
 JEFFREY SWINKIN

 VARIATION AS THEMATIC ACTUALISATION: THE CASE OF
 BRAHMS'S OP. 9

Variations may be classified into (a) those which show that the composer knows his theme, and (b) those which show that he does not. (Tovey 1972, pp. 139–40)¹

I

Generally speaking, variation sets in the Classical period are characterised primarily by embellishment and change of texture, effected so as to create a multitude of views of the same object. In the Romantic period, on the other hand, the theme is not so much decorated as reinterpreted: its harmonic and melodic constituents are exposed, then reconfigured. The change can be traced back to as early as 1802, the year in which Beethoven wrote his *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35, describing them to his publishers as having been composed in ‘a truly new manner’. Yet, like many generalisations, this binary opposition distorts reality to a certain extent: not all variations in Classical sets are primarily decorative, and even those that are often employ figuration and texture in subtle, strategic ways so as to foreground, elucidate and alter tonal and motivic elements of the theme.² Indeed, decorative and interpretative functions can coexist. Conversely, some variations in Romantic sets are unapologetically decorative: their figuration fails to shed new light on their themes.³ However, the stylistic dichotomy proposed here does, I believe, reflect a general trend, according to which nineteenth-century variations reimagine their themes more often, and more significantly, than do their eighteenth-century predecessors.⁴

This dichotomy may be recast from the standpoint of a theme. The implicit corollary of the belief that Classical variations are essentially decorative is that the theme in a Classical set is an autonomous entity with fixed melodic and harmonic components, susceptible to embellishment but not reinterpretation. In other words, anyone who presupposed a set of variations to be primarily ornamental would probably also regard the theme as self-contained, self-defined and directly given – an entity whose underlying structural properties are neither laid bare nor fundamentally altered in the course of the variations. By contrast, anyone who granted variations greater interpretative potency would probably regard the theme not as an *a priori* entity but as something whose identity is contingent upon the processes to which it is subjected. Again, although we can not neatly align the former conception with the pre-*Eroica* sets and the latter one with those of Beethoven’s middle period and beyond, I contend that the themes

of nineteenth-century variation sets – particularly those of Beethoven and Brahms – fall into the latter category more frequently than do their forerunners.

I would emphasise, however, that this change in approach has less to do with the constitution of the themes themselves than with the way composers applied techniques of variation. The waltz by Diabelli on which Beethoven based his Op. 120 may be of no greater artistic worth than the song ‘Ah vous dirai-je, maman’ on which Mozart based his K. 265. The difference – and this is not to underestimate the ingenuity of Mozart’s piece – is that Beethoven approached his theme with a stronger sense of its polysemous character, a deeper conviction of its susceptibility to interpretation. And, no doubt, Beethoven’s instinct about Diabelli’s tune was a self-fulfilling prophecy – the theme, bent to his creative inclinations and machinations, turned out to be as nuanced as his variations ultimately rendered it. Apropos of the epigraph to this study, Beethoven clearly knew his theme intimately: he sensed what it was capable of and wrestled with its manifold possibilities.

The *Albumblatt* by Robert Schumann on which Brahms based his elegant Op. 9 Variations (1854) is, to be sure, not as coarse as Diabelli’s theme, although it seems to be of comparable simplicity. Yet Brahms, no less than Beethoven, teases out all manner of harmonic, rhythmic and motivic nuance from this unassuming piece. As I will demonstrate, many of the thematic details and relationships on which Brahms’s Variations uncannily seize are so minute and nebulous that, were it not for the variations, they would scarcely be perceived, much less regarded as significant. The variations, in other words, manifest latent features of the theme, features of which we might not otherwise be aware. Put more strongly, the variations retroactively define what the theme in fact is. (Again, Beethoven’s *Diabelli* set is paradigmatic of this notion: if not for Beethoven’s masterpiece, who would have thought Diabelli’s cobbler’s patch amenable to such contrapuntal ingenuity, harmonic abstruseness and spiritual transcendence?) This view of the theme as retroactively defined will no doubt evoke for some readers the Beethoven-Hegelian aesthetic expounded by Carl Dahlhaus and, more recently, Janet Schmalfeldt. My notion of thematic actualisation shares some common ground with this aesthetic but is by no means perfectly aligned with it. Indeed, a more apt theoretical framework for my discussion is provided by the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit*. Hence, before proceeding to an analysis of Brahms’s Op. 9 and some secondary examples, I will touch upon both concepts.

II

Theodor Adorno postulates that in his middle period Beethoven, out of a concern to create organic unity and overarching processes, devised themes made up of very basic – one might even say primordial – elements so that they were thoroughly amenable to development, readily absorbed by the whole. These themes exemplify Adorno’s more general assertion that the musical particular in this style is ‘intended to represent the unprocessed, preexisting natural stuff:

hence the triads Precisely its [the particular's] lack of specific qualities ... makes possible the complete submergence in the totality' (Adorno 1988, p. 23).⁵ The opening themes of the *Eroica* Symphony and *Appassionata* Sonata are cases in point: the first half of each theme is nothing more than an arpeggiation of the tonic triad. Dahlhaus adopts a similar but more extreme stance: he maintains that in this style themes are often not even to be found in any concrete sense. That is, themes often do not reside at a determinate point in musical space but rather come into being gradually as the piece unfolds. In this sense, in Beethoven's middle period the theme is no longer the precondition for a developmental process but a part of that process from the outset.

Paradigmatic in this regard is Beethoven's *Tempest* Sonata. Dahlhaus's reading of the first-movement exposition, especially as amplified and historically contextualised by Schmalfeldt, is now so well-known as to require little rehearsal.⁶ In a nutshell, Beethoven's exposition is demonstrably processive in that the formal function of each section crystallises only in retrospect, on the basis of subsequent musical events. In Dahlhaus's estimation, bars 1–21 are not yet a theme, and bars 21–41 are no longer one. The former section appears too erratic to constitute a stable thematic area and thus initially seems introductory. The latter, in its motoric rhythmic drive and decisive enunciation of the tonic, seems stable and thus thematic, yet this section soon proves to function as a transition to the contrasting key of A minor. Hence, only because bars 21–41 are ultimately shown to be transitional do bars 1–21 turn out to have been thematic. Bars 1–21, in other words, are introductory-becoming-thematic, while bars 21–41 are thematic-becoming-transitional. Then, in bars 41ff. the accompaniment stands on the secondary dominant while the melody articulates motivic fragments, so this section seems to prepare the secondary tonal/thematic area. Yet upon the arrival of bar 55, which apparently initiates a closing theme (or perhaps a second secondary theme), the previous fourteen bars are seen, in retrospect, to be the secondary theme (or perhaps the first secondary theme).⁷ We need follow this analysis no further: in music of such dialectical persuasion (or, perhaps, when music is parsed by analysts of such persuasion), 'nowhere is the thematic material "given" in the sense of a text on which a development section comments; rather, it is involved in the developmental process from first to last' (Dahlhaus 1991, pp. 170–1). The theme is not ontologically certain from the outset but rather comes into being as the piece unfolds. By the time we recognise the existence of a thematic entity, it is already being developed or has passed on to another idea.

Although the themes of variation sets are, by definition, obviously more full-fledged and self-contained than in the scenario just described, I believe that, starting with middle-period Beethoven, they nonetheless evince in some sense the retrospective ontology of which I have been speaking. And even though their location in formal space is not open to question as in the *Tempest*, their identity is. That is, the identity or constitution of these themes is largely contingent upon the variational processes to which they are subjected. Beethoven heralds his new

stance towards the variation-set theme by the manner in which he presents the theme of the *Eroica* Variations. Namely, he constructs the theme literally from the bottom up, launching the set with its bass line alone and building the texture incrementally until arriving at the homophony of the theme in all its glory. Here again, the theme is a consequence of development: Beethoven dismantles the theme not only after but also prior to presenting it as a totality. Apparently, he no longer takes the theme as a given, an entity whose properties are self-evident.⁸ This stance towards the theme is also evident in the variations, which treat the theme not as a material entity whose structure they must perpetually reproduce but as an abstract repository of various attributes to be separated out, developed and reconfigured. As Dahlhaus observes, the variations dissolve the theme into its separate components of melody, bass, harmony and metre, which might otherwise be assumed to be inextricable. Variations 2 and 3, for example, are devoted almost entirely to the harmonic-metric framework of the theme; variation 3, in particular, repositions the harmonies with respect to the metre and thus in a sense teases those parameters apart. Dahlhaus declares that 'Beethoven takes his harmonic-metric framework to pieces It would scarcely be exaggerating to call the variation cycle *in toto* an analytical process: a breaking-down of the thematic complex' (1991, p. 172) into its various constituents.⁹ The *Eroica* set thus effects within variation form a paradigm shift whereby the theme is reconceived as a repository of properties, many of them exposed *ex post facto*; the variations themselves choose which properties should be foregrounded and how they should interact.

Taking this notion one step further, I contend that certain thematic features are particularly dependent upon variations for their ontological solidity – are particularly susceptible to retroactive definition – because of the nebulous or obfuscated manner in which they are initially presented. That is, such features exist in embryonic form such that, if not for the variations which manifest these features in more obvious ways, they would probably not be recognised as full-fledged features. For this reason, many thematic features are discernible only in retrospect, as a result of being amplified by one or more variations. Themes which have several such features, then, may be considered repositories not so much of concrete properties, but rather of more abstract potentialities which are actualised by the variations. In other words, these themes are largely inextricable from their variations – what they are can not be entirely separated out from how they are varied.¹⁰ Such is the case, I believe, with Brahms's Op. 9.

Although the Hegelian paradigm is manifestly appropriate for cases like the *Tempest* Sonata, it is arguably less so for variation sets of a markedly retroactive disposition. For one, the continual revising or 'becoming' of formal function in many sonata-form works of middle-period Beethoven engenders and is engendered by the directed motion, the teleological trajectory, with which that style is associated. Yet thematic actualisation in the Romantic variation form by no means necessarily entails such a propulsive dynamic.¹¹ Restated in temporal terms, the Hegelian model emphasises futurity – it implies an entity projecting

itself into the future – whereas pieces such as Brahms's Op. 9 arguably place more emphasis on pastness.

Second, although in Beethoven's sonata forms the progressive realisation of thematic identity (in conjunction with a goal-oriented drive) has an affirmative, positive connotation, the comparable process in the variation form need not feel so positive. By the same token, thematic actualisation in the variation form is arguably more intellectual than visceral: the variations are so many excursions on the theme and hence lean towards a more reflective character (without denying the vim and vigour which a Romantic variation set can sometimes generate). Hence, we seek a model that more readily lends itself to the sense of irresolution and unfulfilled longing associated with Romanticism in general, and to the often wistful, melancholy mood of Brahms's Op. 9 in particular. Indeed, the analysis of actualisation, as we shall see, must account for features which are not realised, or which at least are realised to greater and lesser degrees. Such analysis must also account for features which are realised but also are irreducibly ambiguous or problematic in some way. In other words, a variation may vividly portray a thematic problem without necessarily 'solving' it. In these two respects as well, actualisation can not be equated with positivity.

Hence, given the teleological and affirmative connotations of the Beethoven-Hegelian aesthetic, it is perhaps not the most apposite model by which to elucidate thematic actualisation in Romantic variation form.¹² A more appropriate model (suggested to me by Kevin Korsyn) might be Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, which may be loosely translated as 'deferred action' or 'deferred effect', depending on the context. Freud develops this notion primarily in two case studies, those of Emma and of the Wolfman.

Briefly, in *Project for a Scientific Psychology* Freud relates the case of Emma, who suffered from the compulsion of not being able to visit a shop on her own. During treatment, Emma produced two memories relevant to this inhibition. In the first, of an incident which occurred shortly after she reached puberty, she remembers two clerks having laughed at her as she entered a shop, whereupon she ran off; she also recalls having been sexually aroused by one of the clerks. In the second, when she was younger – eight years old – she went into a shop to buy sweets, and the shopkeeper touched her genitals through her clothes.¹³ Freud relays that the second memory, that of the earlier incident, aroused in Emma a feeling of sexual release which she was not able to experience when the incident occurred, because she was young and prepubescent: at the time, the potential sexual energy was repressed and transformed into anxiety that in the later incident prompted her to flee the shop, fearing a similar assault. Emma's trauma arose not from the earlier incident *per se* but from that incident's being reconceived in light of the second incident once she had come of age sexually – the original event became traumatic only once she reconstructed it as a sexual act: 'Puberty [made] possible a new understanding of the recollected facts The biological maturation gives the child the ability to understand what has happened'. Freud concludes, 'Now this is typical of repression in hysteria. We

invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action*' (Freud [1895] 1966, p. 356). Jacqueline Hamrit (2008) summarises, 'Thus, it is the memory which turns into traumatism as it arouses an affect which had not been prompted by the incident'.

Jacques Lacan, in discussing the Wolfman case study – one far too long and complex to detail here – was the first to hypostatise Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, emphasising that Freud was less concerned with the reality of the (retrospectively) traumatic event than with the way in which patient and analyst 'reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come' (2002, p. 48).¹⁴ Lacan makes clear that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the present and future create the past. A past experience is not a fixed entity which is retained and altered in memory over time; rather, memory actually constitutes that experience in its psychological and emotional dimensions.

The theme of many Romantic variation sets, analogously, is not a fixed entity but a malleable construct whose identity devolves on the variations. More specifically, from a Freudian perspective, the theme bears material traces with 'repressed' (that is, latent or potential) meanings which come to light only as a consequence of musical 'memories' (that is, variations). Maynard Solomon expresses this analogy in similar terms, likening the theme to a manifest dream, 'a simple, condensed sequence of images masking an infinity of latent dream thoughts' (1977, p. 303) and variations to analyses of the dream, which educe certain of those latent thoughts. To be clear, in positing this Freudian framework I am not attributing a particular psychological disposition either to Brahms or to some proxy in the form of a musical persona in his Op. 9 – I am not making a diagnosis here. I am merely offering a conceptual model by which to elucidate the crucial dynamic between musical present and past within variation form.¹⁵

To summarise: we have discussed two different yet related senses in which a theme is retroactively defined. In some cases, as with the *Tempest* Sonata, *where* a musical passage assumes a thematic (or some other formal) function is determined by activity subsequent to that passage. In other cases, as with the *Eroica* Variations, *what* the theme is – which of its phenomena amount to proper features rather than incidental particulars – is determined by variations. Both kinds of cases rely upon the same basic premise – that thematic identity gradually evolves – but the first is mainly a matter of thematic location, the second a matter of thematic constitution. In the first case, a Hegelian model is arguably more apposite, in the second a Freudian one. The latter is particularly applicable when the identity of certain thematic features lies, owing to the latent form in which they initially appear (or, perhaps more accurately, the latent form that we posit only later, once manifested), largely or entirely at the mercy of variational procedures.

III

I contend that a variation actualises thematic potentialities in one of two opposing yet complementary ways: first, it may render a latent feature of the

theme more explicit – more audible, repetitive and salient (I will often refer to this process as ‘exemplification’¹⁶); second, it may afford such a feature greater structural significance, as when the variation composes it out. In short, a variation concretises an otherwise obscure thematic feature by rendering it more salient at the level of the foreground or more structurally consequential at that of the middleground. In analysing Brahms’s Op. 9, I will demonstrate these mechanisms by employing various analytical strategies – drawing upon both Schenkerian and motivic methodologies¹⁷ – in order adequately to grapple with the various structural parameters in which thematic potentialities and actualisations reside. My strategy will be to start from curious or striking features of each variation and trace them back to the thematic features they serve to hypostatise. This reflects not only the procedure I generally employed in analysing this piece but also, which is more important, the very conception of the theme described above: as being in large part retroactively determined.¹⁸

Variation 1

Frequently, in variation sets for keyboard, the first two variations partake of quasi-invertible counterpoint, in which the hands exchange melodic and accompanimental functions (or, more loosely, the part containing the more rapid figuration in variation 1 is transferred to the opposite hand in variation 2).¹⁹ In Op. 9, however, this exchange (as Littlewood 2004, p. 260, observes) occurs between the theme and variation 1 (Exs 1 and 2), such that in the variation the left hand receives the theme, the right hand the accompaniment. Brahms deviates from the norm in order perhaps to forge a direct link between the theme’s final cadence and the onset of variation 1, in order to highlight the fact that both feature three repeated crotchet C# $\hat{5}$ s in the left hand (the tenor voice in the theme). (This example and others evince Brahms’s penchant for motivic linkage [*Knüpftechnik*].) In this way, the start of variation 1 perceptibly transforms the harmonic C#s of the theme’s cadence into the melodic ones that begin the variation. Variation 1 points up the possibility (of which Schumann might well have been unaware) that the C#s in the theme’s bass were always potentially thematic – nascent imitations of the theme’s incipit (Ex. 2b) – and simultaneously realises that possibility. Put another way, Brahms seizes upon the curiosity that beginning a melody with repeated $\hat{5}$ s (as this one does) entails the potential for those notes to sound melodic when they inevitably recur as cadential bass notes.

Because of this event, one might be more likely to notice or ponder other potential motivic connections within the theme. Might the soprano of bars 3–4⁺¹, for example, derive from the tenor of bars 1–2, as indicated in Ex. 2b? Such a reading would corroborate my attribution of thematicity to the bass of bar 3, since now not one but two voices (the soprano and tenor of bar 1) are registrally relocated in bar 3. In other words, in this scenario bar 3 is a textural rearrangement of bar 1. (Such a rearrangement is perhaps more obvious in bar 9 of the theme, where the soprano takes over the alto’s lower-neighbour figure of bar 1

Ex. 1 Brahms, *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann*, Op. 9; theme

Ziemlich langsam

A₁ antecedent consequent

(III:) $V_{\frac{6}{3}}^{\delta} V^7$ I

(III:) $\boxed{\text{I}}$ $\boxed{\text{VI}}$ — —V III: $\boxed{\text{i}}$ $\boxed{\text{ii}}$ vii^{o7} \curvearrowright 9 — (8) ii

(III:) $V_{\frac{6}{3}}^{\delta} V^7$ I i:—

while the alto takes over the soprano's repeated-note figure.) Also, might the bass of bar 9 derive from the soprano of bars 7–8?

Often, when a melodic entity migrates from one voice to another, it creates a tonal environment different from that in which it originally appeared. The C# bass which opens variation 1, for example, creates a dominant emphasis lacking in the opening of the theme. This C# is so pervasive that when it is displaced a

Ex. 2 (a) Variation 1; (b) Theme, bars 1–4: latent imitations; (c) Theme, bars 7–8 and 19–20

(a)

arpeggiation →

9 *espressivo* *p* *più f* *cresc.* *f* *dim.* encapsulates and extends arpeggiation

17 *p* *pp sostenuto* *mp* *col Pedale* chromatic slide motive inverted chromatic slide motive

(b)

$\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ Nb. motive

(c)

semitone by D in bars 18–19, the effect is quite striking, prompting us to seek precedents for a C#–D relation in the theme. Indeed, as shown in Ex. 2b, the bass in the opening bars of the first and last phrases harbours a $\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ neighbour motion just beneath the surface – a motion arguably crystallised by the salient, unexpected C#–D of variation 1. (Also note the vertical juxtaposition of C#–D in the theme, bars 2 and 22, which renders that dyad particularly salient.) This incipient motive, then, which was abandoned at the start of variation 1 because of the melodic role of the bass, is amply restored in variation 1’s A2 section.

However, no sooner does this D occur than it is subsumed by a broader chromatic line reaching from C# to D# and back again (bars 17–23). I believe we can trace this idea back to the inner-voice motion of bars 7–8 and 19–20 in the theme (Ex. 2c) (and, at a different pitch level, of bars 16–18; see the brackets in Ex. 5). Variation 1 exposes and composes out this otherwise negligible detail of voice leading, first in inversion, then *recte* (Exs 2a and c). In so doing, it affords this detail a motivic identity which it would not otherwise possess (I will designate this the chromatic-slide motive). Granted, one must tread carefully here, since chromatic lines occur regularly in post-Classical music; yet we can justify this reading on the basis that the configuration in the variation utilises the selfsame pitches as the original motive.

Finally, the rolled chord in bar 13 is quite pronounced, spanning a range of almost four octaves. Is it merely colouristic, or might it have some deeper significance? Consider that the theme's B section continues upwards by a third from the a¹ in bar 8: C#–E–G# (see again the broken lines in Ex. 1), the last two notes emphasised by *sforzandi*. Following Leonard Meyer, we might submit that the regularity of this pattern generates an implication that the chain of thirds will continue onwards to b² (or perhaps, in modified form, to c#³, given the move to v in bars 15–16). This pitch never arrives, however; instead, bar 14 remains on g², presumably in order to initiate the linear progression descending from 5̂ within the local key of v (Ex. 3 shows how the higher apex might have occurred). Variation 1, on the other hand, by means of its majestic roll, is able to reach this goal pitch (b³), which had been thwarted in the theme. (This is facilitated by the A1 section's arrival on C# in the soprano in bar 8, a pitch the theme did not reach until bar 9, the onset of the B section; hence, the B section of the variation begins one rung higher on the thirds-ladder than the B section of the theme and so can more readily reach the higher apex.) The roll, moreover, does not merely attain this higher pitch but emphasises its attainment by encapsulating, in compressed form, the entire arpeggiation (C#–E#–G#–B) leading to this point, as shown in Ex. 2a. Moreover, in its sheer registral scope and in the physical exertion it requires, the roll embodies the quality of overreaching – of surpassing the previous boundary – entailed by the b³. Hence, the roll does not simply realise the registral implication of the theme; it foregrounds and dramatises the reali-

Ex. 3 Recomposition of theme, bars 9–16, with expected apex

*Notice, this apex precludes a fifth progression in v within the given time frame.

sation. Incidentally, because this B section surpasses the G# from which the theme descended to $\hat{1}$ within C# minor, the G# must be regained. This occurs only two bars before the end of the section (bar 15), thus pushing the fifth-progression within C# minor over the formal boundary into section A2 – with the soprano's D# in bar 16 provisionally resolving to the bass's C# in bar 17 and fully resolving to the C# in the last two bars (see again the arrow in Ex. 2a). Hence, this progression transcends a formal boundary as a direct result of the B section's transcending of a registral boundary, in the process forging a stronger link between the B and A2 sections than occurred in the theme.

In brief, variation 1 initiates the process of parsing the theme. First, in inverting the hands straightaway, it foregrounds the theme's incipient bass thematicity and polyphony – polyphony which will become much more conspicuous later in the set. Second, it concretises two latent thematic motives: the $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{6}$ neighbour motive and the chromatic-slide motive (nesting the former within the latter). Finally, its B section reaches the apex which was foiled in the theme. Hence, this variation realises thematic potentiality with respect to texture, motive and register.

Variation 2

The most striking feature of variation 2 is its compression – formal, rhythmic and metric. Formally, it condenses each thematic section into two bars, as evident in the tonal outline of each two-bar phrase: i–III in the first (as in section A1 of the theme), v in the second (as in section B) and iv–i in the third (as in section A2). The entire six-bar form is then repeated. Rhythmically, the two hands are perpetually out of sync, yielding chords that conjoin different harmonic functions, what I shall call 'plural-functional chords' (PFCs), drawing upon Kevin Swinden's notions of 'functional mixture' or 'functional collision'.²⁰ (Ex. 4 traces the generative history of these chords.) The superimposition of distinct harmonic functions serves to exemplify the quality of compression. Metrically, the compound-metre counterpart of the theme's 4/4 is 12/8, but this variation foreshortens that to 9/8. The formal, rhythmic and metric parameters all work in tandem to engender a single overall effect of compression.

Two potentialities in the theme are actualised as a result of the processes just described. First, consider that, in the theme's A1 section, the first phrase – the antecedent of a period – does not conclude on V, as would be typical in a variation-set theme, but on i. As a result, the tonic is, unusually, stated both at the end of the antecedent and at the beginning of the consequent. In variation 2, by contrast, the antecedent (compressed into bar 1) concludes on a PFC that I hear primarily as a dominant inflected by an anticipation in the bass of the tonic (see again Ex. 4d). Conversely, the chord on the downbeat of bar 2 is primarily a tonic inflected by a dominant suspended from the previous bar. The essential progression, in short, from the end of bar 1 (antecedent) to the start of bar 2 (consequent) is V–i. The tonic is not repeated (other than very incidentally), owing in large part to the metric compression (if the metre had been 12/8, a tonic

Ex. 4 Variation 2, bars 1–2: a generative history

(a) basic harmonic outline

i: i iv⁷ V III: i vi ii⁹ V⁷

(b) addition of consonant skips in bass

(c) addition of suspensions in right hand

(d) addition of anticipations in bass (PFCs arise)

D^S D_T^{**} T^D S^T III: D^S D_T^{**}

would probably have occurred at the end of bar 1). One might say that the harmonic-formal anomaly (redundancy) of the theme is rectified in variation 1. Put another way, the potential for the theme to achieve harmonic economy – for the two tonics to be elided – is realised.²¹

Second, the PFCs, which juxtapose tonic and dominant elements (within the keys of i and III respectively), are perhaps the key to understanding an idiosyn-

Ex. 4 *Continued*

(e) addition of more localised anticipations in bass (actual music)

* These are heard as PFCs on this level more so than on the previous because here the bass subsequently leaps, thus in a sense isolating these sonorities, causing them to sound more like independent chords than like suspensions, as they were on the previous level. (The same basic technique occurs in bar 2 of the theme, where C# and D sound like an isolated dyad – a vertical entity – rather than parts of a suspension figure, precisely because the bass skips down. That variation 2 receives its impetus from that particular bar – and that it amplifies and actualises this bar – is especially evident in the fact that its first PFC specifically superimposes a 'D chord' over a C# bass.)

** The T is subscript both because the tonic member is in the bass and because it is subordinate to the dominant agent, as easily seen by comparing this level with the previous (that is, the tonic bass here is merely an anticipation).

cratic detail of the theme: the rhythmic transformation of a¹ from a grace note in bars 3 and 7 to a full quaver in bar 19. The grace note A in bar 3 is an anticipation of the third of the following i, then in bar 7 an anticipation of the root of the following III; both As are tonic-chord notes superimposed onto dominant-chord notes (within their respective keys). Yet this juxtaposition is much more pronounced in bar 19, where A not only coincides with the dominant bass as before, but now, because of its rhythmic alteration, is more clearly juxtaposed with the preceding note in the melody, the agent of the local dominant – that is, G# and A are closer than before, and A receives equal rhythmic duration. Hence, the rhythmic modification enhances the sense of tonic/dominant juxtaposition, since the tonic element now collides with not one but two dominant elements (the agent preceding it and the bass coinciding with it; note that this event is faintly echoed by the coinciding F and E# in the penultimate sonority of the theme). Crucially, this construal of the theme's grace-note A is more evident (or evident only) in light of the PFCs of variation 2: by utilising tonic/dominant juxtaposition in a much more sonorous and obvious way than does the theme, this variation unambiguously establishes the technique that the As in the theme (in bar 19 in particular) can be understood, in retrospect, to instantiate.

Variation 3

Variation 3 restores the theme's melody to its original register but assigns it to the left hand. Variations 1 and 3 are thus, in a sense, inversely related: whereas in variation 1 the melody is inverted (octave displaced) but the hands maintain their normal positions, in variation 3 the melody is in the 'correct' registral position but the hands are inverted (switched).

In the right-hand accompaniment of variation 3, the triplets outline motions of a third (bars 1, 3, 5, and so on). Do these have any motivic import? Perhaps

Ex. 5 Voice-leading analysis of theme

we can relate them back to the A1 section of the theme, which traces a linear progression from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{3}$, the latter of which is harmonised by III in bar 8 (Ex. 5).²² Although this manoeuvre is not uncommon in minor-mode binary and ternary forms, what is noteworthy is that when $\hat{5}$ linearly descends to $\hat{1}$ in the last phrase, the *pianissimo* undermines to some extent the potentially resolute quality of that event, rendering it virtually an afterthought to the $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{4}$ - $\hat{3}$ of the preceding phrase. In this light, variation 3 can be seen to clutter the foreground with third-gestures which have the effect of obfuscating the underlying $\hat{5}$ -line *Urlinie*. In other words, the variation firmly concretises an abstruse structural possibility of the theme: that its third-progressions compete with and at times overshadow the $\hat{5}$ -line *Urlinie*. Clearly, the third-gestures in the variation are by no means purely or even primarily decorative.

The B section of variation 3 deviates from that of the theme in its unexpected slide from C# to C \flat in bar 11. I construe this C \flat as an enharmonic respelling of the B# of the theme, where it serves as a lower neighbour to C# in bars 9, 11 and 13; such enharmonicism temporarily renders the B# more stable (as C \flat it is $\hat{5}$ in the key of F minor) and engenders an enlargement of the C#-B#-C# neighbour motion of the theme (Ex. 6). This enlargement grants to the C#-B#-C# figure a degree of motivic significance as a pitch-specific entity over and above its role in the theme as merely one of several instantiations (along with E#-F# and A#-B) of a more general lower-neighbour motive.²³ This semitone shift, moreover, renders the ostensible dominant seventh chord on A (bars 9-10) non-functional; that is, it precludes the A⁷ chord from resolving to its assumed tonic, D. In retrospect,

Ex. 6 Variation 3, bars 9–end: expansion of C#–B#–C# neighbour motive

9

17

p *dim.* *p* *dim.*

p *rf* *p*

C# — B# — C#

(∞ enharmonic equivalence) expansion of:

this points up the tonal ambiguity of the A major triad in the theme's B section: on the one hand, that chord initially appears to maintain its role as a local tonic (as established at the end of A1); on the other, the alternation between A and G# in the bass raises the question of exactly which pitch embellishes which. Indeed, even though G# at first seems to be a lower neighbour to A, as the phrase proceeds the two pitches reverse roles, consolidating the key of C# minor: A–G# ultimately describes a $\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$ motion within $v.5$ (an expanded counterpart to the bass's $\hat{6}$ – $\hat{5}$ within the home key, bars 2–3). The A chord in the B section of variation 3, by contrast, is presented as patently unstable from the start – as an A⁷; and even if that seventh were not present, the semitone shift in bar 11 would quash the tonicity of A much more decisively than does the analogous bar in the theme. Hence, this variation points up the ambiguous role of A major in the theme's B section while at the same time disambiguating it, telegraphing its instability by means of an appended seventh.

Variation 4

Variation 4 (Ex. 7) features a G# accentuated by a distinctive semiquaver triplet in bar 4. This pitch fills the A–F# gap of bar 4 in the theme. Moreover, the F#, which was a mere afterthought in that bar, is comparatively emphasised here through syncopation. By supplying a G# and a firmer F# than was present at the same point in the theme, this phrase creates the semblance (because the G# is not harmonically supported – it is an appoggiatura over *i*) of a fifth-progression, one which was obstructed in the theme by the A–F# gap. In other words,

Ex. 7 Variation 4

more explicit fifth-progression than in theme

prolongation of C# (no 3-2-1̇ in III)

initially strong resolution (Picardy effect), but then undermined

this phrase actualises (if only provisionally) the theme's potential to delineate a fifth-progression within the opening phrase, a potential of which we may be unaware or only subliminally aware until it is actualised. Interestingly, this reading is supported by the subsequent phrase, which neglects to delineate the

$\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ within III as found in the second phrase of the theme. Instead, it outlines $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ within III and ultimately circumscribes $\hat{3}$, C#. (This is due to the unexpected upward shift of a third in bar 6^{+2} relative to bar 5^{+2} , reversing the downward shift of a third in bar 2 relative to the first half of bar 1.) In this section, then – in diametric opposition to the analogous situation in the theme – the antecedent's home key achieves greater linear resolution, the consequent's relative major less.

The end of variation 4 likewise brings about a fuller tonic resolution, both harmonically and melodically, than does the end of the theme: harmonically, the antecedent in section A2 (starting in bar 17) stands on the dominant rather than revisiting the relative major as in the theme; it thus prepares for an emphatic discharge upon the tonic, which occurs in bar 21 – as an apparent *terce de Picardie*, no less. Melodically, the $\hat{1}$ is also reached at that point as the terminus of a fifth-progression (bars 17–21), but it is placed in a higher, more conspicuous register ($\#^2$) than the obligatory one of the theme ($\#^1$). This harmonic and melodic arrival is consolidated by a *crescendo*, in contrast to the theme, where in the final phrase it was attenuated by a *pianissimo*. By contrast, the attainment of b^2 within the B section, which in variation 1 was amplified by the roll and *forte*, here is undermined by an unexpected *dolce* (and the *subito piano* which it implies). Whereas in variation 1 the sense of tonic resolution at the end was weak and the B-section arpeggiation was strong, in variation 4 the converse is true.

This variation is interesting in other respects as well. First, the right hand takes up an apparently new theme – or, more precisely, as noted, it traces and decorates the lineaments of the original theme (the descending line in the A sections and the arpeggio in the B section) within a distinctive melodic guise. Second, the fluidity of this melody necessitates that the static repeated-note motive be transferred to the accompaniment, where it is subject to rhythmic diminution and ostinato-like repetition, both of which serve to exemplify the motive. The resultant pedal point, in turn, engenders (as all do) further instances of harmonic-functional plurality, as we had in variation 2.

Variation 5

At the start of variation 5, the repeated-note motive that in variation 4 had been subordinated to the plaintive melody now comes to the fore and bluntly eradicates it. This figure in bar 1 is ambiguous because it is emphatic yet also introductory – the main activity seems not to begin until the anacrusis to bar 3. Hence one wonders whether this figure is part of the frame or the centre of the variation. The ambiguity points up an analogous one in the theme itself: does the melody begin with the soprano's C# or with the alto voice? On the one hand, the former initiates the structural melodic line, the $\hat{5}$ -line *Urlinie*. On the other, the latter is much more active and mobile; indeed, in the B section, this part, transplanted to the soprano, is unambiguously melodic (we might say it realises the potential of the alto in the opening bars to be melodic or thematic).

Hence, variation 5, in asking ‘Where does the theme begin?’, relates to and foregrounds the theme’s question, ‘With *what* does the theme begin?’, especially since both ambiguities involve C#. Whereas the theme poses its question discreetly, the variation does so much more conspicuously; perhaps we recognise the theme’s question only through the retrospective lens of variation 5.

What is more, just as in the theme the possibly (texturally) peripheral alto part dominates in the B section, so in the same section in variation 5 does the possibly (formally) peripheral octave figure dominate. It becomes the main vehicle whereby to enact the requisite arpeggiation and attain the highest point yet: c^{#4} in bar 22 (in this respect, variation 5 takes variations 1 and 4 a step further, figuratively and literally). With this event the initial ambiguity returns, for these C# octaves constitute a possible point of overlap – the culmination of the B section as well as perhaps the initiation of A2 (whether as an introductory or a main figure), given the rough correspondence between bars 24 and 3. However, an even more significant formal ambiguity emerges with the arrival of the A# bass in bar 29 and the consequent tonicisation of B minor (iv), since in the theme these events telegraphed the start of A2. Hence, in retrospect, we may wonder whether A2 begins in bar 22 or bar 32. Yet the formal implication of A# is, I believe, overridden by the correspondence of bars 29–31 with bars 6–7: both passages are written-out caesurae – interruptions of momentum – which emphasise the formal juncture between the antecedent and consequent phrases of their respective A sections. In the end, then, bar 22 (or bar 24) is in fact the start of A2, and A# (as well as the tonicisation of iv) is now understood to be detached from its original function of articulating the beginning of section A2 (on which more later).

One final detail deserves mention: this variation is patently more rhythmic than melodic. The melodic contour is rather disjunct, and what lines it does contain are largely subsurface; on the surface they are sundered by leaps and octave displacements. Hence, in this context, the one protracted foreground line, bars 8–11, is bound to stand out (Ex. 8a). This event is unique in this variation in featuring an octave displacement, d³–d², which is filled in by step (creating a *Koppelung*). D then connects to C#, the two notes making up an enlargement of the D–C# neighbour motive (Ex. 8b). Whereas variation 1 actualised the potential D–C# motive of the theme by foreground emphasis (rendering the pitches adjacent and in an unexpected place), this variation does so by middleground expansion.

Variation 6

In variation 5, we saw A# and the tonicisation of B migrate to a section with which they were not originally associated. In variation 6 the entire key area of v does so. To elaborate, this A1, like that of variation 2, is compressed, here into four bars (they are immediately repeated, whereas in variation 2 the entire compressed A1–B–A2 form was repeated). The antecedent, here represented by bars 1–2, delineates i, as before; the consequent, however, delineates v – the key of the

Ex. 8 (a) Variation 5, bars 8–11; (b) voice-leading analysis

(a)

(b)

Note the two (nested) octave couplings in the soprano as well as the two (consecutive) sixth-unfoldings in the bass.

theme's B section – rather than III (III is only slightly touched upon in bar 3). In other words, the compression is not just formal but substantive: not only are sections foreshortened, but an event in the original harmonic narrative (the move to the relative major) is elided completely and a key area (v) is telescoped. Whereas in variation 2 the formal compression was complemented by harmonic compression on a local scale (the PFCs), here the harmonic (or tonal) compression is on a broader scale. As a result, the B section (starting with the anacrusis to bar 9) moves directly on to A \sharp , the next main tonal event of the original chronological sequence (a 'main event' because in the theme it articulates the onset of A2). The A \sharp , however, does not resolve to B as in the theme but descends chromatically, leading to a G 7 chord in bar 11 (within which occurs the characteristic B-section melodic arpeggiation, which had been delayed). This chord, moreover, is the ostensible dominant of C, and although the bass does resolve there in bar 14, the upper notes linger upon G 7 (forming another PFC), precluding the formation of a complete C major chord. C is then respelled as B \sharp and promptly resolves to C \sharp . The B \sharp /C \sharp enharmonicism clearly alludes to that in variation 3, although here it does not seem to yield an enlargement of the theme's B \sharp -C \sharp neighbour motive.

The consequent phrase of A2 (bar 18) restores the III chord that had been mostly absent from the consequent of A1. This chord, in turn, initiates a

Ex. 9 Variation 6: rhythmic synopsis

Allegro

1
f
p
iambic ?

9
poco f
cresc.
iambic

20
ff
p
sostenuto
dactylic

22
cresc. e stringendo
triochaic

24
ff
(trochaic)

no connection between C# and F#
(C# is end of trochee)

descending-fifth sequence, leading to a full-fledged C major chord (bar 20) and a passage by which it is composed out (by lower-neighbour applied vii^{o7} chords); this passage thus fully actualises the sonority that had been to some extent foiled seconds before. Eventually, however, C reverts to its B# origin (at the penultimate bass note in bar 24) and immediately resolves to C#.

The other noteworthy aspect of this variation is its rhythm (Ex. 9), which foregrounds the anacrusis–downbeat figure of variation 4 (where it led into

bars 1, 5, 9, and so on). There, of course, the figure was clearly iambic. Here, although two-note figures abound, only those which delineate the larger phrase boundaries (leading into bars 1, 3, 5, and so on) are clearly iambic; the rest are somewhat ambiguous. Those in the left hand are ambiguous because, metrically speaking, quavers 2–3 and 5–6 in 6/8 metre are equally weak, and rhythmically speaking, both notes of the two-note figure in the left hand are marked with accents; hence, it is difficult if not impossible to discern which note is stronger. Those in the right hand are no less ambiguous: the first note of each figure accrues some emphasis by coinciding with the bass, the second by landing squarely on a beat. (Another ambiguity lurks here that pertains to the part writing. The left-hand motive precedes the right-hand one and so would seem to lead; however, it does not possess any real melodic content. Yet the right hand does possess such content – it outlines the theme’s melody – despite the fact that it enters after the left hand. Hence, like variation 5 but more explicitly, this opening passage points up an uncertainty regarding the leading voice at the beginning of the theme.)

The B section (starting with the anacrusis to bar 9) disambiguates the two-note figure, presenting it as consistently iambic (using it only to lead to onbeats). By contrast, after the beginning of section A2 briefly restores the ambiguity, the last two quavers of bar 23 and bar 24 subsequently resolve it in favour of trochaic rhythm by means of a hemiola (implying a metre of 2/8).²⁴ As a result, the last quaver of bar 24, although motivically parallel with the previous anacrusis (leading into bars 1, 3, and so on), no longer functions as an anacrusis. The C#–F# motto seems to have been fundamentally altered by the preceding passage in that it is no longer iambic. In the final two bars, the two-note figures are once again ambiguous, bringing the variation full circle.

The rhythmic process in this variation may point to and even expand upon a slight rhythmic ambiguity in the theme. There, the quavers B and D in bar 2 lead slightly into bar 3, but this motion is countered by the fact that B resolves the C# suspension (putatively 7–6 but intervallically altered to 7–8 on account of the skip in the bass). B thus points backwards tonally even as it points forwards rhythmically. (This motion is also countered by a subtle sense of initiation on the downbeat of bar 3 stemming from the onset of the repeated-note motive in the bass.) This backwards-looking tendency is even more pronounced with the F# quaver in bar 4, which, in addition to ending the phrase, carries just enough tonal weight to resist its anacrusic leanings – it touches on the tonic at which the potential fifth-progression aims. In other words, I construe B in bar 2 and F# in bar 4 as members primarily of a trochaic gesture, and only secondarily (or potentially) of an iambic one. The aforementioned process involving the grace notes likewise evinces this dichotomy: overtly anacrusic in bars 3, 7 and 17, the graces are re-written as full quavers in bars 19 and 23 and thus lean more towards the trochaic (as reinforced by the breaks in the slur). Variation 6, then, dramatises the iambic/trochaic duality that is more subtly present in the theme.²⁵

Variation 7

Variation 7 is similar to variation 2 in that both are framed by more clear-cut melodic-outline variations, and thus both have a somewhat parenthetical or transitional quality. Also, both treat thematic features in a distilled manner; variation 2 represents the theme by the barest of harmonic means (compressing the principal harmonies of each section into a mere two bars), variation 7 by the barest of melodic means (A1 is recognisable mostly by its characteristic E \sharp). Note, however, that whereas in the theme E \sharp resolves up to F \sharp , in this variation it moves downwards, yielding a chromatic-slide motive (this motive permeates the variation: F \sharp –E \sharp –E \flat in section A1, C \sharp –C \flat –B in section B).²⁶ This variant thus suggests that E \sharp has bi-directional tendencies – it may proceed either up or down by semitone. In this the variation arguably foregrounds what we might call the ‘semitonal ambivalence’ of the chromatic-slide motive as originally presented: in bars 7 and 19 of the theme, the D \sharp is proximate to both E and D \flat and can thus be seen to discharge upon both (see again the arrows in Ex. 1, bar 7).²⁷ The motive form in variation 7, in moving E \sharp down where we expect it to move up, points up this ambiguity within the chromatic-slide motive of the theme.

Variation 8

Variation 8 follows from variation 7 in beginning with the chromatic-slide motive, still in the bottom voice. This variation borrows from variation 1 the idea of the theme’s residing in the left hand and from variation 6 that of rhythmic imitation, synthesising them to create a full-fledged canon. The canon, in turn, actualises two thematic potentialities previously noted: that in the theme the bass of bar 3 imitates the melody of bar 1 and that the bass of bar 9 imitates the melody of bar 7. (The latter creates a motivic link between the A1 and B sections. Again, it is hardly surprising that Brahms would educe such links from Schumann’s theme, given his own compositional predilection for them.) Because variation 8 is a canon (with the tenor shadowing the soprano at a two-bar interval of imitation), the left hand in those two locations is now an explicit imitation of the soprano (Ex. 10). Thus a latent feature of the theme is made patent by this variation.

The bass, although secondary to the imitative tenor, is occasionally significant in its own right. First, as in variation 1 (bar 19), the C \sharp ($\hat{5}$) progresses deceptively to D ($\hat{6}$) (bar 20), foregrounding the neighbour motive. Second, the B section delineates the key of A major more unambiguously than it does in the theme, since the A in the bass no longer intermingles with G \sharp . The relative clarity with which A major is presented here compensates in part for the absence of that key from the A1 section. Hence, whereas the B section of variation 3 resolved the theme’s ambiguity with respect to A in favour of its potential instability, the B section here resolves this ambiguity in favour of A’s potential stability.

Ex. 10 Variation 8, bars 1–10: explicit imitations

The image displays a musical score for Variation 8, bars 1–10. The score is written for piano in 2/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The upper staff is marked *espressivo* and *p*. The lower staff is marked *col Pedale sempre* and *dolce*. The score is divided into three systems. The first system contains bars 1–4, the second system bars 5–7, and the third system bars 8–10. A circled 'B' is placed above the bass line in bar 8. An arrow labeled 'actualises' points from this circled 'B' down to a circled 'B' in bar 7 of the 'theme' section below. The 'theme' section is labeled 'latent imitation'.

Variation 9

From one perspective, this variation is essentially tonal preparation for the D major (VI) of the next variation (D major being the relative major of B minor).²⁸ Another way that this variation prepares the next is in superimposing G over F in bars 13–14 to form a dominant ninth chord, then leaving that g^2 registally stranded, failing to resolve it to $\#f^2$. Such resolution is achieved at the onset of the next variation, thus binding variations 9 and 10, as shown in Ex. 11. (Interestingly, this process is recapitulated within the A2 section of variation 10 itself: g^2 of bar 25 connects to $\#f^2$ of bar 29.) In this respect, variation 9 is transitional. Indeed, it shares traits with the other two transitional variations (2 and 7) heard thus far: its form is compressed (in section A1 the antecedent occupies bars 1–2, the consequent bars 3–4; all four bars are then repeated), and it distils particular thematic features.

Ex. 11 (a) Variation 9, bars 13–end; (b) variation 10, bars 1–12

(a)

(b)

From an alternate perspective, however, the B minor of variation 9 is less a foil for the next key than a full-fledged key in its own right. To elaborate: a B minor chord is first gently broached in bar 2 of the theme, then tonicised in bar 17 – a notable event, as we have seen, because it articulates the onset of section A2. Yet the tonicisation is somewhat precarious, given that the leading note A# is sneaked in, as it were (although sustained by the pedal, it arises in a metrically incon-

Ex. 12 Alternate analysis of theme (compare Ex. 5)

C# (v) is subsumed by a prolongation of III rather than serving as the terminus of a F#-A-C# arpeggiation.

spicuous fashion), and that the key is short-lived, yielding immediately to A major. In fact, B minor, despite its formally prominent position, might be seen as ultimately having been subsumed by a prolongation of III, a possibility demonstrated by Ex. 12 – a revised tonal interpretation of the theme which grants greater structural import to A major than was represented in Ex. 5. In any case, the tonicity of B minor in the theme is more potential than actual, and variation 9 can be seen to realise this potential in its extended use of this key.

Variation 10

In variation 10 the theme's bass is transplanted to the soprano, serving as the melody and engendering a modulation to D major (as in variation 1, textural inversion and tonal reorientation go hand in hand, although such repositioning is obviously much more extensive here). Clearly, variations 1 and 10 are inversely related: whereas in the former the theme's melody occurs in the bass, in the latter the theme's bass occurs in the melody. In variation 10, the bass itself has a quasi-thematic role: in section A1 (and, in somewhat more concealed fashion, in A2 as well) it delineates the inversion of the melody, as if to reflect the fact that the melody here is derived from the original bass line. Indeed, as Ex. 11b reveals, the thematic potential of this bass part is manifested in bars 10ff., where it is transplanted to the alto voice within a canonic context; now, as an inverted *comes*, it is more explicitly thematic. (We have seen that Brahms employs canonic technique in variation 8 to similar effect, rendering potentially thematic or imitative parts of the theme more explicitly so.) Hence, this variation exemplifies the fact that its melody is derived from the theme's bass by rendering its own bass line thematic – the variation reenacts its own coming-into-being. The thematicity of the bass is also evident in the fact that one of its central figures, the G–F# neighbour motion, appears to influence the soprano, which sounds those pitches in formally significant places (at the ends of several phrases and of the entire variation; see the voice-leading analysis in Ex. 13).²⁹

Ex. 13 Variation 10: voice-leading analysis

The musical score for Variation 10 is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-6) features an octave transfer in measure 3 and a third-progression in measure 5. The second system (measures 7-16) includes a neighbour motion (Nb. motive) in measure 10 and a chromatic alteration (Nb. to G[♯]) in measure 11. The third system (measures 17-24) shows further voice-leading with a neighbour motion in measure 19. Roman numerals I, vii[°], and vi are indicated below the first system, and I, V, and I are indicated below the third system. Various voice-leading annotations like (UN), (LN), and (LN) (UN) are present throughout the score.

Variation 11

Variation 11 (Ex. 14) is tonally transitional. It attaches a seventh to the D major of the preceding variation, undermining its tonicity. We might assume this chord to be the dominant of G, but it never resolves to G; instead the D⁷ is enharmonically reinterpreted as a German augmented-sixth chord in the penultimate bar and resolves to C[♯] (V of the home key) in the final bar. As in variation 3, the resolution of an ostensible dominant seventh chord is foiled in order to compose out a neighbour motion of the theme – B[♯]–C[♯] in variation 3, D–C[♯] here. In both variations, this technique imbues a particular instance of a generic neighbour motive with pitch-specific identity by elaborating it on a middleground level – variation 11 transforms the D–C[♯] figure from a token to a type. This elaboration is seen in retrospect to extend back to variation 10, whose apparently stable tonal centre is ultimately revealed by variation 11 to be part of an unstable neighbour expansion. Indeed, these two variations collectively engender a large-scale D–C[♯] neighbour motive which, owing to its extended duration and central formal placement, makes up an essential component of the tonal structure of the entire

Ex. 14 Variation 11

Un poco più animato

sempre *pp* *dolciss.*

col Ped.

to C#

D# fans out

dim.

14

sempre *pp* *dolciss.*

20

dim. sempre

rit.

third-progression (LN)

D⁷ enharmonised as Gr⁺⁶

expansion of: (theme)

Neighbour motive:

set, as Ex. 15 illustrates.³⁰ This example suggests that thematic and motivic actualisation occur not only on the level of particular variations but on that of large-scale structure as well.

As with other transitional variations, both the form and the thematic content are represented here by the barest of means. The antecedent and consequent

Ex. 15 Tonal overview of entire set

* Notice how the large-scale F[♯]–B[♯]–C[♯] motion traversing variations 10 and 11 beautifully approximates, writ large, the melodic contour of variation 10's opening gesture: F[♯]–C[♯]–D.

are compressed into three bars each and signalled by the repeated-note motive followed by the descending-fourth motion of the theme: the theme's C[♯]–B–A–G[♯] is rendered C[♯]–B–A–G[♯].³¹ The main vestige of the B section is the small arpeggiation leading to the apex a² in bars 7–9: the theme's E–G[♯] is rendered E–G[♯]. This strategy of retaining the same basic pitches of the theme's melody within a different tonal context, a common technique in the nineteenth century, points to a similar manoeuvre in the theme itself: section A2 reharmonises the melody of section A1.

The precise manner in which bars 9–13 and 22–27 correlate with section A2 of the theme is somewhat obscure, but this section at any rate appears to carry out two functions. First, it separates out D[♯]'s conflicting tendencies, embodied in the chromatic-slide motive as presented in the theme: in bars 11–12 and 24–25 D[♯] fans out by a semitone, resolving up to E and then down to D[♯] (see again the broken-line arrows in Ex. 14).³² Second, this section advances the process of metric acceleration from units of three bars (bars 1–6) to one bar (bars 7–8) to half a bar (bars 9–13) – for, in the last, two consecutive bass notes appear for the first time in the variation (bar 9), thus establishing a clear quaver pulse off which the syncopated right hand plays.

Variation 12

In variation 12 (Ex. 16) the antecedent and consequent of the A1 section are each compressed into two bars and closed by imperfect cadences (the former within i, the latter within III). The III that opens the B section is on surer footing than it is in the analogous place in the theme, especially given that A, rather than oscillating with G[♯] as in the theme, is effectively the sole bass note for almost two bars. This tonal security is ephemeral, however, for A is promptly subsumed by a chromatic sequence in all parts.

If this section thus ultimately fails to establish III more firmly than did the theme, it surpasses the theme in another respect: in the theme's B section, bars

Ex. 16 Variation 12

Allegretto, poco scherzando

p stacc. e legg.

col Ped.

4

wedging 5

sosten.

p

Red.

p

9

cresc.

a tempo dolce

p stacc.

cresc. sf sf sf

13

legato

p

cresc.

f p stacc.

Red.

col Ped.

18

Presto.

molto cresc. e stringendo

ff

9–12, only the second bar in each two-bar module rises sequentially, while in bars 13–14 even the second bar does not ascend as expected, as noted above. In this sense, the theme’s B section is only partially or potentially sequential. The B section in variation 12, by contrast, employs a *bona fide* sequence: bars 7–8

transpose by a whole tone the entire model of bars 5–6. Motivic reduction follows: the two-bar modules yield to one-bar modules (bars 9–10), which in turn yield to one-beat modules (within bars 10–11). During this process the soprano doggedly ascends, eventually attaining the melodic apex (b^2 , bar 11) which was implied within the theme. Moreover, this b^2 eventually pushes up to $c^{\#3}$ in bar 18 via an inner-voice detour through $B^{\#}$ in the previous bar. This $C^{\#}$ has a powerful impact: it resolves the b^2 which had been left hanging since bar 11. The power of this note derives from its arrival's being delayed, from resolving the tension which had accrued during that delay. Variation 12, in short, can be seen as realising the sequential and registral potentialities of the theme.

Variation 13

Variation 13 (Ex. 17) is transitional by virtue of its weightless, diaphanous and tonally sketchy quality, its compressed form (in A1) and its distillation of thematic components. The B section outlines the chromatic climb of variation 12 only in fragmented, attenuated form (see the broken lines in Ex. 17), and the apex b^3 (bar 8) is likewise attenuated by its soft dynamic (as in variation 4 but more so here, given the *pianissimo*). Although this variation carries the generally light, *scherzando* character of the previous variation further, it is precisely because of this character that it is unable to go as far registrally (to $c^{\#3}$) – it lacks the striving, determined quality of its predecessor's B and A2 sections. A2, with its systematic sequential ascent, attempts to generate some momentum, but it peters out before reaching either $c^{\#4}$ or even b^3 . This decrease of momentum derives in part from the process of motivic reduction: the two-bar modules of bars 14–17 yield to the one-bar module of bar 18, which in turn yields to the half-bar modules of the last two bars

Ex. 17 Variation 13, bars 1–8

Non troppo Presto

fragmented, attenuated ascent

pp molto leggero

pp leggero

col Ped.

(which dismantle not only the two-bar module of this variation but also the last bar of the previous one, perforating it with rests).

Variation 14

Perhaps to compensate for the melodic vagueness of variation 13, variation 14 restores the melodic outline of the theme. In fact, as Ex. 18b shows, it actualises the potential of the opening bars in the theme to describe a linear fifth-progression. Ultimately, however, the primary melodic line does not descend beyond $\hat{3}$, assuming we take to heart the hand-crossing in the last bar, which implies that $F\sharp$ is not the true soprano – and even if it were, it does not reside in the obligatory register. Thus the variation exacerbates the tonal indecisiveness of the theme, its reticent resolution of the $\hat{5}$ -line *Urlinie*. Whereas in the theme the *Urlinie* descent was tenuous because of the *pianissimo*, it is now obliterated altogether. This variation, in short, actualises the theme's $\hat{5}$ -line potential in its opening, but it also actualises the theme's potential for a thwarted $\hat{5}$ -line at its end. In short, this variation actualises both positive and negative possibilities.

The B section (starting in bar 13) employs a stepwise sequence, as in variation 12. Yet this sequence is more palpable because its two-bar modules proceed at a swifter pace; it is also more extended, as a consequence leading directly to $C\sharp$ rather than deferring it until the A2 section. This variation's A2 section offers an interesting harmonic twist: B minor is not subsumed by A major (III) (as in Ex. 12) because the resolution of V^7/III (bars 27–28) is evaded, yielding instead to a $G\sharp^{#07}$ (bar 29) which initiates a ii^7-V-i progression in the home key. A2 is thereby extended to one long phrase. This section thus surpasses the many previous variations that link formal sections, since here the antecedent and consequent are no longer merely bridged but completely fused.

Variations 15–16

Notwithstanding its serenely static quality, variation 15 is tonally transitional in that it foreshadows or prepares, in enharmonic form, the key of $F\sharp$ major in which the piece ends. The variation begins, atypically, on $\hat{3}$ (modally adjusting the minor $\hat{3}$ on which the previous variation concluded); $\hat{5}$ in the bass's *comes* follows. This variation, in fact, pointedly actualises the faint conflict in the theme between a fifth- and third-orientation (which I will call 'fifthness' and 'thirdness' respectively); recall that the theme devotes most of its middleground space to $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ and descends to $\hat{1}$ at the end only tentatively. As we approach the end of the set, Brahms, logically, foregrounds the ambivalence towards tonal closure which is implicit in the theme.

The B section features a telling detail: the melody departs from the same notes on which the bass of A1 ended, $B\flat-A\flat-B\flat$. This manoeuvre is striking because even though, within the canon that is this variation, the bass has been and continues to be the *comes*, beginning the B section in this manner affords the bass the momentary appearance of a *dux*: the bass had been following the soprano but now leads it briefly. Brahms thus provides a twist to his strategy of employing

Ex. 18 (a) Variation 14, bars 1–22; (b) analysis of bars 1–7

(a)

Andante

pespressivo

stacc. e legg.

7

13 steady ascent to apex within B section

p *cresc.*

18 *sf*

(b)

1 3 5 7

fifth-progression departing from $\dot{5}$

(Nb.)

(susp.)

imitative counterpoint to actualise the latent imitation linking the A1 and B sections of the theme. Now, instead of having the bass imitate the soprano, as before, he does the reverse. In all cases, Brahms utilises canon not merely to dress up the theme contrapuntally but to educe unsuspected connections between voices and between formal sections.

In bar 21 (in accordance with bar 5), the soprano departs from $\hat{5}$ as if to prepare for a definitive descent of a fifth to close the set. However, this descent does not receive strong harmonic support, and so its resolution, as in the theme, is equivocal. Nor indeed does the very end of the piece achieve melodic closure – the last note in the right hand is $\hat{5}$, C#. This lack of linear resolution is emblematic of the desultory disposition of variation 16 as a whole, by which thematic ideas appear in liquidated, vestigial form. The sparsity of right-hand material also derives from the fact that this variation lays the bass bare (as in the *Eroica* Variations, but as a final rather than an opening statement, for the purpose of reflection rather than anticipation) – the bass with which this set has been so preoccupied. As others have noted, this bass is evocative of a *cantus firmus* or perhaps a ground bass (Brahms adopts a similar procedure in the finale of his *Haydn* Variations, Op. 56) and thus imbues the finale with archaic and spiritually transcendent qualities. We might say that the set has come full circle in a very particular sense: it returns not to its beginning but to its inchoate, primordial foundation – its ‘prehistory’.

IV

As we have seen, a variation may realise a potential motive in one of two ways: either by rendering it more salient and audible or by augmenting its structural import – in other words, by allowing the feature either to surface or to recede deeper into the middleground.³³ These two basic types of motivic realisation allow variations to be seen to relate not only to the theme but also to other variations (a phenomenon at which I have been hinting throughout). I offer two points in this regard.

First, a variation may instantiate a thematic feature in a way that is salient or expanded relative to the theme but that is still subtle enough to permit of further actualisation. For example, the first variation, as we know, realises the potential of the theme’s B section to reach b^2 . Yet subsequent variations (5 and 12) attain the even higher peak of $c\sharp^3$. Moreover, variation 12 leads to $c\sharp^3$ in a more linear and systematic way than does variation 5. (Variation 14 does as well, yet because it reaches that pitch directly, without accumulating tension by means of a delayed resolution – as occurred in variation 12 – the apex does not have as great an impact. What variation 14 gains in the intelligibility of its sequence it forfeits in the emphasis upon its apex.) Hence, with respect to realisation of the apex, variation 12 surpasses 5, which in turn surpasses 1. Likewise, variation 4 actualises the potential fifthness of the theme’s opening phrase; but variation 14, owing to its less adorned, more clearly stated fifth-motion (soprano, bars 1–7), does so to a greater degree. Furthermore, the first variation points up particular notes of the theme’s bass that are nascently thematic; later, variation 10 more fully realises this possibility by importing the bass line as a whole into the melody.

This last example leads to a second point: that multiple variations may actualise the same feature not merely to different degrees but also in different

ways, the various realisations of a feature differing not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. In this case, variation 1 thematicises the C#s of the theme's bass; it also, of course, places the theme's melody in the bass. Variation 10 presents the theme's bass as the melody. In the final variation, the bass is thematic and melodic in a very different sense: it is presented as a kind of *cantus firmus* or ground bass. These three variations offer diverse instantiations less of a concrete motive than of an abstract idea, which we may term 'bass-as-thematic'.

Such ideas I term 'conceptual motives' (as distinct from 'material motives' – either in the traditional sense of a concrete rhythmic or intervallic shape or in the Schoenbergian sense of a more abstract *Grundgestalt*). A motive is conceptual in that (a) it may be materialised in markedly different ways and no one materialisation will epitomise it – the motive is necessarily broader than any one of its instances; (b) in consequence, it is never definitively presented but rather progressively realised as the piece proceeds; we gradually induce or infer the motive from its numerous instances; and most significant, (c) although it will employ particular musical techniques or phenomena, the substance of the motive consists in ideas *about* such phenomena. For example, as we shall see below, Brahms's use of the *tierce de Picardie* in this piece rises far above the level of a routine musical technique: he invokes it not as a musical given but in such a way as to foreground its potential duality, its capacity to function as either a major I or a V of iv.

We might liken conceptual motives to Schoenberg's 'Idea', which, as expressed by Claire Boge, 'lie[s] outside the realm of specific musical events, being the conceptual seed of a musical creation and the more abstract nature which holds it together as a coherently functioning totality' (Boge 1990, p. 116). The Idea is often a 'tonal problem' whose solution motivates the structure of the entire work. It is first and foremost manifested in the work's *Grundgestalt*, which, according to Hali Fieldman, 'is the link between the composer's atemporal idea and the realization of that idea in time, the work itself' (Fieldman 2002, p. 119). This conception obviously emanates from Schoenberg's organicist aesthetic ideology, which entails that the whole of an artwork is more than the sum of its parts and external to them – it is an idea which infuses the myriad particulars.³⁴ There are, however, three differences between Schoenberg's Idea and my conceptual motive. First, although the former can be either 'absolute' or 'metaphorical', my conceptual motives, at least for the present purposes, are strictly of the 'absolute' variety – limited to ideas dealing with 'syntactic or motivic gestures' (in Boge's definition; Boge 1990, p. 117). Second, whereas Schoenberg's Idea is meant to underlie an entire composition, my conceptual motives underlie only parts of one – in this case, particular variations. Finally, and most significantly, whereas Schoenberg apparently considers the Idea *a priori*, I consider conceptual motives *a posteriori*, inferred retroactively.

Besides the bass-as-thematic, there are four other conceptual motives whereby variations relate to each other in Op. 9.

(1) *Autonomy of tonal entities*. In this piece, melodic and harmonic entities acquire a measure of autonomy in numerous ways. One is formal displacement,

whereby a tonal entity which was associated with a particular formal section in the theme is transplanted to another section in a variation. For example, we saw that in variation 5 the motion A#–B (as well as the tonicisation of iv) is detached from its original function of articulating the onset of section A2 – here it occurs within that section (bars 29–32). Similarly, in variation 4 A#–B in the bass occurs in bar 15, prior to the beginning of section A2. In variation 5, however, this event is much more pronounced – more sonorous, extended and of greater formal consequence (in terms of generating the formal ambiguity we discussed). Variation 5 thus actualises variation 4 with respect to the autonomy of A#–B. In variation 5 the A#, in turn, eventually severs its embellishment relation to B: in the final bar, it arguably functions as a free-standing pitch, serving to induce a major-mode ending (*tierce de Picardie*). That A# possesses a distinct motivic identity within this otherwise formulaic harmonic device is intimated by the unusual voicing of this chord, in which the A# is doubled and the root is played with the right hand. The latter circumstance implies that F# is not the true bass but rather an upper voice (within a I⁶ chord) that is supposed (in the Rameauvian sense) beneath A#. Note, too, the autonomy of A# in the final variation, where it is treated as a pedal point underlying most of the B section rather than as a tonicising agent of B minor. Indeed, this variation constitutes the apotheosis of A#'s autonomy.

If Brahms transplants tonal entities to new formal contexts, he also transplants them to new tonal contexts. In variation 10, for example, bar 8 retains the tonicised A major chord which occurs at that point in the theme even though the key is different: A major, originally III in F# minor, is now recontextualised as V in D major. Likewise, the move to B minor in A2 is preserved, although now it is a tonicised vi. Such invariances – and that these chords in variation 10 are invariances rather than random recurrences is demonstrated by the fact that they arise in the same formal locations as in the theme – arguably serve to exemplify or reinforce the foundational principle of this variation as a whole: that the variation retains the theme's bass within a new key, or, put differently, that the bass, placed in the soprano, engenders a new key. These tonal entities, in short, derive a measure of autonomy from the fact that, in the process of their remaining constant across keys, it becomes apparent that they exist independently of any single tonal function. That is, A major and B minor, upon appearing in variation 10, can no longer be identified solely with III and IV, respectively, of the home key. No longer are they merely scale-step indicators; they are now concrete entities in their own right.

A final, somewhat unusual example should be mentioned. In variation 6, the C major chord is initially evaded (or alluded to only obliquely) in bar 14 within a brief statement of the B#–C# neighbour motive. C# then returns in bars 20 and 21 within a more fully realised, elaborated guise, receiving its own neighbour embellishments, and the C major harmony it supports is tonicised. Moreover, although it does not partake of a B#–C# enlargement, it is likely at least to evoke the enlargement that occurred in variation 3 (especially since, three bars from the end of variation 6, Brahms respells the C# as B#, which he then resolves to C#). For

all these reasons, this variation hints at C's autonomy: this autonomy is present, since the C chord is itself composed out – rather than, as in variation 3, serving merely as a secondary dominant of F minor – but the autonomy is understated because of the lingering association with the B#–C# motive. The next variation realises this autonomy more fully. That is, the B section of variation 7 cadences on G⁷ major (bar 7), clearly V⁷ of a phantom C, before being enharmonically redirected into the home key (G major reappears in the penultimate bar, no sooner tonicised than reappraised as a Neapolitan chord within the home key). C sits on the tonal horizon yet never actually appears; in this respect it is fully liberated from its original function as an enharmonic proxy for B# within a B#–C# enlargement (as in variation 3). C thus attains a higher degree of autonomy in relation to its former embellishment (neighbour) and motivic function than in the previous variation; variation 7 actualises variation 6 with respect to this feature. Interestingly, the aforementioned invariant chords in variation 10 derive autonomy (in relation to tonal function) from increased materiality, whereas C major in variation 7 derives autonomy (in relation to motivic function) from increased abstraction.

In short, certain variations embody a potential for autonomy which subsequent ones actualise. Tonal entities in this piece achieve autonomy with respect to former formal, tonal and motivic functions.

(2) *Tierce de Picardie*. As discussed above, the partially autonomous character of A# at the close of variation 5 suggests that the *tierce de Picardie* (hereafter, 'Picardy') is less a monolithic sonority – that is, less a self-evident formula – than a by-product of independent elements. Nevertheless, it is the most resolute cadence in the piece thus far – more so, I should emphasise, than the previous apparent Picardy in variation 4 (bar 21), since that chord eventually yielded to a minor-mode ending; indeed, in retrospect, it was more a V of IV (the IV resting on a tonic pedal, bar 22) than a major I.³⁵ Variation 5, by contrast, ends firmly on a major I. That tonic, moreover, is the very end of a long build-up, a harmonic digression which serves to expand the consequent phrase of A2 (notice that all the sections of this variation are expanded relative to the theme, and that each expansion is greater than the one before: A1 is expanded from eight to eleven bars, B from eight to twelve bars and A2 from eight to twenty bars). This process grants all the more emphasis to I when it does arrive: the tonic resolves the tension that had been mounting for some eleven bars. Variation 5 thus actualises the foiled, and hence merely potential, Picardy of variation 4. The last two variations do so more fully, for they serve to conclude not just a variation or variation group but the entire piece (indeed, they make up a coda of sorts). Yet, as in the end of variation 5, the major tonic is at least somewhat equivocal, given the gradual, enharmonic manner in which F# major is broached there and the reticent, reflective character of the last two variations (traditionally the Picardy is associated with optimism, strength and triumph over adversity).

Yet another apparent Picardy occurs at the end of variation 8. As in variation 4, this chord is ultimately more a matter of 'mixture in the service of a secondary

key' – that is, of iv – than a Picardy *per se*. In fact, if this function was at all tenuous in variation 4 (since IV there was rather transitory), it is now certain, because the next variation is in the key of B minor; F# major is indubitably seen, in retrospect, as the dominant of that key. In other words, variation 9 greatly amplifies the dominant function of F# major by supplying a more definitive and elongated iv than was present in or after variation 4. (Note that, in variation 8, the undermining of F#'s tonicity is foreshadowed the moment F# first appears: in the antepenultimate bar, E in the alto voice is appended to the F# major triad, forming a presumptive V⁷/IV, and although IV does not fully materialise until variation 9, it is telegraphed by the alto's D# and D^b [which, incidentally, then proceed to C#, thus instantiating the chromatic-slide motive]).³⁶

To summarise: variation 4, in the process of provisionally actualising the theme's potential for definitive tonal closure, generates an apparent potential Picardy. This event has a dual significance in that it signals both affirmative and self-negating potential. The former is realised (although, even here, not unequivocally) by variations 5, 15 and 16; the latter is realised by variation 8 in conjunction with variation 9. An analogous event in this regard is the ambiguous A major in the theme's B section, whose potential for stability, as we have seen, is realised by variation 8, and whose potential for instability is realised by variations 3 and 4. To be clear, self-negation is a component of any potentiality, which, by definition, can either materialise or not. Yet the Picardy of variation 4 distinctly conveys its own negation, its propensity to tonicise iv – and this propensity is realised by subsequent variations. In short, musical potential may be negative potential – not in the weak sense that a potentiality is not realised (although that is always a possibility), but in the strong sense that a lack, inhibition or inability is a palpable quality of the music and is subsequently realised.

(3) *Semitonal ambivalence*. Although this conceptual motive does not originate with the variations as do the 'autonomy' and Picardy motives – it is a salient aspect of the theme – it does come to the fore in the variations and forms a strong bond among them. This idea assumes three distinct forms in the piece. In the first, two notes a semitone apart partake of an uneasy relationship, in which it is uncertain which is the primary and which the secondary note. The seed for this idea is sown in the theme's B section, which oscillates between A and G#. In the variations this ambivalence is more often rectified (in the B sections of variations 4 and 8, for example) than exacerbated. In the second, a single note may ascend by a semitone in one context and descend by a semitone in another. This idea is born of the chromatic-slide motive in the theme, where D# fans out by semitone to both E and D^b. The ambivalence is highlighted at the outset of variation 7, because, as previously described, the downward chromatic slide occurs in a context in which we expect E# to resolve upwards. Finally, a single note can be approached as easily from a semitone above as from a semitone below.

This last form is most evident in the treatment throughout the piece of the presumptive primary note, C#. In the theme, C# is approached from both the D above and the B# below, and these respective upper- and lower-neighbour

motives, as we have seen, are independently concretised by numerous variations. However, it is not until variation 6 that the two motives relate more directly: there D and B \sharp occur simultaneously in the process of ‘wedging’ C \sharp (bars 14–15). However, this is but a momentary occurrence and hence merely suggestive or potential; it is not actualised until variations 10 and 11. In variation 10, as Ex. 13 illustrates (see brackets), the D–C \sharp motion in the A1 section is composed out as part of a large I–V⁶ motion; the tonic, D, is destabilised by G \sharp in the soprano in bar 7 so that it becomes an upper neighbour to C \sharp within A major (V). In the B section, this C \sharp is approached from the other direction. Variation 10 thus revolves around the two different semitonal resolutions to C \sharp (the global *Kopfton*). Variation 11 significantly amplifies this process on two structural levels. At that of the middleground (as shown in Ex. 15), the entire variation enlarges the D–C \sharp motive in the bass and the B \sharp –C \sharp motive in the soprano. At that of the foreground, shortly before the D⁷-*cum*-German sixth resolves to C \sharp in the final bar, it is inverted: the C \flat /B \sharp is transferred to the bass in bar 23 (see again Ex. 14). The normative position of the German sixth chord is briefly regained in the penultimate bar (via an enharmonic voice exchange that restores D to the bass). Hence, the resolution of D to C \sharp in the bass is deflected at the foreground by the insertion of B \sharp – the bass seems unable to decide whether it wants to approach $\hat{5}$ from a semitone above or a semitone below. This variation is thus the apotheosis of semitonal ambivalence.³⁷ Notice how this double-leading-note approach to C \sharp infiltrates subsequent variations – for example, variation 12, with the bass of bars 1–2 (see again Ex. 16) and the German sixth in bar 17 (which of course encompasses both $\hat{6}$ and $\sharp\hat{4}$); and, more obviously, the opening of variation 13 (soprano, bars 1 and 3), where C \sharp is circumscribed by B \sharp and D. In sum, the idea of semitonal ambivalence around the primary note creates an arch among the variations: presaged in variation 6, it intensifies in variation 10, culminates in variation 11 and then leaves residues in variations 12 and 13.

(4) *Fifthness versus thirdness*. We have seen how variation 3, with its preponderance of third-motions, calls attention to how the $\hat{5}$ -line *Urlinie* in the theme is somewhat obscured by an apparent preoccupation with third-progressions. The theme, in other words, is ambivalent with respect to fifthness versus thirdness (although not genuinely ambiguous, since it does unfold a $\hat{5}$ -line *Urlinie* in the end). Subsequent variations exacerbate this ambivalence. Variation 14, as we saw, opens with a clear commitment to fifth-progressions but in the end holds the line at $\hat{3}$. In the last two variations, this conceptual motive assumes a more pointed form – one might even say that variation 15 posits competing primary notes, pitting $\hat{3}$ against $\hat{5}$ (see again Ex. 15). The $\hat{5}$ on which the piece ends is poignantly ironic, given that the piece seems to settle on its preferred primary note but too late for it to resolve linearly. (Such resolution occurs only in the imagination, perhaps, in some hypothetical realm beyond the physical confines of the piece, indicative of endless longing.) The rivalry between these two intervallic spaces, then, first piqued by variation 3, assumes ever broader structural significance as the piece proceeds.

V

Brahms's Op. 9, in brief, instantiates the principle that, in Dahlhaus's pithy formulation, 'the nature of a thing shows itself most clearly in the consequences that proceed from it' (1990, p. 163).³⁸ In this set, the variations' *raison d'être* is not to decorate an established theme but to bring that theme into being. Like any persuasive act of interpretation, analytic or otherwise, the variations treat its object in terms not of what it presumably is but of what it can be. Now that we have witnessed the procedure of thematic actualisation operating across an entire work, we shall examine just a few isolated examples in music by Beethoven and Mozart.

Dahlhaus astutely parses an especially telling moment in Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*.³⁹ Variation 1, bars 9–12 (Ex. 19), revises the sequence of bars 9–12 in the theme, separating out melodic aspects from harmonic ones: whereas in the theme both the melodic content and harmonic progression are sequenced a tone higher, in variation 1 the melody is so sequenced but the harmonies now progress by fifth, tonicising F and B \flat rather than, as in the theme, F and G. If in the theme the melody and harmony in these bars seemed inseparable, it is now apparent they were always at least potentially separate and abstract. Moreover, the harmonic deviation just mentioned is created by the substitution of B \flat in the bass (bar 11) for B \sharp in the analogous part of the theme. This, in turn, alters the original whole-tone relation of model and sequence (between the bass notes A and B) to a semitonal relation (between A and B \flat). By this deviation, Dahlhaus contends, Beethoven hypostatizes the interval of the second as a high-level motivic entity, which both the whole tone of the theme and semitone of variation 1 instantiate. In other words, this variation compels us to reckon with the more abstract idea that underlay the sequential relation to begin with. In these and other variations as well, 'we are forced to grant the aesthetic reality even of the most extreme degrees of abstraction' (Dahlhaus 1991, p. 226). Like the abstract, conceptual motives in the Brahms, the abstract (not quality-specific) interval of the second here emerges only retroactively.

Ex. 19 Beethoven, *33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli*, Op. 120, variation 1, bars 9–13

melodic sequence same as before (up by step)

IV (F) B \flat vi (a)

harmonic sequence different (down by fifth)

Ex. 20 Beethoven, Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, third movement, second theme

The image shows a musical score for the second theme of the third movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125. The score is in 3/4 time and D minor. It features a reduced score with parts for Violins II and Violas (Vn II, Vla), Double Bass (D. b.), Flute and Oboe (Fl., Ob.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The first theme is shown in a separate staff below. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'espressivo', 'più p', and 'pp', and performance instructions like 'morendo'. Bar numbers 25 and 39 are indicated.

A related phenomenon, quite common in late Beethoven, occurs when the composer retroactively defines not a single theme but an affinity between two themes. That is, in alternating variations, he progressively develops a relationship between two themes which initially appear to have no relationship – to be saliently opposed – but which in retrospect harbour a latent commonality and thus the potential for reconciliation. For example, in the third movement of the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven presents two themes that form ostensible antipodes, contrasting in key, metre, tempo, rhythmic façade, orchestration, ambitus, and so on. Yet as the movement unfolds, the first theme progressively assumes the rhythmic syncopation and plasticity of the second. This rapprochement might be seen in retrospect to actualise a potential for commonality which was present from the outset: as Ex. 20 shows in reduced score, the accompanimental bass line in the second theme morphs into consecutive descending-fourth figures which replicate those of the first theme, and at the same pitch level: D–A–B \flat –F \sharp .⁴⁰ Similarly, the ‘Heiliger Dankgesang’ from the String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, counterposes two themes that differ in almost every conceivable respect. In particular, the first theme is free of obvious parallelisms, while the second is dominated by them. Yet in the final variation of the first theme, where the *cantus firmus* is subject to imitations, parallelisms abound, thus drawing an affinity between the first and second themes (in addition, the first theme gradually assumes the registral scope and rhythmic pliability of the second theme as the piece unfolds). In retrospect, we might notice that the first theme embodied a couple of subtle parallelisms from the outset and carried the potential to be reconciled with its ostensible antipode: I refer to the D–G–A–D figure found in bars 21–23 and 27–29. In fact, in bar 29, this motive is passed off to the bass, where it forms a means of connecting one theme to the other, describing $\hat{1}$ – $\hat{4}$ – $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{1}$ in the D major of the second theme. Hence, this motive (very similar to the D–A–B \flat –F of the Ninth Symphony’s third movement) is inclined to mitigate the disparity between the themes and anticipates the more thoroughgoing reconciliation between them. In each of these movements, the progressive

Ex. 21 Mozart, Piano Sonata in D, K. 311, second movement, bars 1–8

integration comprising the narrative arch arguably receives its impetus from a latent motive held in common between two themes. What is actualised over the course of the piece is less that motive itself than the thematic rapprochement it intimates; what is actualised is a conceptual motive.

Although more examples from the Beethoven literature could easily be found, I hope that these substantiate my hypothesis that retrospective thematicity (and retrospective relatedness between themes) within variation sets was a concern not only of Brahms but of Beethoven as well. Nor, to return to a point made at the outset, was this notion entirely foreign to composers prior to Beethoven and Brahms, even if it was not as ingrained. Consider a final example (Ex. 21), this one by Mozart. His consequent phrase is essentially a variation of the antecedent. The sole variant of bar 2 is the E appoggiatura in bar 6, an unassuming pitch that actually has considerable import: it picks up the soprano's E of bar 3, which was in a sense isolated from its surroundings – both by the leap by which it was approached and by the *subito piano* which followed it – and incorporates it into a line that we realise, in retrospective, to have lain just beneath the musical surface (see the broken-line circles). (Note that whereas this variant guides e^2 down to g^1 by step, the one in bar 7 guides e^2 up to g^2 ; in each case, the variant attempts to make sense of a pitch that, at its first appearance, protruded conspicuously from its surroundings.⁴¹) This deceptively simple passage is but one example of Mozart's ability to employ variation technique motivically rather than just decoratively (or, better, to integrate motivic and decorative functions). Obviously, the example also indicates that the particular and probing use of variation which we have been discussing can also be found in pieces not cast as variation sets.⁴²

VI

I began by placing my approach against the backdrop of para-musical (Hegelian and Freudian) paradigms. I shall conclude by placing it against a strictly musical one, which will also provide an opportunity to encapsulate some key points. Most readers will not have failed to detect some overlap between my methodology and that of Leonard Meyer, specifically between my notion of actualisa-

tion and his of realisation (within his implication-realisation model). I would like first briefly to acknowledge some similarities and then to suggest some key differences between Meyer's theories and mine.

In both models, a thematic or melodic idea is 'lacking' in some sense and thus warrants or implies further treatment. For Meyer, one type of implication arises from some manner of syntactical incompleteness, such as an intervallic gap waiting to be filled. Some (although not all) of the potentialities which I have cited are implications in this sense. For example, bar 4 of the theme contains a gap (A–F#) which is filled by variation 4 (on a broader level, this fill serves to realise the $\hat{5}$ -line potential of the entire phrase). Likewise, the arpeggiation within the theme's B section is incomplete in that it fails to reach its implied apex; several variations, as we have seen, remedy this lack. Second, Meyer's realisations can themselves generate further implications; analogously, variations, in the process of actualising a thematic potentiality, can themselves generate new potentialities, as we have seen. Third, Meyer claims that we often do not recognise an implication until its realisation occurs, that we become aware of it only in retrospect; I have said much the same with respect to thematic potentiality. Relatedly, Meyer posits that the identity of an implicative event is partially contingent upon the realisations to which it gives rise, as I have argued with respect to the themes of variation sets. According to Meyer, 'Most of the time a pattern can be fully comprehended and its internal relationships analyzed only by seeing what follows from it We understand temporal events ... not only in terms of where they have come from and what they are, but also in terms of their consequences – both proximate and remote' (Meyer 1973, p. 113).

These commonalities, however, are overshadowed by more fundamental differences. The first is especially apparent when considering Meyer's own definition of potentiality, the second type of implication in his theory (alongside incompleteness). He defines potentiality as a 'discrepancy that calls for resolution' (Meyer 1973, p. 123). This can occur when, within an event, melodically prominent notes are not 'complemented by functional importance', or when 'the event as a whole implies a function not realized when it is first presented' (*ibid.*) – as when, for example, a piece begins with a cadential figure. A potentiality in my sense, by contrast, need entail no patent discrepancy or disparity; it requires only the inconspicuous, ambiguous or nebulous presentation of an idea which allows for or is conducive to clearer statement and further exploration. Moreover, even when the potentiality does involve some sort of obvious lack, its realisation need not attempt to resolve or ameliorate this lack in some way. Quite the contrary: the realisation, as noted, may consist precisely in pointing up this lack, rendering the ambiguity more pronounced and amplifying its effect. Indeed, one of the essential precepts of my model is that some musical ambiguities are aesthetically valuable and are meant to be preserved or even enhanced rather than resolved within a given act of interpretation.

Second, a potentiality in my sense is not a 'generative event' in the way that an implication is for Meyer – it does not necessarily implicate or require particular

continuations. Implicit in Meyer's scheme is, I believe, a relation of causality (the implication in some sense causes the realisation), whereas in my scheme the potentiality arises largely in retrospect (we come to know it through its realisation). In other words, thematic potentialities in my model are not necessarily seminal events which precipitate fuller realisations but musical elements which are hypostatized as features or properties only after the fact – by a variation. Consequently, my potentialities are certainly less likely than Meyer's implications to generate any expectations of their being realised (although, to be precise, Meyer does not strictly equate implication and expectation).

In short, a potentiality in my scheme need involve no syntactical fissure or structural disparity which requires resolution; it can be incomplete in some sense but need not be. It is often complete in itself but understated or nebulous, so that it attains the status of a full-fledged feature only after it has been varied. It acquires a stable identity, paradoxically, only by being deviated from (varied, embellished or permuted) in some respect, much as musical conventions, to offer a broad analogy, are often recognised and hypostatized as such only in the process of being deformed or problematised.⁴³ Both thematic and stylistic features come out of the woodwork only, or especially, when toyed with.

NOTES

Versions of this article were read at the 2011 Music Theory Midwest conference (Lincoln, NB) and the 2012 'Brahms in the New Century' conference, presented by the American Brahms Society (New York). I thank Kevin Korsyn, Wayne Petty, Frank Samarotto and Ramon Satyendra for their generous assistance with this essay. Many of my thoughts about Brahms's Op. 9 arose while teaching this piece to Ari Benderly, and I thank him for that opportunity and for his valuable input. Finally, Ivanovitch (2010c) discusses many of the same issues I raise here, but his article was published as this one was going to press, so I did not have time to incorporate it.

1. Tovey makes a virtually identical claim in his 'Variations' entry for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1944), p. 245.
2. For examples of this phenomenon in Mozart, see Ivanovitch (2010b) and Swinkin (2004).
3. Nelson (1949), p. 80, cites Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn and Brahms as nineteenth-century composers who at times adopted the 'ornamental variation' (which for Nelson typified the High Classical style) 'in spite of the trend towards a more vigorous and dramatic idiom in the early nineteenth century'.
4. This is particularly true of Nelson's 'free variation' type, which 'indulges in an unfettered development of [the theme's] material'; *ibid.*, p. 90.
5. Of course, Adorno's appraisal of Beethoven's compositional styles is replete with complex sociological meanings that we can not pursue here. Rosen, less inclined than Adorno to periodise Beethoven's oeuvre, suggests that '[t]he use of the simplest elements of the tonal system as themes lay at the heart of Beethoven's personal style from the beginning' (1997), p. 389.

6. See Dahlhaus (1991), pp. 6–7, 89, 116–18 and 169–71; and Schmalfeldt (1995).
7. This last point comes from Caplin (2010) rather than from Schmalfeldt herself, who apparently takes it for granted that the material beginning in bar 41 articulates a secondary theme from the start (see Schmalfeldt 1995, p. 65). Generally, Caplin is sympathetic to Schmalfeldt's reading of the *Tempest* but offers some alternative readings, such as the one just cited. He also finds problematic Schmalfeldt's assumption that main themes are in general rhythmically stable and texturally homogeneous whereas transitions are rhythmically unstable and texturally heterogeneous (and thus that the opening 21 bars of the *Tempest* initially appear introductory). Caplin asserts that 'a good number of main themes feature discontinuities in durational patterning [and] marked contrasts in textural disposition', while 'transitions tend to feature continuity of durational patterning [and] uniformity of textural combinations' (2010, sec. 9).
8. Kunze (1972), pp. 129–31, in discussing this piece, notes: 'In the introductory part the theme's bass is the basis for the building up of the section from the unison bass to the four-voice texture. The theme itself in its melodic form ... is in a sense the result of this bottom-up process *The theme is put forward not as something ready-made but as built from scratch*' ['Im Introduktions-Teil ist der Basso del [sic] Thema ... die Basis für die Aufschichtung des Satzes vom Unisono-Baß zur Vierstimmigkeit. Das Thema selbst in seiner melodischen Form ... ist gleichsam Ergebnis dieses von unten aufbauenden Vorgangs *Das Thema wird nicht als ein Fertiges aufgestellt, sondern von Grund auf erbaut*'] (my translation).
9. Szabolcsi (1960), p. 149, apparently discerns this disposition even in Beethoven's earliest variations, stating, 'It is characteristic ... that Mozart began with dances and songs, with movement and melody, Beethoven, by contrast, with variations ... with *analysis and reconfiguration*' ['"Es ist charakteristisch ... daß Mozart mit Tanzstücken and Liedern, mit Bewegung und Melodie begann, Beethoven dagegen mit Variationen ... mit *Analyse und Umgestaltung*"']; cited in Batta and Kovács (1978), p. 126 (my translation). Whiting (1994), p. 459, speaking of Beethoven's Variations on Dittersdorf's 'Es war einmal ein alter Mann', WoO 66, likewise affirms, 'Even before leaving Bonn, Beethoven held an analytic rather than a primarily decorative conception of musical variation' ['Schon bevor er Bonn verließ, hatte Beethoven eine eher analytische als primär dekorative Auffassung der musikalischen Variationen'] (my translation).
10. Schoenberg (1967), p. 103, remarks, 'A theme is not at all independent and self-determined. On the contrary, it is strictly bound to consequences which have to be drawn, and without which it may appear insignificant'. Schoenberg here is distinguishing between theme and melody on the basis that true themes are comprised of motivic molecules that mandate further elaboration; melodies, by contrast, are much less motivic in constitution; in addition, they are more homogeneous and evince greater equipoise. For both reasons, melodies are less consequential, more self-contained, than themes: 'Thus a melody can be compared to ... an "aphorism", in its rapid advance from problem to solution. But a theme resembles rather a scientific hypothesis which does not convince without a number of tests, without presentation or proof' (*ibid.*, p. 102). Schoenberg appears to be speaking of themes in general, but we can readily understand his viewpoint as emanating from (or inflected by) a distinctly early nineteenth-century aesthetic context, a Hegelian ethos. Interestingly, Schenker, early on, appeared to hold a view similar to Schoen-

berg's, despite the eventual divergence of the two thinkers in many respects. For the Schenker of *Harmony*, motives were repositories of latent features, latencies that were variously revealed as the motive entered into various circumstances, much like a principal character in a drama. As van den Toorn asserts, interpolating Schenker, 'the progress of a piece was judged to be the progress of its motives, the progress of a single motive that of a "personage in a drama" whose "characteristic features" were revealed in a series of stages' (1996, p. 373); see Schenker ([1906] 1973), p. 12.

11. One might claim that sonata form, irrespective of historical or compositional style, is by nature discursive and thus forges thematic identity within an ongoing, uninterrupted process, and that variation form, by contrast, is by nature recursive – in the sense that it is repetitive, that it perpetually revisits the same event (that is, the theme) from different vantages – and thus forges thematic identity within a more retrospective framework. On this distinction, see Ivanovitch (2010a).
12. We should also be wary of the current tendency in musicology to rely too heavily or automatically upon Hegel and to simplify or distort his precepts. Korsyn (2009) admonishes in particular against invoking the hackneyed 'Hegelian triad' – that of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, which Hegel himself apparently dismissed as a reified schema.
13. See Freud ([1895] 1966).
14. The case study can be found in Freud (2003). Freud specifically cites the 'post-poned' (*nachträglich*) effect of his analysand's 'primal scene', in which he witnesses his parents copulating, on p. 239.
15. Yet another possible para-musical model for thematic actualisation resides in Nietzsche ([1887] 1956). Very briefly, he posits that subjects are not self-determining but are instead inextricable from their actions. We develop self-awareness only in the process of having to account for ourselves, of defending ourselves against the accusations of the 'weak' whom we have ostensibly harmed. The human subject is not autonomous and self-positing but rather formulates an identity only after having acted aggressively towards another human and then having been coerced (by some sort of legal system) to explain himself or herself, to link himself or herself causally to that action. Butler (2005), pp. 10–15, offers a helpful excursus.
16. On the semiotics of musical exemplification within the context of variation form, see Swinkin (2004).
17. Well-known applications of Schenkerian methods to variation form include Cavett-Dunsby (1989), Jackson (1999) and Marston (1989). Schenker himself took only a few extended forays into variation analysis; see Schenker (1924), ([1926] 1996) and (1997).
18. Much of the scholarship on Op. 9 up to now has focussed upon its wealth of musical references. Most obviously, the theme is Robert Schumann's *Albumblatt*, the first of five from his *Bunte Blätter*, Op. 99. Less obviously but amply documented, variation 9, in its key and texture, alludes to the second *Albumblatt*, and a countermelody at the close of variation 10 (conspicuous because it appears to bear little or no relation to the theme) alludes to the theme of Clara Schumann's *Romance variée*, Op. 3 (1833), and thus also to Robert Schumann's *Impromptu*, Op. 5 (1833), which employ the same theme. Several authors have also been struck by the cornucopia

- of genres Brahms invokes – from canon to Schumannesque toccata to Mendelssohnian scherzo. Both types of reference have in turn incited much speculation as to the para-musical meanings Op. 9 might hold – especially regarding the relationships among Brahms, Robert and Clara. On these points see Floros (1980), Littlewood (2004), Neighbour (1984) and Sisman (1990). While these lines of inquiry are no doubt interesting, I believe expositors of this piece have focussed on them unduly, with the result that many of the subtle structural relations between the variations and theme that pervade this work await elucidation. Danuser (1984) is likewise somewhat skeptical of an unduly biographical approach; accordingly, in his essay he strikes a fine balance between the structural and biographical, framing Brahms's structural accomplishments – in particular his unique amalgamation of the strict and free variation styles – as efforts to carve out an individual musical identity in relation to Robert Schumann, whose variations were pervasively free (falling into the category of 'fantasy variation').
19. See, for example, Mozart's Variations in E \flat on an Air by Bonmarchai, K. 354; in C on 'Ah vous dirai-je, maman', K. 265; in C on a Theme by Dezède, K. 264; in G on a Theme by Gluck, K. 455; and in B \flat , K. 500; Beethoven's Variations on a Theme by Paisiello, WoO 70, and 32 Variations in C minor, WoO 80; and Schubert's Variations on a Theme by Hüttenbrenner. Mies (1937), p. 478, terms this technique 'mirroring' (*Spiegelung*). Of course, any two consecutive variations may partake of a mirroring relationship, but it is more common in the first two.
 20. See Swinden (2005). Whereas Swinden mainly theorises chords that amalgamate subdominant and dominant functions (D^S indicates a subdominant-inflected dominant, S^D the reverse), some of the chords here amalgamate dominant and tonic functions. Danuser also notes the 'harmonic-functional mixture' (*Funktionsmischung der Harmonik*) in this variation (1984, p. 96). Incidentally, Beethoven employs essentially the same technique in the first variation of the *Appassionata* Sonata, Op. 57, second movement, as Brahms does here in variation 2.
 21. For this last paragraph I am deeply indebted to an anonymous reader.
 22. The F \sharp in bar 4 is a *Nachschlag* of sorts, a consonant-skip embellishment of the previous A. In this sense, A–F \sharp is parallel to the bass's D–B in bar 2, in which B embellishes D in a similar manner. This correspondence is noteworthy in two respects: first, it supports the contention that D connects to C \sharp in the bass, that the two notes form a 6–5 motive. Second, it is yet another example of the theme's imitative proclivities: in this reading, the soprano in bars 3–4 imitates not only the tenor of bar 1 but then also the bass of bar 2 (the former at pitch, the latter a perfect fifth higher).
 23. Cadwallader (1988) argues that this technique is a characteristic of Brahms's late style. As the example suggests – and as subsequent ones will – this technique is by no means foreign to Brahms's earlier music, nor to Beethoven, for that matter. For example, Reti (1951), pp. 206–11, in examining the motivic network spanning the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 135, suggests that the opening grace-note gesture (the viola's G–A–B \flat) assumes motivic identity precisely because it recurs (in bars 4–6) with interpolated pitches – in our terms, it is composed out. As Cook (1987), p. 94, explains, 'It is recurrences like this, says Reti, that justify our

calling the first three notes a motif; in other words, when you call something a motif you are not talking about how it looks (or sounds) in itself but about what it is *doing* in the piece' (emphasis added).

24. Notice, incidentally, that this variation progressively foreshortens its metric groups, from six quavers in bar 1 to three in bar 20 to two in bar 23. This abbreviation may reflect the broader process of progressive diminution of which this variation is the terminus: from quavers in the theme and variation 1 to quaver triplets in variations 2 and 3 to semiquavers in variations 4 and 5 to semiquaver triplets in variation 6. This variation, by means of metric compression, encapsulates and exemplifies the larger-scale process of rhythmic acceleration that it caps.
25. Compare Dahlhaus's (1967) reading of the first variation of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*: the variation presents a duality or conflict between a long upbeat (beats 3 and 4, since Dahlhaus apparently conceives the metre of this variation, although marked common time, as in essence *alla breve*) and a short one, and, concomitantly, a conflict between a 'falling' metre (that is, trochaic) and a 'climbing' one (that is, iambic). In his view, this antagonism significantly amplifies one more latent in the theme – in particular, between the short upbeat at the very beginning and the longer one in bar 3 (starting on the *sforzando* E). In this respect, the relationship between Beethoven's variation 1 and its theme is remarkably similar to that between Brahms's variation 6 and its theme. See Dahlhaus (1967), pp. 20–1.
26. Granted, here I am unable to rely upon pitch invariance ($D\sharp-D\sharp-C\sharp$) to corroborate this reading. Yet I feel the chromatic-slide motive is distinguished by more than just its original pitch classes; it is also distinguished by its consistent restriction to three notes spanning an interval of two semitones. It is thus more specific than, say, an entire chromatic scale or large segment of it.
27. Technically, the $D\flat$ follows from B rather than from $D\sharp$ because both $D\flat$ and B are in the third-to-top voice; nonetheless, the principle of voice-leading parsimony would hold that the $D\flat$ in essence follows from $D\sharp$.
28. Sisman (1993), p. 4, posits that variation form is always on the verge of merging with other forms, insofar as 'at any moment a greater-than-usual contrast can upset the perception of a repetitive form and seemingly reorganize the whole', and that variation form can readily suggest some ternary-oriented design. Whether this design is better understood as a *da capo* ternary or a sonata, Sisman suggests, is largely contingent upon the character of the tonal-thematic return: in the former such return has a 'symmetrical' quality, in the latter a more 'resolving' quality (*ibid.*). It is on this basis that I view variation 10 as suggestive of a B section within a ternary form, since variation 12 provides more a symmetrical return than a resolution or point of arrival (variation 11, as we shall see, is retransitional). Like the B section of most large ternaries, variation 10 features its own 'interior' theme and key. On these and other features of this form, consult Caplin (1998), especially pp. 211–15. (Caplin attests to the ability of the *minore* or *maggiore* variation within a variation set to assume the role of an interior theme within a large ternary [p. 218].)
29. Interestingly, the bass-soprano counterpoint of the opening instantiates the '1–7 ... 4–3' schema about which Gjerdingen (1988) has written extensively, although this instance is somewhat atypical in sounding the scale-degree pairs simultaneously (note that in bars 1–2, $\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ occurs in the bass, $\hat{7}-\hat{1}$ in the soprano; in bars 3–4 the

- voices begin that way but are then contrapuntally inverted). This atypicality is consonant with Gjerdingen's claim that, in fact, 'characteristic examples' of this schema are 'seldom found after the 1840s' [1988, p. 249].) A very similar treatment of this schema, as pointed out by an anonymous reader, occurs in the opening theme of the third movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. If in fact this variation constitutes a salient reference on Brahms's part to the Ninth – and I am not necessarily advancing that hypothesis, although the resemblance, Brahms's inner voices notwithstanding, is striking – then one might claim that such an association with a famous slow movement supports reading this variation as essentially the B section (the 'slow movement') of a large ternary form.
30. This reading of the tonal structure supports that of the formal structure offered above: many nineteenth-century large ternaries employ VI for the interior key area, often converting it, as Brahms does here, to an augmented sixth chord in order to transition back to the tonic at the start of A2, thus creating a middleground neighbour motion. Another variation set which employs this key scheme and modulatory technique is Schubert's Impromptu, Op. 142 No. 3, where the theme and variations 1 and 2 are in the home key of B \flat major; variation 3 is in B \flat minor, as modal preparation for the G \flat major of variation 4 (much as, in Brahms's set, the B minor of variation 9 prepares the D major of 10); then, with the addition of a brief E \sharp in the third-to-last bar of this variation, G \flat major is transformed into a G \flat German sixth chord, paving the way for a return to the home key in the fifth and final variation. On this and other similar examples, see Perry (2002).
 31. Danuser (1984) notes that the C–B–A–G \sharp figure relates to the inner voice's A–G–F \sharp –E of the previous variation (bar 1), which itself alludes to the descending fourth (C \sharp –B–A–G \sharp) of the theme's melody. In our terms, we may state that variation 11 actualises the latent thematic content of variation 10's inner voices by rendering explicit the theme's pitches (in a chromatic variant) to which those inner-voice notes obliquely refer.
 32. Jackson (1992) offers an analogous example in Fauré's song 'La fleur qui va sur l'eau', claiming that in bar 36 the B \flat , which Fauré had previously established as an enharmonic proxy for A \sharp (the leading note in this B minor song), in bar 37 discharges its dual tendencies to ascend and descend by semitone – as A \sharp it rises to B, and as B \flat it alights on A. Jackson deems this pitch a fitting symbol for the feckless heroine of Catulle Mendès's poem, whose rose floats on the ocean's surface as she sinks below.
 33. These two types of actualisation may even occur within the same passage. In variation 14, for instance, the D–C \sharp motive is rendered rather salient at the foreground level when the two pitches collide in the right hand in bar 3; at the same time, that D participates in an enlarged neighbour motion spanning bars 1–7 (see Ex. 18b). Another example is the opening of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E major, Op. 14 No. 1. The open fourth (b 1 –e 2) in the first bar is a potential motive that is progressively realised not only by the sequential repetition in bar 2 but also by the composing out of a linear fourth over bars 1–4: b 1 –c \sharp^2 –d \sharp^2 –e 3 (which also serves to fill the initial gap). What is more, the final pitch of this progression is itself approached by a rapid rising-fourth figure in bar 4 (b 2 –c \sharp^3 –d \sharp^3 –e 3), which renders the middleground fourth-progression more audible and salient. Middleground enlargement and foreground exemplification thus coexist within the same phrase and even overlap. (This example, incidentally, hints at the potential of my method-

ology to elucidate instances of motivic actualisation within forms and genres other than theme and variation.) For analyses of this passage, see Neumeier (1987) and Schachter (1982).

34. On these points, consult Neff's introduction to Schoenberg (1994), especially pp. liii–lvii.
35. Proctor (1978) discusses the phenomenon in which a key is tonicised primarily in order to emphasise a non-tonic chord *within* that key; he terms this 'tonicization in the service of a secondary key' (which is usually the dominant, for which he coins the term 'dominantization') (p. 71). As we have just seen, modal mixture can serve this very same purpose, which we can thus designate 'mixture in the service of a secondary key'.
36. An analogous example is Beethoven's Piano Sonata in A \flat major, Op. 110, in the transition from the Allegro molto to the third movement, which begins with a recitative. The former, in the key of F minor, ends on a F major chord – an apparent *tierce de Picardie* but one that ultimately serves as the dominant of B \flat minor, the key which begins the next movement. Note that, as in the Brahms (at the end of variation 8), this passage telegraphs its negation of the conventional *tierce de Picardie* function with its *piano* dynamic (Brahms does so with a *diminuendo* and by means of the alto line just mentioned).
37. Such wedging of, or 'double-leading-note' motion towards, the dominant is a common technique in the nineteenth century. To cite another example, one strikingly akin to Brahms's variation 11: Schubert's 'Einsamkeit' (the final song of Part I of *Winterreise*) unfolds a VI starting in bar 29, a G 7 to be precise (I cite here the second version of the song, which is in B minor); this sonority implies C major just as Brahms's D 7 implies G major. Yet in neither case does the implied key materialise. Schubert, like Brahms, enharmonically respells and redirects this harmony such that it mutates into a German sixth chord which resolves to V within the home key. In both pieces, the German sixth amalgamates two pre-established motives, that of the $\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ and $\sharp\hat{4}-\hat{5}$ (in the Schubert, the latter motive first appears in bars 16 and 17 as part of an E–E \sharp –F \sharp passing motion). For a thorough analysis of this song, see Everett (1990); for a rigorous exposition of the wedging technique, see Witten (1997), pp. 117–86.
38. Dahlhaus is not discussing Brahms or thematic actualisation in this context.
39. See Dahlhaus (1991), p. 226.
40. I thank Kevin Korsyn for elucidating this example. My discussion of the next example is indebted to Korsyn (1993).
41. Cavett-Dunsby (1989), p. 266, points out a similar phenomenon in the first movement of Mozart's G major Quartet, K. 387: bar 2 of the first group in the recapitulation (which Cavett-Dunsby is considering as, for all intents and purposes, a variation of the exposition) supplies a slight variant in the form of a chromatic passing note, which is itself drawn from bar 4 of the original theme. In this way, explains Cavett-Dunsby, 'the latent unity of bars 2 and 4 of the exposition is made explicit by bar 109 of the recapitulation'.
42. Ivanovitch's work in general focusses on the broader 'environment of variation' within Mozart's oeuvre; see Ivanovitch (2010a) and (2010b).

43. Apropos of this analogy, Rosen (1997), p. 482, states, 'Beethoven treats harmonic conventions very much as he treats the themes of variation sets; he aims less to decorate or vary them as [*sic*] to reduce them to their underlying skeleton'.

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NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

JEFFREY SWINKIN is a doctoral candidate in music theory at the University of Michigan. He researches the areas of performance and analysis, variation form and the philosophy of music.