, 11; Leeson 1997, 186). (4) Finally, K. 361's variation movement shares some material with the second movement of Quartet for Flute and Strings in C, K. 285<sup>b</sup>, but the latter is not the source of the former; on the contrary, it "is a spurious arrangement . . . by an unknown person" (Leeson 1997, 223).

22. Mozart was known to treat topics in a compressed manner—layering them, and also changing them at breakneck speed. (On the admixture of topics and the process of *troping*, see Melanie Lowe's chapter [Chapter 11] in this volume.) Still, one might object that, even by Mozartian standards, the figures here are too fleeting to warrant the topical labels I give them. I admit that some of these—the lament bass, for example—are less full-fledged topics than characteristic figures, ones redolent of topics.
23. Another set in which the theme is tethered to the first variation, the two forming a tight-knit group, is the second movement of Brahms's Piano Sonata in C, op. 1. The reason, as Julian Littlewood explains (2004, 119–120), has partially to do with the text of the "altdeutschen Minneliede" on which Brahms bases his set.
24. I mentioned above that the interpretive work variations do tend to continue and intensify that already begun in the theme; here, we see that same idea apply to progressive rhythmic animation. This phenomenon is evident even in music that is not in variation form but still variative. In such music by Chopin, for instance, often it is precisely the phrases that feature rhythmic acceleration that are varied by phrases featuring yet further acceleration. Moreover, such a variation will typically do so at the *exact point* where such acceleration had occurred in the model. As Zofia Chechlińska states, "The ornamental groups usually fall at points where the melodic line of the model is rhythmically subdivided to a greater extent. Thus, the motion merely 'signalled' by the model is intensified" (2019, 33).
25. Not that such a phenomenon is rare among instances of the Meyer. See, for example, the passage by Dittersdorf cited in Gjerdingen (2007, Example 9.4, 113).
26. See Gjerdingen (2007, Example 9.5, 114) for a very similar example from Carl Graun.
27. Dorian Bandy argues along similar lines on behalf of Mozart's use of variational embellishment outside of variation form. Mozart tends to decorate a returning theme with ever greater intricacy and affective clarity, engendering a "sense of musical process and progress" (2022, 52), a sense of linearity that "complements the directional 'arrow' that has been located in other parameters of Mozart's style"—his cadential schemes especially.

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