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Recursive/Discursive: Variation and Sonata in the Andante of Mozart's String Quartet in F, K. 590

ROMAN IVANOVITCH

The slow movement of Mozart's String Quartet in F major, K. 590, presents a remarkable fusion of two apparently contradictory modes of musical construction: variation and sonata. Each phrase of the exposition is derived from the movement's opening eight-bar unit, yet this variation-like, "recursive" procedure is shaped through sustained engagement with the larger formal dynamic of sonata form—a goal-directed, "discursive" dynamic.

The thematic uniformity of the movement brings to the fore other musical parameters. Particularly important here are the roles of texture and sheer quality of sound—aspects of the musical experience that are hallmarks of Mozart's engagement with variation. In this pared-down environment, the understated yet virtuosic treatment of the instrumental forces—so characteristic of his later works—plays a form-defining role.

At the heart of this essay is the suggestion that variation can be understood as a vital mode of Mozart's musical thinking, an impulse evident not merely in movements labeled "theme and variation," but in his output as a whole. Accordingly, I begin by sketching a more general theoretical context for the interaction of this variation impulse with the more teleological formal dynamics of sonata.

Keywords: Mozart, variation, sonata, recursive, discursive, Wittgenstein, texture, K. 464, K. 499, K. 590

"Die erste Bewegung reiht einen Gedanken an den anderen, die andere zielt immer wieder nach demselben Ort.

Die eine Bewegung baut und nimmt Stein auf Stein in die Hand, die andere greift immer wieder nach demselben."

"One movement links thoughts with one another in a series, the other keeps aiming at the same spot.

One is constructive and picks up one stone after another, the other keeps taking hold of the same thing."

—LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Culture and Value* (1930)

OUR FAVORITE ANALYTICAL STORIES OFTEN INVOLVE CONFLICT: the odd, incongruous, frictive element, or the opposing, supposedly mutually exclusive principles. We like to think that composers will give expression to two rival forces and then, in the amphitheater of choice, let them engage in hand-to-hand combat, "work themselves out." They may remain locked forever in a dialectical struggle, unresolved or unsynthesized; or a winner might emerge triumphant; or, indeed, they may ultimately be defused and brought to a harmonious union. But in such venerable scenarios there is an indelible element of tension or *agon*.¹ Such paradigms, though, represent only one of the fictions we can tell. We might, on the contrary, choose to speak of conflict averted, strife preempted—a complex union, perhaps, but one with no jostling for preeminence. Indeed, there is no reason to suppose that a composer might

not be proud of reconciling two apparently opposing impulses, of having, from the outset, contrived a beautiful, almost paradoxical melding of their features. The slow movement of Mozart's last quartet, K. 590 in F, an unassuming movement in an overlooked work, offers a remarkable example of such a procedure, fusing together as equal partners the ostensibly exclusive impulses of variation and sonata. The significance of the movement, however, lies not simply in the virtuosity with which Mozart handles his material, but in its crystallization of a marked tendency toward recursive strategies in his music—a tendency that grew more pronounced and refined in his later compositions. In a modern theoretical environment in which increasingly sophisticated and complex models of sonata form vie for prestige, the *locus classicus* of K. 590 supports an additional, complementary narrative, one whose contextual field entails a different way of thinking—a distinctive set of concerns. In what follows, I shall sketch a brief theoretical framework for the interaction of variation and sonata, present some supporting, "typical" examples, and then proceed to a close analysis of the Andante from K. 590. The preparation should be considered less an introduction than a scaffolding, crucial to understanding what makes K. 590 so significant.

I

On the face of it, sonata and variation appear to work in very different ways. Charles Rosen, indeed, calls them "polar opposites." His careful phrasing continues:

Sonata form assumes a series of structural transformations of harmony and melody, with new material added to old, and the old material restructured, not merely repeated and varied; variation form in

Among the many people who have helped shape this project, I am particularly grateful to Kofi Agawu, Patrick McCreless, and Kristina Muxfeldt.
1 A nuanced exploration of the "unexplained oddity" narrative can be found in Dubiel (1980). The topic of archetypal analytical plots within a sonata context, particularly that of "conflict-resolution," is addressed cogently in Burnham (2001).

Mozart, on the contrary, depends on an unchanging underlying structure, in which a single melody is repeated with changing ornamentation and texture.²

The impulses which we typically, if metonymically, view as animating these formal paradigms are indeed in opposition: the impulse to return, to revisit and retrace; and a goal-directed, constructive, even transformative impulse. It is these two impulses, or “movements,”³ that are beautifully encapsulated in Wittgenstein’s formulation, quoted at the head of this article (and in that the two sentences are variants of one another, the thought itself enacts one of its impulses: Wittgenstein too is “aiming at the same spot”).⁴ It is convenient to have terms by which to refer to these impulses, and I propose here the terms “recursive” and “discursive.” Thus, we can say that variation exhibits a recursive tendency, while sonata form tends to a discursive mode.

The term recursive, from the Latin *currere*, to run, fits variation well. It connotes not only a course (whose root is also found in *currere*) but also a sense of regularity; *The Chambers*

Dictionary, for instance, defines “recur” as “to come up or come around again, or at intervals.”⁵ Recursive is also more precise than the obvious alternative “circular,” which is often used to describe the variation impulse, for neither individual variations nor complete sets tend to trace a “circle”: a course whose end is its beginning.⁶ The term “discursive” is used as a contrastive, and while the word can house radically divergent meanings—in addition to the sense I intend, it can mean roving, desultory, rambling, or digressive—it is employed here with the idea of pertaining to discourse, with the rational elements this implies. Thus: “passing from premisses to conclusions; proceeding by reasoning or argument.”⁷ This seems to fit sonata well, not because sonatas manifest a kind of “wordless rhetoric,” but because they are frequently characterized as having a single kind of goal, and (more or less explicitly) being “about” working toward that goal. Whether formulated in terms of large-scale tonal dissonance and resolution (Rosen and Schenker), or the “sonata principle” of presenting important non-tonic material back in the home key during the recapitulation (Cone), or making a strong, definitive cadence in the tonic (the “Essential Structural Closure” of Hepokoski and Darcy), our most influential conceptions of sonata involve key events that—unlike in variation sets—occur only once, after which the movement can finish. Scott Burnham characterizes this “unitary” view well:

Sonata form both sets up and resolves a consequential long-range tonal opposition, one which is said to reside in the very syntax of tonal music. It creates thereby a dialectical process: tonic begets dominant which begets tonic-again. Dominant and tonic are synthesised within a large-scale cyclic rhythm, like the great cyclic processes of nature, but with one big difference: this process closes; it is unitary and all-consuming.⁸

If the extremes of the spectrum are clear, it is equally apparent that in variation and sonata neither recursive nor discursive mode is present to the exclusion of the other (this matter is why I spoke above of a tendency). Variation sets are, after all, made up of small pieces, each of which in itself presents a small goal-directed course. Further, sets are often shaped by the composer—that is, given a sense of purpose or goal beyond their inevitable

- 2 Rosen (1994, 86–87). It is precisely the self-evident nature of this difference that leads Rosen in this essay to castigate Friedrich Blume for misreading the slow movement of the Piano Concerto in G, K. 453, as a “modified variation” form rather than a sonata form. The blunder is revealing, though. As Carl Schachter points out, in this piece “sonata procedures, though undeniably present, are far from the most striking elements of the design, for they are overshadowed by an idiosyncratic feature of the movement: each of the five large sections (including the coda) begins with an almost identical phrase, which I shall refer to as a ‘motto’” (1996, 322). It should be noted that the story often told of this movement—its search for a plausible, satisfying conclusion to the motto, discovered only in the coda—is an excellent example of the narrative of opening incongruity discussed at the head of this paper. (Less frequently mentioned, perhaps, is the way in which this strategy has an echo, a diffusively comic retelling, in the final movement of the concerto, a variation set in which the main theme’s antecedent phrase receives, via its manipulation in the presto “finale,” a variety of consequent responses, of increasing tonal groundedness and simplicity—from modulating consequent [mm. 5–8], to half cadence [mm. 253–56], to full tonic close [mm. 337–40].)

- 3 The word “movement” is a translation of the German “Bewegung” (Wittgenstein [1980, 7, 7e]). It is perhaps an echo of a term that appears nearby, “Denkbewegung,” translated by Peter Winch as “way of thinking” (although “intellectual impulse” would serve well). See the following note for a description of the larger context.

- 4 The formulation seems to refer not simply to the way thoughts can “work” (they can connect or return), but to the impulse behind such workings, to modes of thinking (one might call this a mindset). The context, an early draft of the foreword to *Philosophical Remarks*, which contains a long continuous body of text followed by several straggling sentences, suggests that Wittgenstein is concerned with modes of philosophical investigation, nothing less than ways of understanding the world: it is a “scientific” impulse that wants to “construct” things, in the name of “progress,” and it is against this impulse that Wittgenstein rails in the body of the comment proper (“It is all one to me whether or not the typical western scientist understands or appreciates my work, since he will not in any case understand the spirit in which I write.” [7]). The formulation that I have used as the epigraph—a pair of the trailing sentences—seems to have shed this specifically anti-scientific complaint. The profusion of metaphor, untempered from any single image, gives the utterance a gnomic quality, appearing to lay bare two basic universal principles.

- 5 *The Chambers Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Recur.” Note that by “recursive” I am not intending to invoke strictly grammatical or mathematical usages of the term.

- 6 At the highest formal level, the use of the term “circular” to describe variation sets which end with a thematic reprise (such as the “Goldberg” Variations) usually reflects simply the idea that, having arrived once more at the initial theme, one could begin the set all over again, ad infinitum. This is rather different from claiming that the entire trajectory of the set is itself a circle. Tovey often uses the rich metaphor of “orbital” or “diurnal” movement to capture the larger rhythms of a variation set. In the essay on variation in his Beethoven monograph (1945, 124–35), he is particularly attuned to moments when that axial momentum is halted (perhaps by a fugue that flies off “at a tangent”). In his view, one of the greatest challenges for a composer of variations is simply to provide a plausible conclusion to a set; that is, to bring the “orbital rotation” to a compelling rest.

- 7 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Discursive.”

- 8 Burnham (2001, 136). It should be observed that Burnham’s article seeks to nuance, even undermine, this conception.

temporal directedness—through processes such as progressive rhythmic diminution, “mirroring,” or other kinds of systematic textural procedures.⁹ The incursion of directed, shaping forces into the otherwise “purely” (or abstractly) recursive, paratactic environment of variation is thus a typical and oft-noted feature, part of the “practice” of the genre.¹⁰

The opposite phenomenon, the incorporation of recursive features into the ultimately teleological world of the sonata, is more intricate. Of course, certain basic structural attributes of sonata immediately suggest themselves. Most obviously, on a grand formal scale, the retracing of the exposition in the recapitulation might encourage the view of recapitulations as “variations” of expositions, perhaps coordinated with the sort of long-range tonal cyclicity to which Burnham alludes above (the two aspects are separable in principle).¹¹ Along similar lines, one could mention the axiomatic concept of “rotation” within James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy’s “sonata theory”; applied to the standard sonata (their Type 3), it implicates the development section as well, so that each of the three main sections tracks through the same arrangement of thematic modules, initially presented in the exposition as a “referential layout.”¹² At lower organizational levels, operating within rather than between the main sections, the notion of “monothematicism” might be invoked. Associated especially with Haydn, of course (as well as with later Mozart), the term itself can disguise more than it reveals, for the practices it designates can range from strategic “motto” quotations to thoroughgoing recompositions of primary theme material, and can implicate anything from just the two most stable thematic areas of a sonata exposition to

every strongly delineated internal juncture.¹³ Nonetheless, as an indication of the established possibility for a sonata discourse to turn back on itself, to recycle or rework its own premises, the concept can be an illuminating one with which to view recursive strategies (although I will not pursue it as a primary frame of reference in this essay).¹⁴

Perhaps the most sophisticated and explicit invocation of variation within sonata is found in Michael Spitzer’s recent “metaphoric model” of sonata form.¹⁵ Here variation plays a crucial role, both as the state to which second subjects naturally tend (so that they epitomize the so-called “centre–periphery” schema in contrast to the primary theme group’s “source–path–goal” schema), and also as the lens through which a second theme can itself be viewed in relation to the whole—as a “second glance” at the primary theme, a reinterpretation or variation. Counterpointed with this is the notion of a (hermeneutic) discourse that inexorably thickens with the flow of time, becoming “dense” (in the language of Ricoeur); the result is a complex weave of temporal tenses and levels of discourse, in which variation serves as a guiding force, at once specific (marked by such concrete phenomena as dyadic flips) and diffuse (since the kaleidoscopic recombination of referents yields a more abstract correspondence between “variations”).¹⁶

Important as these ideas are (and the foregoing sketch can do them little justice), they need not constrain the present study, for the conception of variation proposed here is, in a sense, simpler, more literal. This is variation at the level of the phrase—the scope within which variation operates in a variation set, involving discrete, bounded, measurable spans of music, and configured in a traditional way, in the manner of a “text” that is “commented on,” to borrow Dahlhaus’s useful

9 “Mirroring” is a translation of the term “*Spiegelung*,” used by Paul Mies (1937) in his seminal article on Mozart’s variation techniques. The term refers to the common variation strategy of textural inversion, which serves structurally either to bind together two adjacent variations or to enliven the repeated halves of a single variation. For a helpful discussion of Mies’s article, see Cavett-Dunsby (1989, 45–56).

10 Elaine Sisman views this as the inevitable consequence of the nature of repetition, which is “somewhat unstable and seeks another kind of organization” (1993, 106–07; see also 3–4). Such organization can often mimic or resemble the “dramatic process of divergence, development, and return of which sonata form claims itself the privileged embodiment.” It is precisely the notion of sonata as the “privileged embodiment” of these sorts of processes that Sisman wishes to undermine in her study, which is at root an attempt at the “rehabilitation” of variation.

11 This is Cavett-Dunsby’s approach, in considering the role of variation in sonata form (1989, 264–302). See also her examination of the reworking of second subjects in the recapitulations of the “Haydn” Quartets (1988).

12 Hepokoski and Darcy (2006). The authors suggest that, on occasion, rotational principles might be discussed as “cycles, varied repetitions, or varied restatements” (614). Although the concept is invoked at the outset of the book, an explicit theoretical justification for the idea, and a fuller sense of its intellectual heritage, can be found in their second appendix (611–14). Rotation has long been part of the conceptual arsenal of both authors, of course, stemming from their work with later composers such as Sibelius, Mahler, and Bruckner (one might say, in fact, that its application to the late-eighteenth-century sonata is a kind of “reverse engineering”). For a trenchant assessment of the term’s use in “sonata theory,” see Wingfield (2008, 149–53).

13 Somfai gives an excellent account of the flexible range of procedures employed by Haydn in his piano sonatas, which encompass all the situations mentioned above (1995, see particularly 232–36 and 266–74).

On the usage of the term monothematic as it applies to sonata practice, the two ends of the spectrum might roughly be represented by William Caplin, who describes monothematicism as “the use of the same basic idea for both the main theme and the subordinate theme” (1998, 169; in Caplin’s scheme, a “basic idea,” of course, is typically a two-measure unit), and James Webster, who suggests that, since many so-called monothematic movements eventually present new material later on in the second group, the term proper should be restricted only “to those very rare movements that are based entirely on only one theme” (2001, 692). It should be noted, however, that neither author seems particularly dogmatic about the issue.

14 The principal illustrations from Mozart’s works discussed in this article do indeed intersect with monothematic conceptions of sonata, but in the first set of examples (K. 499 and K. 464) any monothematic quality is tangible more as the absence of another sort of thematic entity than as a strong factor in its own right, and in K. 590 the term only begins to tell the whole story (a fact which is, I suppose, in itself revealing).

15 Spitzer (2008).

16 The conceptual background to the model, especially the Ricoeurian notion of discourse, is fleshed out in Spitzer (2004). See particularly Chapter 3 (“Poetics”), in which, in an additional layer, variation is presented as synonymous with “musical discourse’s paradigmatic dimension” (108)—and thus as a foundational, ubiquitous phenomenon in music.

formulation.¹⁷ While any delimiting of the concept of variation is to some extent artificial (as Nelson Goodman has observed, any two passages of music are alike in some ways and different in others),¹⁸ configuring it in *this* manner has the advantage of allowing us to import our familiar habits of variation-listening directly into the new environment, thereby emphasizing the segmented, recursive mode, the importance of pacing (the crucial imprinting of larger rhythms on the unfolding series of events), and the primacy of cadences. It also attunes us to the notion of variation as constraint, a manner of musical engagement tinged with the quotidian (even perhaps the mercantile: variations upon popular tunes), against which the master composer presses, marshalling in an imaginative way the full spectrum of technical resources. Finally, this way of conceiving variation typically involves a commitment to the musical surface, to events in plain sight, and to related aspects such as rhetorical stance, texture, and quality of sound (these elements form something of an *idée fixe* in what follows; we shall see their importance most particularly in K. 590).¹⁹

Folding this local-level idea of variation back into sonata, we can identify several ways in which variation might become prominent, its characteristic properties exploited. For instance, one of variation's basic features is, simply put, that it does something more than once. At junctures in the sonata discourse where, by convention, things are likewise done more than once—such as in closing passages—we might expect to find variation placed in relief.²⁰ Similarly, variation takes time to do its work. At places where the urgency of the sonata argument is stilled, the inherently expansive nature of variation might come to the fore—whether such an event is “built in” to the sonata, as in some second theme groups, or apparently “imposed” from without.²¹ Most crucial, perhaps, when it comes to tracking through the course of phrases or groups of phrases, is the notion of *delay*. In this context, Schenker's insights are unsurpassed, for his methods lay bare not only a controlling linear force, but also

its myriad forms of frustration, an almost inherently dramatic situation that he locates as the source (or perhaps expression) of musical artistry. His famous enduing of tone with life, at the beginning of *Free Composition*, addresses exactly this point:

In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and, in short, retardations of all kinds. Therein lies the source of all artistic delaying, from which the creative mind can derive content that is ever new. Thus we hear in the middleground and foreground an almost dramatic course of events.²²

For Schenker, “the *goal* and the course to the goal are primary.”²³ And it is in the nature of goals that they are most dramatically and conclusively felt if they are hard-won, if obstacles have been—or appear to be, or are presented as being—overcome. The emblem of this conception, at the heart of Schenkerian sonata-thinking, is of course the interruption, entailing and motivating the dramatic re-beginning, or “double return,” of the recapitulation. But on a less imposing scale (the foreground and middleground levels to which Schenker refers in the quotation above), we can suppose that variation might be employed as a delaying tactic or goal-retarding intensification at crucial nodes of the sonata discourse—those myriad smaller way-stations which both shape and reflect the larger sonata argument.

II

Some illustrations will help make the point. We shall see that, in general, variation functions as a subordinate element within the prevailing sonata context—although, importantly, the “meaning” of that subordination is not fixed. Example 1, from the first movement of Mozart's *Quartet in D*, K. 499, presents the turn of events leading up to the frustration and eventual attainment of the exposition's principal cadence in the dominant (mm. 57–73). Whether this cadence ushers in a delayed secondary theme or instead signifies the syntactical goal of the exposition is, like much else in this idiosyncratic movement, open to debate (the status of the only previous candidate for secondary theme, in m. 40, seems doubly undermined, both thematically, in its canonic reiteration of the opening theme, and harmonically, in its orientation on V/V: it appears to be “waiting music”). In any case, closure is clearly in the air, and so, to the same degree, it is startling when the signaled cadence is evaded, V moving to vi on the downbeat of m. 57. An additional surprise: instead of immediately regrouping and pressing quickly toward a rectified version of the promised cadence, Mozart tarries, protracting the submediant harmony itself, over the course of six measures, into a genuine excursion.

Over a gentle accompanimental oscillation formed by the cello and second violin, i–V in F# minor (the slow rate of

17 Dahlhaus (1991, 167). Dahlhaus posits this “traditional” conception of theme as a stable, “given” entity in order to demonstrate an important key to the propulsive logic of Beethoven's “new path” works, which, by contrast, utilize a forever fluid, indefinite “thematic configuration.” (The “Eroica” Variations, Op. 35, are a paragon in this regard.)

18 Goodman (1988, 67).

19 Kofi Agawu (1996) has written eloquently about the role of a variation aesthetic in Mozart, a pervasive mode of thinking for the composer. Although in his conception of variation Agawu ranges more freely through formal levels than does the present author, taking in anything from small phrase segments to large sections, he demonstrates the possibility for variation to reconfigure our typical modes of discourse about Mozart—an impulse this essay shares.

20 See Ivanovitch (2008) for an investigation of variation procedure within closing passages (the so-called “display episodes”) of Mozart's piano concertos.

21 Tovey's characterization is representative: second theme groups are places where “the action of the music is at leisure for melodies to behave like lyrics with a regular stanza-form” (1949, 281). The notion of regularity in second theme groups—a conception not unique to Tovey—might seem at odds with William Caplin's emphasis on “looseness” in these places, which implies a certain inefficiency or irregularity.

22 Schenker (1979, 5).

23 Ibid. Compare too with Felix Salzer: “Thus the structural outline or framework represents the fundamental motion to the goal; it shows the direct, the shortest way to this goal. The whole interest and tension of a piece consists in the expansions, modifications, detours and elaborations of this basic direction, and these we call the prolongations” (1952, 14).

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 45 to 66, and the second system covers measures 67 to 71. The notation includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. Key features include:

- Measure 45:** Starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (D major).
- Measures 46-50:** Feature a *crescendo* marking and a *p* (piano) dynamic.
- Measure 51:** Marked with a *f* (forte) dynamic.
- Measures 52-55:** Continue the *f* dynamic.
- Measure 56:** Marked with a *p* dynamic.
- Measures 57-60:** Continue the *p* dynamic.
- Measures 61-64:** Marked with a *f* dynamic.
- Measures 65-66:** End the first system.
- Measures 67-70:** Continue the second system.
- Measure 71:** Ends with a cadence, marked "(cadence!)" and a double bar line.
- Harmonic Analysis:** Labels include "A: ii₆ V vi" and "V₄: 5/3".

EXAMPLE 1. Mozart, *String Quartet in D*, K. 499, I, drive to cadence in V and submediant digression

harmonic change here contrasting markedly with the foregoing drive to the cadence), the first violin spells out a rhythmically elongated version of the arpeggiated motive upon which so much of the movement, from its very first measures, has been based. The call to return from the submediant harmonic terrain is sounded in mm. 62–63 by a more literal, quicker form of the opening motto (an exact duplicate of the opening bars of the piece, now beginning on C#). The cello drops down from F# to E, and we once more await the promised cadence in A major. In a remarkable stroke, however, Mozart again avoids closure, this time through a move to the more remote flat submediant, F major. What follows in mm. 65–73—allowing for the modal shift, and the final close in A major—can be said to retrace the course of mm. 57–65, both harmonically and melodically (the correspondence between the phrases is seen most clearly in the cello and second violin parts, but one can also note the equivalent melodic focus in each passage, C# then C). To put it more pointedly: we are encouraged to interpret mm. 65–73 *in terms of* mm. 57–65, in a manner characteristic of the recursive mindset—as a variation, in other words.²⁴

Rather than offering a simple reiteration, however, the second phrase has the property of exaggerating or emphasizing key features of the first. The impression of harmonic distance is increased, for example, F major simultaneously warmer and more remote than F# minor. The sense of stasis, the suspension of the flow of discourse that was already in evidence in the F# minor phrase, is also heightened here. The rate of harmonic motion might be identical in both phrases, but the melody of the F major passage is pared down: the voice-leading focus, C# now in the viola, is the anchor of a melodic strand that barely moves, unlike the arpeggiated sweep from C# in the first phrase (the first violin itself also marks this distance by referring to the C–A head motive of the arpeggio, now reduced to a mere embellishing prefix of an A–Bb neighbor note pattern).²⁵

The presence of this unexpected recursive “lapse,” just when the discursive logic of the movement is at its most ironclad—when a crucial cadence has been elaborately prepared—resists easy interpretation. The moment of variation can be viewed as an integral part of the drama of the movement: if the cadence projected for m. 57 was well-prepared and anticipated to begin with, withholding and delaying it in this fashion makes its attainment all the more keenly felt. And yet the patch of variation casts its own shadow. Harmonically speaking, the submediant sojourn is of course a parenthesis: m. 56 connects up with m. 73, and what happens in between is of no substance. But the passage is actually *staged* to sound parenthetical, to offer itself as distinct from its surroundings: an enclave or oasis—a lyrical reverie. Even the points of contact between this submediant section and its surroundings serve to reinforce this distinction. We have seen this in the way that the arpeggiated motto from the opening

becomes elongated, for instance. Just as telling is the contrast between the motto’s setting here—as a cantabile melody with accompaniment—and its preceding guise as an element of a canon (m. 40). And the further we delve into this submediant terrain, to the lush and exotic F major, the more this lyrical enclave seems to renounce or retreat from the sonata discourse.

And so there is a dialectical edge to this patch of variation. On the one hand, it is staged as an independent element, of a different tone and expressive nature from its surroundings, a beautiful exploration of a realm in which we might rather linger. Yet as a subordinate formal element of recursion embedded in a larger, ultimately prevailing discursive formal dynamic, it serves the more pedestrian function of delaying the inevitable. We know that this dreamlike state cannot last; the passage ends up reinforcing what it would resist. This would make for a gloomy sociological interpretation, if one were so inclined. In mitigation of this, however, I find it hard to shake off the effects of this sojourn in the music that follows. Is the cadence of m. 73 to be celebrated as a grand moment of arrival, or mourned for its curtailment of a beautiful excursion? Does it still carry the full authority of its stature and position in the larger formal scheme, or is it reduced to a mere formality? In the face of this refractory movement, it is hard to decide; the “goal” and the “course to the goal” appear to pull away from each other.²⁶

Our next example comes from the last movement of the Quartet in A, K. 464. Like the enclave of K. 499, this instance of variation also highlights one of the important hinges in the unfolding of the sonata discourse—in this case, from the development section. The moment in question is the quiet D major hymn-like passage from the heart of the development, consisting of an eight-measure *alla breve* antecedent (mm. 114–21) followed by its varied and expanded consequent (mm. 122–36). I shall discuss the passage in detail shortly (the reader can find it below as Example 4), but to understand its effect some context is required.

The movement opens innocuously, a melody set in jaunty two-part counterpoint, with a sinuous chromaticism that barely covers its scaffolding of interlocking double-neighbor notes (see Example 2). The configuration (the presentation unit of a sixteen-measure sentence) contains the beginnings and possibilities of a sequence, however, and can be taken as a sign of things to come, for this complex movement is quite remarkable in its single-mindedness: of the eighty-one bars of the exposition, the first sixty or so are devoted explicitly to working out the descending chromatic motive of the opening. Accordingly, the texture is

24 The impression of variation is further strengthened in the recapitulation, for, at the equivalent spot, the first violin and viola parts are exchanged, creating a new textural variant.

25 The connection to the distinctive arpeggio is made particularly clear in mm. 68–69, when the isolated C–A unit is folded into a return of the “motto” arpeggio.

26 Agawu has remarked on the “sizable phenomenal deficit” that results from excising apparently parenthetical stretches of music; such an act “seems to deprive the passage in question of something essential, something basic. What is left seems hardly worthwhile; the remaining music is devoid of interest; it seems banal.” Agawu pushes the point still further, to the realm of musical syntax, arguing that musical parentheses, unlike their verbal counterparts, are genuinely essential: “A grammar of music that does not recognize the essential nature of that which seems inessential is likely to be impoverished” (2009, 96–97). It should, in any case, be noted that F major remains a special key for K. 499: the development section of the first movement touches upon it (and also Bb major), and, more strikingly, the final movement begins a prominent recapitulatory statement in that key (m. 237).

Allegro non troppo

EXAMPLE 2(A). Mozart, *String Quartet in A*, K. 464, IV, mm. 1–16: score

EXAMPLE 2(B). *Sequential possibilities in mm. 1–8*

crammed full of all sorts of “intellectual” devices for spinning out and developing material: imitation, stretto, and invertible counterpoint, as well as motivic isolation and transformation. The combination of dense chromaticism and whirling counterpoint lends the movement an air of cerebral mania that, despite the articulative demands of the sonata form, is only rarely punctuated.²⁷ The first moment of reprieve comes after nearly sixty measures, with the first violin’s solo flourish in m. 59—the first instance of florid,

virtuosic solo writing in the movement, carrying with it, in its diminuendo and registral descent, the impression of a long exhalation: a moment of release (see Example 3). There follows a

question of “bypassing” a potential secondary theme does not arise here as it does in K. 499), but not without its difficulties: does the ostensible secondary theme begin in m. 40 or m. 41? (In other words, is m. 40 filler or substance?) The very fact of ambiguity over this point goes to the heart of the matter; it betokens precisely a movement whose intensity “overwhelms” clarity of punctuation and articulation. As with K. 499, applying a label “correctly” is less important than understanding the conditions of its application.

²⁷ Like the first movement of K. 499, this movement might be viewed as a “monothematic” sonata form, clearer perhaps in its overall picture (the

EXAMPLE 3. Mozart, *String Quartet in A*, K. 464, IV, mm. 54–66

two-measure homophonic interlude, the fragility of which is immediately underscored, however, by its transformation into a loud, flamboyant cadential gesture, ushering in the closing material (even in the homophonic passage, though, the imprint of the opening motive is evident in the cello's double-neighbor-note configuration).

In the development, such moments of introspection are again markedly absent, the counterpoint and chromaticism now harnessed to sequential drive, textural planes piled up as the harmonic spring is wound ever tighter. And so it is amidst this whirl, bustle, and drive that we encounter the hymn-like passage (see Example 4). Its manner of introduction is immediately striking. The sequential motor of the previous twenty measures finally comes to a halt, leaving us perched precariously on a C# major triad. A quick measure's silence—a glimpse over the edge of the precipice—and the quiet hymn enters in D major. The juxtaposition of these adjoining elements—the end of the sequential passage and the beginning of the hymn—is as stark as Mozart can allow. The oppositions of register, texture, articulation, dynamics, and affect: everything is designed to dislocate, and any thread of coherence (the impression of the semitonal shift as a “deceptive” harmonic maneuver, for instance) must be hunted out in retrospect.²⁸

²⁸ This tactic, with wrenching semitonal motion across a sharp rhetorical divide, is a favorite dislocatory device of Mozart's. As in K. 464, the harmonic shift can usually be rationalized after the fact as a deceptive move. Other instances include: Piano Sonata in Bb, K. 570, I, mm. 21–23 (the beginning of the transition); Symphony in Eb, K. 543, IV, mm. 105–08 (the beginning

As we pause at the interstice of these segments, two further contextual factors must be introduced. The first is the fact that the moment of juxtaposition is not an isolated instance in the movement. The development actually *begins* with an identical moment of dislocation (mm. 81–85, given as Example 5). The same music that later precedes the hymn also opens up the main, B minor, arena of the development proper, the F# major triad giving way, in a similar semitonal-deceptive maneuver, to a segment in G major. A cyclic quality might be hypothesized for this development, then, a spiral of action and reaction that shapes our expectations of how to proceed in m. 114. The second factor is one of convention: a listener able to keep track of the tonal course of the development will realize that, in m. 112, the harmonic spring is wound as tightly as it will reasonably go. V of vi (or vi itself) is a common marker of what Leonard Ratner terms “the point of furthest remove”: the end of the development's first, outward harmonic swing (“centrifugal motion”), and the signal for a second stage, in which the harmonic course is directed back toward the tonic (“centripetal motion”).²⁹ The two most typical strategies for effecting this return home involve either a journey on the circle of fifths (the “strongest” approach, according to Ratner), or a “quick shift” from V/vi to I. A

of the development); Violin Sonata in Eb, K. 481, I, mm. 95–96 (the beginning of the development); and String Quintet in D, K. 593, IV, mm. 102–03 (the beginning of the development), a passage which has important connections to similar shifts at the ends of the exposition and recapitulation.

²⁹ Ratner (1980, 225–27).

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146

①

②

③

① (sequenced)

② (rhythmically augmented)

③ (composed out)

crescendo

cresc.

crescendo

crescendo

p

f

opening motive

opening motive

EXAMPLE 4. *Mozart, String Quartet in A, K. 464, IV, mm. 105–146*

EXAMPLE 5. Mozart, *String Quartet in A*, K. 464, IV, end of exposition into beginning of development

EXAMPLE 6. Hypothetical move from *V/vi* to *V/I* in K. 464, IV

Mozartian variant of this shift, elucidated memorably by Wye Jamison Allanbrook in the context of the Piano Sonata in F, K. 332, involves a series of incremental stepwise voice-leading moves, a “sleight of hand” maneuver that dismantles *V/vi* and rebuilds *V/I* in its place (Example 6 shows how this would work in the present context).³⁰ In hypothesizing a form of continuation at the moment of rupture in m. 112, then, several possibilities are at hand—ranging from those informed by broad conventions to specific procedures established in this movement.

The first thing to notice, in the spirit of the example from K. 499 discussed above, is that the overall impression of this passage

is of a haven, a withdrawal or retreat from the vicissitudes of the swirl of counterpoint and sequence, and the rising harmonic tensions, that surround it (the still eye of the storm, as it were). And, as with K. 499, one of the ways in which this passage signals its retreat is through variation: the expanded consequent phrase (m. 129ff.) employs a form of textural variation, surrounding the melody (now in the higher reaches of the first violin) with a halo of figuration. Variation, as noted above, takes time and space—and in this pressing, dense environment those have been in short supply. The earlier passage to which our “hymn” is most closely related is the short two-measure homophonic interlude just before the main cadence of the exposition—and this was immediately canceled out by its “reversal” in the next two measures, the figuration in that instance serving not as support but as negation. One of the most remarkable features of this relaxing subdominant haven, then, is simply its luxurious refusal to be hurried.

To be sure, the urge to “spin out,” to develop material, is present here too, most evidently in the sequences embedded in the consequent phrase: the repetition of its opening up a step (mm. 122–25 and 126–29), and then the descending fifths of mm. 130–34. Yet the spinning out takes a different cast here, its primary characteristic being one of elongation, in contrast to the heaped strettos and contrapuntal combinations of the previous portion of the development. Indeed, for all that the modulatory consequent comes eventually to steer its own course, it can also be seen as a drawing out of the elements of the antecedent. As the annotations show, the beginning, middle, and end of the antecedent are all found in the right order in the

³⁰ Allanbrook (1992, 144). A significant body of literature has grown up around the use of *vi* or *V/vi* platforms in sonata development sections, with recurrent topics including the nature of a connection to Baroque practices and the shadings of mediation between *V/vi* and recapitulatory tonic (we shall encounter this latter topic again in the discussion of K. 590). In addition to the authors cited in the main text, seminal discussions include Rosen (1988, 262–83); Beach (1983); and Webster (1991, 133–45). A useful first point of orientation, with an excellent summary, is Hepokoski and Darcy (2006, 198–205).

consequent, but subjected to such forms of enlargement as sequence, rhythmic augmentation, and “composing out” (note how the octave descent from B5 to B4 in mm. 129–36 contains both the chromatic descent of the middle portion and the ending portion’s upper-voice descent of a fifth, now composed out into a stepwise line, against the bass 4–#4–5).³¹

Yet, as in K. 499, this passage also has work to do; its most basic and obvious task is to provide transportation from the point of furthest remove to the retransitional dominant, in preparation for the recapitulation. And so, once more, there is slippage between the “seeming” and the “doing”: in its manner of introduction, the passage is literally detached from its surroundings, a world apart. And yet, shot through with shadows of the opening motive, and “worked upon” with the implements of musical craft, it quietly discharges its allotted form-functional duty. Disengaged at one end, it is seamlessly integrated back into the discourse at the other—as it must be, a guest within the prevailing formal dynamic. So it often is with variation: presented as a luxury, it must nonetheless pay its own way.

III

This scenario of variation as a “fly in the ointment,” a momentary protrusion in the discursive flow, is the standard one, at least when variation is configured along the lines proposed here. Almost of necessity, to speak of the engagement of variation with sonata is to speak of passages, moments, patches, or instances (even if, as we have seen, it is not to fix or limit in advance the *quality* of these moments). It is in this light that we can turn now to the Andante of the Quartet in F, K. 590 (see Example 7), for, as suggested at the beginning of this essay, Mozart contrives in this movement a situation in which variation operates as a fully-fledged and thoroughgoing organizing principle, on an equal footing with sonata rather than a junior partner.

Let us begin with an emblem, a motif: we shall begin, in fact, in the middle, at the moment where development gives way to recapitulation (mm. 61–63). Simply glanced at on the page, this moment reveals little out of the ordinary. Arriving at E major, taken as the dominant of A minor (V of vi, globally speaking), a slender connecting thread is spun out in the first violin, a lone E that wavers chromatically before being absorbed into the C major of the recapitulation. V of vi, of course, is the point of furthest remove, and this particular return to the tonic might be considered striking only in its abruptness: the brief common-tone lifeline is the most meager of attempts to smooth the gap—a quaint gesture, perhaps, emphasizing its ancestral Baroque overtones or hearkening back to some of Mozart’s earlier works, such as the violin concertos of the 1770s. In context, however, the move is stunning, for it mimics exactly the manner in which

the development was itself approached from the exposition (mm. 44–47), the earlier section ending in G major followed by a common-tone modulation down a major third to E♭.

To enter and leave the development in similar fashion is not unheard of (there were hints of this in the finale of K. 464, discussed above). But here the two configurations match almost exactly, with only a tiny difference in their voicing (although, as we shall see, that change is not without significance: texture and sound quality acquire special importance in this movement). Nor are thematic markers of much help here, since the beginning of the development is, in this respect, identical to that of the exposition. Mozart seems to have used every resource at his disposal, then, to effectively efface one of the critical moments of sonata form (Mozartian developments may start elliptically; recapitulations rarely so).³² We might speak of this brand of formal ambiguity as a kind of *topographical flatness*: the environment lacks the customary landmarks by which we typically orient ourselves—or, more precisely, the landscape here is not exactly featureless; rather the requisite markers are not sufficiently distinct from one another (perhaps “topographical uniformity,” then). This idea of an uncertain geography, entailing adjustments to our listening strategies, is an important key to this movement, and it is in the crystallization of this idea that the moment of recapitulation can be considered emblematic.

32 To call this moment critical is not to opine on whether the double return is *defining* for what we call “sonata form” (as for instance in Webster [2001, especially 687–90]), and we do not need to get swept into the vortex of issues such a statement would bring: it is clear by this point in the movement that we are in the kind of sonata in which a double return *is* expected (we are playing a “Type 3 game,” as Hepokoski and Darcy might say [2006]). Leaving aside situations in which tonal and thematic returns are not coordinated (i.e., thematic reprises that begin away from the tonic—some examples of which are discussed at the end of this essay—or tonic returns that are not marked by thematic re-beginnings—as in Hepokoski and Darcy’s “Type 2” sonatas, some variants of which have traditionally been labeled “reverse recapitulations”), there are relatively few Mozart sonata recapitulations the commencement of which is somehow disguised or uncertain. One example is offered by the Haydnesque finale of the Quartet in D, K. 499, whose playful formal intentions are signaled at the very opening by the highly unusual (for Mozart) “off-tonic” beginning: despite the pedal D, the listener’s key-perception at the start of the movement is tilted inevitably toward the subdominant, a joke Mozart happily exploits at strategic junctures. The moment of recapitulation is technically in m. 198, but it is scarcely detectable as such: the inherently preparatory character of the opening theme, combined with a substantial recomposition—full-textured and imitative now, rather than slight and jerky—makes m. 198 sound for all the world like a continuation of the development section. Another instance—utterly different in character—can be found in the Adagio in B minor, K. 540, whose recapitulation begins in m. 35 as the third iteration of an ascending sequence that passed from G minor (m. 31) through A minor (m. 33) to B minor. The only outward clue that we have entered recapitulatory space in m. 35 is a textural one: the reversion—provoking a subliminal charge of recognition—to the piece’s opening configuration, with the arpeggiated melody back now in the right hand, instead of the left (as it had been in the previous sequential units). I am grateful to David Cohen for reminding me of this example.

31 This procedure is reminiscent of the relaxed, lyrical motivic working at the beginning of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major. The piano’s opening invocation (mm. 1–5) prompts an orchestral response that involves a similar stretching out of the thematic components through the use of sequence, inversion, and rhythmic augmentation (mm. 6–14).

"Theme"

Andante. (Alligretto.)

33 Variation ④

Codetta

Variation ①

9

Variation ②

15

Variation ③

21

27

41

47

53

58

(Recapitulation)

Vvi

EXAMPLE 7. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, K. 590, II, opening to beginning of recapitulation*



EXAMPLE 7. [Continued]

Let us turn now to the exposition. The opening thematic module (mm. 1–8) is tightly constructed from a tiny number of components, drawing almost obsessively from a small rhythmic palette, employing a sentential construction that encloses a sequence between its opening units (thus deriving four bars of material from two), and spanning the modest melodic range of a fifth. This marked sparseness is a microcosm of the economy of means exhibited by the movement as a whole. Almost everything can be described in terms of two axiomatic elements: a thematic element, the opening eight-bar sentence, and a textural component, the accompanimental strand of figuration that enters in the second eight-bar block. This striking expression of a recursive bent—the opening eight-bar phrase quite different, in its spatial properties (its palpable expanse), from a motive (the sort of grounding element employed by the exposition of K. 464’s finale)—suggests that we can describe the exposition as a series of variations, four in all, followed by a codetta. Each of these variations comprises an eight-measure sentence in the 2+2+4 mold, based on the opening module, and reproducing exactly its distinctive rhythmic profile (the one exception is the third variation, mm. 25–33, the five-measure “continuation” unit of which departs from the established pattern).

The cold description perhaps sounds unpromising, and Mozart’s subtle phraseology disguises what might otherwise be an unbearably four-square construction, particularly through the elision of phrase endings with beginnings (the last bar of one phrase becoming the first bar of the next), and through the use of strands of figuration either to cover the cracks of a phrase join (seen embryonically in the first violin in m. 8, and then in mm. 16 and 24), or to suggest processes that continue beyond the phrase (or variation) in which they were begun.³³ This last

procedure is illustrated in the second variation (mm. 17–24), in which a strand of figuration begins to travel up through the instruments, starting with the cello. The process cuts across the phrase divisions, however, for it is only at the beginning of the next (third) variation that the baton is finally passed to the first violin. The resonance of this technique of passing from one instrument to another a “focal point” of the texture—whether a prominent melody or an active filament of figuration—is unmistakable: it suggests immediately the environment of variation, where it is a common method of binding together separate variations. Ready examples in Mozart include the variation movements of the Trio in G, K. 564, the Quartet in D minor, K. 421, and the Quartet in A, K. 464; in this latter work, it forms an important organizational principle over the course of the set, recapitulated in brief between the last variation and the thematic reprise (mm. 145–60; see Example 8).³⁴

Now, it is clear that these little “variations” also bear the imprint of the sonata environment in which they flourish, the melding of sonata and variation achieved, without drama or friction, through the adaptation of each phrase to fit a specific sonata niche. So, in the exposition, the first phrase, progenitor of all that follows, is actually incomplete: it is but an antecedent. The ensuing consequent (mm. 9–16) must provide closure to the pair of phrases and round off the tonic key area—and so its tail end is altered. The next eight-bar phrase (or variation) is designed as a transitional unit, and thus its continuation (mm. 21–24) moves to the dominant, ending on V of V. The next phrase functions as the ostensible secondary theme of the sonata, its structural importance highlighted not simply by its clinching of the dominant but also by the coincidence of this harmonic arrival with the endpoint of the figuration strand’s upward migration, which began in m. 16 (this phrase takes over, too, almost as in a chain-like process, the new I–V–V–I presentation format of the transitional material).³⁵ It is hard to ascribe a stock sonata function to the variation that

33 A useful contextual foil is provided here by William Rothstein’s discussion of duple construction and sentence structure in the first movement of Haydn’s Quartet in D minor, Op. 42. Rothstein shows how each main segment of the exposition is based on—or at least projects—an eight-measure sentence template, disguised through artful manipulations such as cropping, expansion, and parenthetical insertion. The underlying principle—fashioning entire expositions from four- or eight-measure “basic phrases”—is not an isolated one, he suggests (it is “fundamental to most of Haydn’s sonata forms of 1785–88”), but only in certain “strategic points in the exposition” are the basic phrases likely to “step forward plainly” (often in the manner of a “tune”) (1989, 151–57). What is striking about all this in connection with K. 590 is the relative *lack* of concealment or disguise in Mozart’s movement. This literalness is part of its daring—and, in that Mozart pulls it off, also part of its virtuosity.

34 Elaine Sisman convincingly appeals to the potent logic of this textural process in her assessment of the original plan of K. 464, in which Variation 3 was followed by what is now Variation 6, the active strand migrating directly from viola to cello (1993, 210–14).

35 The powerful effect of small changes occurring within a larger field of similarity is wonderfully exploited here: for the first time, in the continuation portion of the sentence (mm. 29–33), the detached rhythmic articulation gives way to legato phrasing, first in the inner voices and then in the first violin, whose sustained, joined-up line, so vocal in character, is like nothing we have heard so far. Even the figuration changes its meaning in this passage.

EXAMPLE 8. Mozart, *String Quartet in A*, K. 464, III, end of Variation 6 and retransition to reprise

follows (mm. 33–39), but its gestural function is familiar enough, and unmistakable: it is the tense dramatic foil, a crucial turn of the screw, against which the diatonic and conventional simplicity of the closing phrase will be felt.³⁶ It is thus the most complex variation, marked with chromaticism, the subject in thirds counterpointed against itself—a stretto that yields a corresponding rhythmic complexity in its layered superposition of the distinctive pattern.

In m. 26, the octave oscillations in the first violin betoken the by-now established characteristic of the figuration as a single strand woven into the fabric, as an overlay; in m. 28, however, the “figuration” becomes a full participant on multiple planes, the octave oscillations unfolding into simultaneous voices, one a pedal, the other singing with the first violin in parallel sixths. The effect of sustained voices in the cello is an illusion, but one that encapsulates exactly the metamorphosis undergone by the figuration.

³⁶ The complementarity of these phrases is most directly evident in their ascending and descending melodic contours.

This adaptation of a thoroughgoing recursive impulse to the needs of a forward-directed argument, in which each element of the formal scheme must play a different role, is remarkable. Revisiting Rosen’s observation, quoted earlier—that, unlike variation, “sonata form assumes a series of structural transformations of harmony and melody, with new material added to old, and the old material restructured, not merely repeated and varied”—it seems that, here, the material is both restructured *and* repeated and varied. The two impulses, apparently “polar opposites,” not only co-exist peacefully but reinforce each other, the one impulse the foil against which the other can be measured.

A companion illustration is instructive here, one which presents a similar scenario, but on a smaller scale. Example 9 presents the theme and fifth variation from the slow movement of the *Quartet in A*, K. 464. Here, Mozart crafts a variation that simultaneously traces the course of the theme—a typical binary construction—while also managing to suggest its own internal

a) Theme

 EXAMPLE 9(A). *Mozart String Quartet in A, K. 464, III: Theme*

variation process, in which each eight bar phrase is composed of the same combination and ordering of the contrapuntal elements (see my annotations). Mozart's concession to the harmonic structure of the theme is reflected in the ends of the eight-bar variation phrases, which close on the tonic or dominant as necessary; his concession to the newly-fashioned internal variation structure is to shear the last phrase (and its repeat) of a deceptive move near its end, which, with its resulting two-bar extension (the theme's second half is ten measures long), would upset the carefully arranged parallelisms. With its written-out repeats, each of which intensifies the preceding phrase, and its dedication to the theme's overarching harmonic scheme, the variation *in toto* enacts a satisfying and necessary journey; and yet each of its four phrases covers essentially the same ground.

The salient difference between this variation and K. 590 is not really one of scale, though; it is a question of presentation. In K. 464, the union of teleology and recursion is clandestine,

hidden beneath the elaborate surface of contrapuntal artifice. Only under close scrutiny does the variation yield up its secret—the internal variations buried within. In K. 590, on the other hand, the enmeshing of the two impulses is part of the expressive fabric of the piece, to be taken into account from the very start; the markers of sonata and variation saturate the movement, from surface to structure, and the story of the movement cannot but be told in terms of these two elements.

IV

By way of conclusion, I should like to trace a supplementary path through the movement, a thread that emerges naturally from the special environment Mozart has created. The effect of the pervasive variation dynamic on the sonata discourse has been described as a sort of topographical flattening. Changing metaphors, we might compare this absence of overt markers to

b) Variation 5

1a 2a 3a 4a A'

9 1a 2a B

17 1a 2a 1b 2b 3b 4a

25 1a 2b 3b 4a

EXAMPLE 9(B). *Mozart String Quartet in A, K. 464, III: Variation 5*

a sort of sensory deprivation. And just as a lost or missing sense can eventually come to be compensated for, so here, in this altered environment, other parameters accrue special significance, as we become attuned to elements for which we might not otherwise have listened. One of the enduring features of Mozart's engagement with variation is his love for, and exploration of,

texture, and it is this aspect, together with related concerns such as tone color, scoring, and figuration, that come strikingly to the fore in this movement.

We might latch onto the concern with texture, the sheer sound of the quartet, right at the outset, in the insistent repeated chords of the first measure. This somewhat vague

awareness of quality of sound or texture is given focus in the consequent phrase (mm. 9–16), when the embellishing strand emerges in the first violin. The analysis in the previous section already touched upon this layer of figuration, and some of its implications, but what is perhaps most obvious about this extra strand is precisely that it is an *addition*: the four-voiced sonority of the antecedent is preserved exactly in the lower three voices, with the second violin making up the difference in double stops. This *trompe l'oreille*, as four instruments do the work of five, is the first evidence of the extraordinary resourcefulness and ingenuity Mozart invests in accommodating the thread of figuration—an inventiveness demonstrated most simply in the transitional variation (mm. 17–24), where the strand is passed up from the lowest instrument to the highest, and the scoring of each segment of the phrase is altered accordingly. Indeed, none of the variations in the exposition are scored in the same way, and it is clear that Mozart has labored hard to produce unusual voicings, even when they are not strictly required by the demands of the figuration strand (see, for instance, the beginning of the transitional unit, in which the second violin, rather than the viola, provides the bottom of the texture).³⁷

In fact, texture plays a subtle role in delineating the form of the movement. There is, for instance, a textural process at work across the exposition: the main thematic material is presented first in four voices, played by four instruments; in four voices, played by three instruments; in three voices; and then in two voices—and it against this attenuation that the complex stretto of the next variation gains force. Perhaps the site of greatest complexity for the transaction between texture and form is the beginning of the recapitulation, a section which here exhibits a distinctive feature of Mozart's later works, seen particularly in the slow movements of the string quintets, namely, the addition in a thematic return of a new layer of figurative material upon the preexisting texture. This aspect of being shot through, or speckled with figuration (in its layering effect quite different from the embellishment of a melody) can take on the celebratory cast of an apotheosis, as in the rondo returns of the Quartet in D, K. 575. Yet in the quieter, more introspective movements, the effect is quite different. Maynard Solomon has written of the ways in which some of Mozart's recapitulations, especially in slow movements, seem to transform rather than rehearse. Speaking of the Andante of the Sonata in B \flat , K. 333, he observes that its “lavishly ornamented recapitulation . . . emphasizes the reaching of a transformed and heightened state rather

than a simple return to an antecedent condition.”³⁸ Mozart's great stroke in his later works is to suggest this heightened state not through lavish embellishment, but through changes in texture, and in the quality and intensity of sound (a similar preoccupation can be found in Schubert's late works—see, for example, the recapitulations of the slow movements of the later piano sonatas and the String Quintet). Here, in K. 590, the textural layer is fashioned of new material, chordal skips in the rhythm of Scotch snaps, and it helps create the rarefied atmosphere of the beginning of the recapitulation—a special atmosphere that continues until the end of the first tonic block in m. 78, after which, as we revert to the familiar textural world of the exposition, there is a palpable sense of depressurization.

There is an extra complication, however: accommodating the new strand of figuration at the beginning of the recapitulation requires that, if the full four-voiced texture of the opening of the movement is to be maintained, then three instruments must do the work of four. This constraint was observed in the second phrase of the exposition (the consequent), yet the permutation of instruments here is in fact new: the violins take the upper three voices, leaving the viola free for the new layer.³⁹ And unlike the second phrase of the exposition, in which the *trompe l'oreille* arrangement was covered by the first violin's figuration, at the very beginning of the recapitulation the special sonority is completely exposed, the viola's entrance filling up the previously empty space at the end of the presentation units. To return to our initial observation on the movement—that the transition from development to recapitulation is deliberately “unmarked”—we can see that there is in fact a subtle clue to the change in surroundings in the special sonority starting in m. 63. Music theory does not possess a well-articulated grammar of texture and sound quality: our sense for the interaction between structure, expression, and texture is largely common sense. But we do have the rudiments of a grammar in our ability to grasp *difference*. We cannot say that the texture in m. 63 sounds “recapitulatory,” for instance, but we can note its qualitative difference and organize a new set of listening hypotheses and expectations around this fact.

Other instances in Mozart come to mind, vivid places where signs of return collide with these rarefied aspects of sound quality. Such examples include the flat mediant recapitulation of the Andante of the Piano Concerto in C, K. 467, which arrives via a “magical” modulation from the dominant of the home key; the subdominant recapitulation of the Sonata in C, K. 545; and the

³⁷ The most striking voicing in the piece is surely to be found in the very last chord. In the final phrase, the strand of figuration is passed up through the instruments. Just as it reaches the uppermost regions of the first violin's range, three octaves above middle C (the highest C feasible for the violin), the other instruments present the lowest possible voicing of a C major triad (second violin and cello right at the bottom of their registers, viola providing the lowest possible third). This combination of lowest and highest is surely the most “extreme” voicing of the C major triad practical for a string quartet in Mozart's time. (For an extended, enlightening discussion of registral disposition in the classical string quartet, in this case pertaining to Haydn, see November [2007]).

³⁸ Solomon (1995, 198).

³⁹ The consequent phrase of the exposition (mm. 9–16) used the second violin in double stops and the viola as the third voice (now the roles of first and second violins, respectively). Since there are no registral reasons to prevent the viola's Scotch snap figuration being taken by the first violin (thus reproducing the configuration of the exposition's consequent), we can assume there is another reason for Mozart's alteration here—perhaps simply a desire for variety, or, more likely, because using the viola as the bearer of figuration here allows Mozart to save the first violin for its interplay with the cello at the outer extremities of the ensemble in the next phrase (mm. 71–78), a function for which the viola is less suitable.

The musical score is for the second movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, K. 467. It shows measures 67 through 72. The key signature is C major. The score is written for piano and includes various dynamics such as *sf*, *sfz*, *p*, and *coll'arco*. Measures 67-71 show a series of chords and arpeggios in the right hand, with the left hand providing a steady accompaniment. Measure 72 begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a *pizzicato* instruction for the right hand.

EXAMPLE 10. Mozart, *Piano Concerto in C*, K. 467, II, end of development into beginning of recapitulation

apparent B \flat major “reprise” in the G-major slow movement of the Quintet in D, K. 593, a passage that is eventually revealed as the beginning of the development section. In all these instances, a crucial element of the “strangeness” of these regions, their off-kilter aspect, is tied to their sound quality: the tonal landscape is more intense, the tessitura “wrong,” the flatward drift too marked. This emphasis on sound quality is even more pronounced in that the formal markers might indicate quite the

opposite. In K. 467, for instance (see Example 10), the local signposts might lead one to deduce that the A \flat major recapitulation is actually in the right key: the stepwise voice-leading maneuver that Mozart uses to glide from the C major to A \flat major chords mimics the familiar “point of furthest remove” slide from V/vi to I. The pun is that the “magical” modulation is exactly what we would expect—for a movement in A \flat . The extra twist in K. 590 is that the markedly different sound quality

is an indication that we are in the *right* key. In an inversion of K. 467, the formal signposts of K. 590 are obscure, but the tonal orientation is correct.

v

This is a good place to stop, the landscape now crowded with the features of variation and sonata, of style, convention, and form, and hued with the characteristically Mozartian affinity for the play of texture. Analysis is at root an activity of comparison, and to compare is to contextualize, to assert that “this belongs with that,” setting phrase against phrase, piece against piece, model against realization, a matter not just of revelation but even of constitution. It is also to choose, to select and arrange, an activity that aspires to grasp whole things, but which must content itself with partial glimpses, landscapes crisscrossed multiple times, from different directions. The contextual field—the “album”—arranged here around K. 590 shapes it as a remarkable expression of a recursive tendency, a way of thinking that “keeps aiming at the same spot”: the abbreviated recursive indulgences of K. 499 and K. 464 suggest how fragile variation can be out in the open, and how, partly as a consequence, it can become encoded as “another way of doing things”; the connections made to variation sets attune us to strategies that prize textural resourcefulness, and to the adjustments between recursive and discursive modes that are naturally laid bare in the pared-down environment of variation. The understated nature of the slow movement of K. 590 should not obscure the boldness of its conception nor the technical virtuosity that enables it. Indeed, the movement can be viewed almost as an experiment in the exploration of the recursive mode; as such it connects up with such late essays as the slow movement of the Quintet in E \flat , K. 614, which fuses together variation and rondo, and (for all that it belongs to a completely different expressive realm) the Overture to *Così fan tutte*, which pushes a local recursive strategy to the limits of sense, combining and recombining thematic modules with bewildering capriciousness.⁴⁰ Ultimately, however, K. 590 might be seen as remarkable simply as a macrocosmic expression of something we have heard countless times on a different scale, in question-answer, antecedent-consequent

constructions, refrains, returns, and recapitulations—although perhaps without being aware of it in quite this way. For Mozart, boundlessly inventive, change is a constant; and yet change derives its meaning only from what is unchanged. For listeners, acknowledging the push and pull of these two forces—and their potential as creators of shape and form—is simultaneously our most rudimentary and complex task.

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⁴⁰ Not to be overlooked here is an earlier recursive experiment, the Rondo in D, K. 485. As William Rothstein has observed, not only is the piece really “a sonata form in the style of a rondo”—that is, a sonata whose main theme sounds—and is treated—like a rondo refrain (for more on the question of genre in K. 485, see Galand [1995, especially 32–36])—but in fact “every section of the piece is based on the refrain.” Remarkably, in one form or another, the theme is heard throughout the piece no fewer than fourteen times. Some of the compositional problems set up in K. 485 resonate strongly with K. 590, and indeed, the grounding challenge of Rothstein’s analysis is to show Mozart’s compositional virtuosity in forming “a moderately substantial piece out of a minimum of melodic material”—a matter partly of *demonstration*, Mozart being *seen* at certain key points to escape the threat of monotony (2005, 204, 212). In that it relies even less than K. 485 on modest phrase expansions, developmental processes, or connective flourishes, K. 590 might be seen as the more radical piece, perhaps.

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