



## Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata

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## Contexts

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### Abstract and Keywords

There is no consensus regarding the manner in which sonata form in the decades around 1800 is to be grasped. Analysts are confronted with a clutch of diverse approaches with differing emphases, interests, and terminologies. At the same time we propose a new genre-based perspective, along with useful ways of formulating analytical questions and moving on to productive hermeneutic endeavors. Musicology and music theory have often pursued distinct paths that generate different questions and answers. Studying and teaching musicology and music theory in the 1960s to 1980s, most authors absorbed in such views and previous textbooks invited a too rigid understanding of sonata form. By midcentury, it had become a scholarly point to declare war on the textbooks on the limitations of classifying schemes in general.

*Keywords:* consensus, analysts, sonata, limitations, textbooks, musicology, music theory

### Differing Approaches to Sonata Form

There is no consensus regarding the manner in which sonata form in the decades around 1800 is to be grasped. On the contrary, analysts are confronted with a clutch of diverse approaches with differing emphases, interests, and terminologies. This is contested terrain, particularly since the structure is basic to how we conceptualize the Austro-Germanic art-music enterprise stemming from Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. Our contribution, *Sonata Theory*, provides a *via media* among these approaches, remaining open to the positive insights that each has to offer and for the most part remaining methodologically compatible with them all. At the same time we propose new, genre-based

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perspectives, along with useful ways of formulating analytical questions and moving on to productive hermeneutic endeavors — interpretations of meaning.

Situating oneself within a conflicted field is a risky, fallible enterprise, in part because one is obliged reductively to characterize the work of others — and those others nearly always object (often rightly so) to such characterizations. And yet it may be helpful to sketch out some rough descriptions of viable approaches to the subject of sonata form, if only to suggest an impression of the larger playing field. In influential English-language scholarship today one might recognize four general trends: two broad musicological lines and two broad music-theory lines. To be sure, the categories overlap — they are anything but airtight — and within each there are differences and varied accents in the way the general method is formulated. Still, musicology and music theory have often pursued distinct paths, generating different questions and answers.

The two broad musicological approaches, sometimes intersecting, are: (1) the style of eclectic analytical writing favored by Donald Francis Tovey and carried on (and varied) by such differing writers as Joseph Kerman and Charles Rosen and (2) the more strictly “historical-evidentiary-empirical” concerns of such diverse figures as William S. Newman, Jan LaRue, Eugene K. Wolf, Leonard G. Ratner, and their successors. The two broad music-theoretical approaches are: (3) Schenkerian and post-Schenkerian methodologies and (4) lines of analysis emphasizing motivic growth from small musical cells, as well as the identification of phrase-shapes and the patterns of larger sectional blocks—a style of analysis associated with Arnold Schoenberg, Rudolph Réti, and Hans Keller, and including the work of Erwin Ratz and, most recently, William E. **(p.4)** Caplin.<sup>1</sup> At the risk of oversimplification (and with apologies to those unmentioned), we might characterize the interests of these four categories by citing an example of an important text within each.

1. Our first-category illustration is Charles Rosen's *Sonata Forms* (1980, rev. 1988).<sup>2</sup> Drawing on the analytical and prose style of Tovey and grounded in a vast knowledge of the repertory, Rosen's *magnum opus* stressed the variety of procedures that one can encounter in the “texture” or “process” that we now call sonata form. (Hence his plural, “forms,” echoing Tovey.)<sup>3</sup> Rather than elaborating an intricate background plan for the form, Rosen preferred to demonstrate how difficult—or futile—it is to provide a set of detailed expectations regarding it because of the unique things that occur in individual pieces by composers of genius. As a matter of principle Rosen shunned the idea of a “general practice” for the construction of sonatas — except for a few tonal requirements and common textural choices — although there were clearly better and more masterly solutions to the general set of problems at hand.<sup>4</sup> This somewhat intuitive approach, acute and invariably musical, also emphasized the concept of tonal “polarization” (usually tonic and dominant) in expositions

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and famously regarded the expositional shift to a non-tonic key as an “oppositional” move, a “large-scale dissonance” (“structural dissonance” or “dissonant section”) that needs to be resolved in the recapitulation.<sup>5</sup> A central feature of Rosen's writing (as well as that of Tovey and Kerman) was the description of individual compositional styles and preferences, along with the pronouncement of cleanly-divided aesthetic judgments of the works at hand — strong praise for the masterworks contrasted with tart dismissals of works deemed not to make the grade.

2. The second category is best represented by Leonard G. Ratner's *Classic Music* (1980).<sup>6</sup> Somewhat parallel to the scholarly-inventory work of William S. Newman and Jan LaRue, Ratner sought to reconstruct the concept of the eighteenth-century style from the point of view of the eighteenth century itself. The book was to be

a full-scale explication of the stylistic premises of classic music, a guide to the principles according to which this music was composed...The exposition of 18th-century musical rhetoric is found in theoretical and critical treatises...[These writings] point to what was current *then*, illuminating our present view of the music. Coordinated with analysis of the music itself, the data gleaned from these writings make it possible to determine the basic criteria of expression, rhetoric, structure, performance, and style that govern classic music...This book allows the student to approach the music and musical precepts of the 18th century in much the same way a listener of that time would have done.<sup>7</sup>

**(p.5)** Not surprisingly, Ratner paid close attention to the early theorists' descriptions of what came to be called (c. 1824–1845) “sonata form.” The Newman-LaRue-Ratner projects (however they might differ in other respects) were ones of data-gathering and recovery. One of their features was to urge analysts to sideline nineteenth- or twentieth-century views of sonata form in order to gain a more period-conscious conception of the form.<sup>8</sup> (In this regard these interests are not without parallel to the performance-practice movement and its quest for “authenticity.”) To varying degrees scholars within this circle seek to describe sonata form (and other forms) from the perspective of late-eighteenth-century theorists — favoring their terminology and concerns and being cautious about going beyond them.<sup>9</sup> Writers influenced by this point of view call upon the authority of late-eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century writers on the form (such as the important statements of Heinrich Christoph Koch, Francesco Galeazzi, Augustus Kollmann, and Anton Reicha). Several of them have also tended to view harmony (modulations, key-areas visited, and so on) as the primary feature of sonata form in the years from roughly 1750 to 1820—giving it the upper hand over thematic arrangement. In the mid-twentieth century Ratner famously contested the

earlier, thematic view of the sonata, which he regarded as discredited, an anachronistic, nineteenth-century (mis-)under-standing of the form as it had been originally grasped in Beethovenian and pre-Beethovenian decades.<sup>10</sup> Some writers influenced by Ratner's work are also concerned with identifying historically defensible musical "topics" (standardized musical gestures or types within phrases) and eighteenth-century conceptions of "rhetoric" in this repertory.

3. Moving to the music-theory side of things, the touchstone of the third category is Heinrich Schenker's *Der freie Satz* (1935, translated as *Free Composition*).<sup>11</sup> For many music theorists interested in sonata form, no text is more central than this one. Opposed to traditional ways of discussing musical structure, Schenker was convinced that he had discovered a new theory of form, "a new concept, one inherent in the works of the great masters; indeed, it is the very secret and source of their being: the concept of organic coherence."<sup>12</sup> This theory was to be grounded not in phrase- or section-repetitions or in thematic manipulation but rather in linear-contrapuntal views of the sonata as the unfolding of a "fundamental structure" (*Ursatz*) by means of more elaborate middleground and foreground structures. Middlegrounds and foregrounds are understood as florid "diminutions" of more simple, elemental background gestures elaborated over the course of an entire movement. The method is highly sensitive to contrapuntal, linear voice-leading, long-range prolongations or descents of important individual pitches, and the like. Here sonata form is understood as divided into two parts (expositiondevelopment | | recapitulation) with a crucial harmonic "interruption" (| |) at the end of the development and a subsequent rebeginning at the onset of the recapitulation, which restates and finally completes the fundamental structure interrupted at the end of the first part.<sup>13</sup>

**(p.6)** 4. Our example of the fourth category is William E. Caplin's *Classical Form* (1998).<sup>14</sup> Its opening paragraph proclaimed the need for "a new theory of classical form," one that avoids "ill-defined concepts and ambiguous terminology derived from theories that have long fallen into disrepute." Following the work of Schoenberg and Ratz,<sup>15</sup> Caplin viewed form as a *grouping structure*, and he set out to identify and classify the "formal functions" of smaller thematic/formal units. In practice, this entailed close attention to the structures and subparts of three fundamental theme types: the *sentence* (consisting, for Caplin, of presentation, continuation, and cadential functions; or basic idea [usually repeated, perhaps with variation] + fragmentation + cadence); the *period* (antecedent + consequent); and the *small ternary* (A—B — A'). Much attention was also given to the anatomy of numerous "hybrids" that mix aspects of the more standard theme types (as defined by the author). As the musical parts are assembled, they can take on "framing functions,"

“interthematic functions,” “harmonic functions,” “initiating functions,” “continuation functions,” and so on, often at more large-scale levels. One aim of analysis is to be able to recognize the theme types (and hybrids) and to place them into a larger functional system of interrelated parts. In the end, what was provided was an elaborate taxonomy of different kinds of phrase-and-section juxtapositions.

### The War against the Textbooks

One prominent feature of the study of sonata form in recent decades — very much in the wake of Tovey's similar assertions<sup>16</sup> — has been the repeated declaration that the “textbook” view of sonata form is inadequate to deal with the actual musical structures at hand. At best, such a scheme represents a conformist trap that master-composers avoid falling into. In addition, the implication has sometimes been that to undertake any such “textbook” description of norms, however nuanced or sophisticated, is a mistaken enterprise. It is not difficult to find conventionalized avowals on these matters. Here is a strong version of the credo from Claudio Spies, excerpted from an essay in a book of *Brahms Studies* (1991):

There is nothing new about “forms” with whose aid pieces of music are easily and lazily categorized or typified, tagged, pigeon-holed, and conveniently stored away without further — or even prior—hearing, and without further thought. We were all initiated into the non-mysterious stolidities of “form,” particularly the most fictitious one of all, “Sonata Form.” Nor is there, I hasten to add, anything new in the notion that such “forms” — and especially “Sonata Form” — are fictions to whose specifications and proclaimed norms very few pieces of music worth any further thought actually conform in any appreciable way.... It is almost as if Brahms had decided to compose [the *Tragic Overture*] as a potent rebuttal of notions propounded by the tenets of *Formenlehre*, although [it] is by no means unique among his works in this respect.

The same point, put more gently — and after an admirably detailed study of Brahms — may be found from James Webster in the same volume:

From examples like these it is clear that norms of formal procedure, whether the bad old textbook **(p.7)** models or the numerical averages developed earlier in this paper, can never satisfactorily account for the reality of individual compositions. In fact, when Brahms's technique seems most paradoxical — as in the timeless, themeless, tonic retransition we have just analysed—the artistic result is often the most poetic.<sup>17</sup>

Remarks along these lines could hardly be more familiar. Even earlier, by midcentury, it had become a scholarly point of honor to declare war on the textbooks and, for some (again, in varying degrees), on the often-wooden limitations of classifying schemes in general. Whether uttered in stronger or

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gentler versions, such declarations advanced unswervingly orthodox late-twentieth-century convictions, and they were caught up in the traditional philosophical dilemma of universals and particulars. For the most part — again, much as Tovey had done — they took partisan positions on behalf of the particulars, or at least on behalf of the ultimate noncapturability of the great masters. Apart from assessing this neonominalist argument on its own terms, it would also be valuable to investigate the modernist assumptions that made such views possible: the mystification of genius; the belief in the compulsion of the true artist to escape from confining, externally applied rules or systems; the precept that what we most revere in music must not only be beyond the grasp of academic minds and rational classification but must always be declared to be so; and so on.

Studying and teaching musicology and music theory in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the authors of this book absorbed such views into the marrow of their bones. We also agreed—and we continue to agree — that prior textbooks had invited a too rigid understanding of sonata form. So far as the gravamen of the charge goes, the literal point is correct and has the added benefit of bringing caution to any new analytical inquiry. Still, the problem of determining the role of convention within this “classical” repertory was more complex than the reflex denunciations suggested. The reiterated conviction that there was no single plan for sonata form in the later eighteenth century, true enough in its narrow, literal sense, rises to the level of an error when it is naively taken either to dismiss the presence of substantially more complex systems of standard practices or to discourage inquiry into those practices. Is there a more effective way of examining conventional musical gestures (or calling forth that which *was* conventional within individualized musical gestures) without producing ideas that were reductive, stiff, mechanical, prescriptive? Is an aesthetically sensitive openness to the study of convention within composition possible?

The most strongly formulated arguments against generalized principles of sonata practice concealed a substantial weakness: in their intensity they tempted one to overstate the degree to which such classifications were ever intended to be equivalent to scientific laws. Within the humanities norms, generic options, and more-or-less standard procedures are not laws at all. And since they are not, there was no need to suppose that the existence of numerous exceptions or deviations invalidated the norm. Perhaps the many deviations were purposeful dialogues with the background norm. But this would mean, paradoxically, that the deviations helped to reinforce the socially shared norm that was being temporarily overridden. (Otherwise how could they be perceived as deviations at all?) But what is meant by a norm? And how could one come to an understanding of what such norms might have been? We began to seek a way out of the dilemma. The most profitable guidelines for our solution lay within the domains of current genre theory and hermeneutics.

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Given the flexibility found in the large-scale architecture of later-eighteenth-century composition, the main descriptive problem was the difficulty of positing convincing categories of typical procedures. As scholars of eighteenth- (p.8) century music perennially point out, surprising occurrences and variants abound — all the more so when one's investigation takes a panoramic view, extending beyond Haydn, Mozart, and early Beethoven to include the works of less-explored composers. It is for this reason that attempts to describe normative sonata procedures tend to bog down in trying to account for a host of seemingly unusual cases (of which there is an especially abundant supply in Haydn's *œuvre*).

So much is evident, but the only alternative to throwing up one's hands in the face of such diversity (rallying around the cry, "Anything can happen!," which is obviously untrue) was to find a reasonable middle ground between confiningly rigid schemata and the claim of a near-total freedom. It was necessary to retrieve a workable hermeneutic space between the reductive textbook models of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the unhelpful (though still fashionable) "lowest-common-denominator" harmonic models, whose claims to adequacy have been challenged on both historical and conceptual grounds in an important essay from 1991 by Mark Evan Bonds.<sup>18</sup> In that essay Bonds distinguished between "conformational" and "generative" concepts of sonata form, traced the fortunes of these concepts historically, and submitted the mid-twentieth-century ascendancy of the generative models to a critique. Among his conclusions:

Few analyses [today] openly acknowledge the extent to which composers worked within the context of formal conventions...But it would be ludicrous to argue that sonata form was not at least in part an *a priori* schema available to the composer...Sonata form, for Haydn, was in fact a point of departure, a mold, albeit a flexible one...What is needed, then, is a general theory of form that can account for conventional patterns and at the same time do justice to the immense diversity that exists within the framework of these patterns.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the challenge: to articulate the implied pattern-types that appear in some of the clearest or most notable exemplars and to do this with as much detail and specificity as the material encourages. These heuristic norms need not be considered as literally existing "things." Rather, they may be understood as what Dahlhaus, following Max Weber, regarded as ideal types or what we prefer to consider as regulative guides for interpretation. Moreover, these norms would have to be defined neither by unusual cases nor by expressive deformations of more standard choices. Rather, they would derive from the standard choices themselves, insofar as the frequency of those choices (not their inevitability) permit one, inductively, to infer a background set of guidelines shared by composers and a community of listeners at a given historical time and place. As

we constructed these models, then, we were concerned to identify types or tendencies that (in retrospect) were influential generic participants in the eventual crystallization or early reification phase of the sonata in the mid-eighteenth century, when the preferred options became both clearer and somewhat more consistent.<sup>20</sup> The result was the system that we call Sonata Theory.

Our intention is not to lay down binding laws or invariant rules concerning either the parts of a sonata or the sonata as a whole. Instead, we are trying to sketch the outlines of a complex set of common options or generic defaults. It is not that any attempt to recover standard patterns **(p.9)** is a flawed enterprise; rather, it is that prior attempts have been inadequately conceived. We offer Sonata Theory as a heuristic construct that can help the task of analysis and hermeneutics. At any point, the method outlined here can be expanded or modified through criticism, correction, or nuance. Indeed, we invite this. The proposed construct is intended only as a beginning, as a work-in-progress—not as a fixed set of finalized dicta. As an assemblage of separate subparts, each of which should be subjected to constant testing and refinement, the utility of Sonata Theory as a whole does not rest on the unexceptionable validity of any correctible subpart.

### Sonata Theory: Introductory Remarks

What follows lays the groundwork of a method of approaching analytically any sonata-form movement from the period of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. A central premise of this method is the conviction that we must seek to understand the backdrop of normative procedures within the different zones or action-spaces of the late-eighteenth-century sonata. Much of this book sketches out key technical features of those norms as we currently understand them.

At any given point in the construction of a sonata form, a composer was faced with an array of common types of continuation-choices established by the limits of “expected” architecture found in (and generalized from) numerous generic precedents. (To produce a keyboard-sonata or symphonic movement was to place one's individual achievement into a dialogue with a community-shared pool of preexisting works, probably including some well-known ones, that formed the new work's context of understanding.) This is not to say that any skilled composer soberly pondered these choices, one by one, in the act of composing. Surely the most common decisions were made efficiently, expertly, and tacitly on the basis of norms that had been internalized (rendered automatic) through experience and familiarity with the style. Still, even before a sonata form was begun, a composer might, consciously or not, confront an array of initial questions acting as a filter for all that followed: symphony movement? overture? sonata? chamber music? how long or “grand” a movement? how complex? how “original”? how “intense” or “challenging” to listeners? what is the expected audience? for connoisseurs or amateurs (*Kenner* or *Liebhaber*)? how “unusual”



in its internal language and manner of presentation? in competition with whom? whom am I trying to impress? for what occasion? and so on.

Once these gateways had been determined and work begun in earnest—the task of creating an engaging musical pathway through pre-established, generically obligatory stations — the composer faced practical issues of musical continuation from one idea to its successor. (A succeeding phrase, even an utterly contrasting phrase, would typically be heard as “reacting to” what had been established up to that point — moving outward to another branch of the musical ramification.) A sonata form required that certain audible goals be successively articulated and secured, even though the individual details of each sonata journey could differ remarkably. A composer's choices involved not only varying senses of the propriety of “what sorts of things could reasonably be expected next” within the style but also how delectable surprises, even varying degrees of seeming transgressions, might be folded into the expanding network of ideas. Within each compositional zone (action-space) or subsection these “internalized” features included such things as generically appropriate types of themes and textures; reasonable lengths of individual passages (which depended on the anticipated length and complexity of the whole composition); dynamics; degrees of anticipated contrast; standard “topics” or thematic formulas; properly placed cadences and/or cadential delay or frustration; the handling of major- and minor-mode coloration; boundaries of taste; and the limits of eccentricity.

The options available from compositional zone to zone existed conceptually within the knowledgeable musical community as something on the order of tasteful generic advice — enabling and constraining guidelines (not inviolable rules) within the “sonata-game” — given by a shared knowledge of precedents. Moreover, the available guidelines for each moment (primary **(p.10)** theme, transition, medial caesura, secondary theme, and so on) were not accessible in an arbitrary, non-weighted fashion. Some choices were virtually obligatory; others less so, sometimes in discernible degrees. (For novice-composers, one might wittily fantasize — provided that the image is not taken too literally — something on the order of an aggressively complex “wizard” help feature within a late-eighteenth-century musical computer application, prompting the still-puzzled apprentice with a welter of numerous, successive dialog boxes of general information, tips, pre-selected weighted options, and strong, generically normative suggestions as the act of composition proceeded. What would have been urged here were such things as thematic-modular shape, style, effect, and format appropriate to the relevant action-space moment — not literal content, the burden of which was still placed on the composer.)

Within the late-eighteenth-century style some of the options were much more frequently chosen: To suggest the strength and pre-established hierarchical ordering of these options we call the more normative procedures *first- and*

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*second-level defaults* within the various zones.<sup>21</sup> Most simply put, composers selected (or adapted) first-level options more frequently than second-level ones, and so on. (Writers of minor-mode sonatas, for instance, more often modulated to the major mediant, III, in the exposition, than to the minor dominant, v — a less common option.) As we use it, however, the term *default* connotes more than a merely preferred option for otherwise detached consideration. First-level defaults were almost reflexive choices — the things that most composers might do as a matter of course, the first option that would normally occur to them. More than that: not to activate a first-level-default option (for example, to provide an expositional move to v instead of to III) would require a more fully conscious decision—the striving for an effect different from that provided by the usual choice. An additional implication is that not to choose the first-level default would in most cases lead one to consider what the second-level default was — the next most obvious choice. If that, too, were rejected, then one was next invited to consider the third-level default (if it existed), and so on. Or perhaps at some point in this process a composer might decide to do something unusual by rejecting all of the default choices altogether, in pursuit of a *deformation* of that compositional moment.

As might be imagined, the whole system was highly complex, typically involving at any compositional point more than two default levels of options. This is why it requires so much time — and space — to reconstruct the background system. But it is only through an understanding of what the main options were that we can come to grips with the implications of a composer's choices from moment to moment.

In confronting any individual composition we seek to determine which gestures in it were normative within the style, which were elaborate, elegant, or strained treatments of the culturally available norms, and which were not normative at all. Sonata Theory starts from the premise that an individual composition is a musical utterance that is set (by the composer) into a dialogue with implied norms. This is an understanding of formal procedures as *dynamic, dialogic*. Our conception of the sonata as an instance of *dialogic form* is not accurately described as seeking to reinstate a bluntly “conformational” view of that structure (in Bonds's original sense of that category). Viewed more subtly, it is not the obligation of a sonata to “conform” to a fixed background pattern, which then, in turn, might be construed as an “ideal” or “well formed” shape from which deviations might be regarded as compositional errors or aesthetically undesirable distortions. Rather, the composer generates a sonata — which we regard as a *process*, a linear series of compositional choices—to enter into a dialogue with an intricate web of interrelated norms as an ongoing action in time. The acoustic surface of any sonata form (what we literally hear) sets forth **(p.11)** the sonic traces of this individualized, processual dialogue, one that, from the standpoint of reception, it is the task of the analyst to reinvigorate. The backdrop of norms against which a sonata or any of its successive zones is

placed into dialogue is no monodimensional, reified “thing.” On the contrary, that backdrop comprises complex sets (or constellations) of flexible action-options, devised to facilitate the dialogue. Understanding form as dialogue also helps us to realize that in some cases standard procedures may be locally overridden for certain expressive effects. These effects differ from composition to composition: each needs to be interpreted individually. The more piece-specific one's readings can be along these lines, the better. In any analysis merely to assert that something is done “for expressive reasons” or “for reasons of variety” is obviously inadequate.

Background norms and standard options are classifiable into common and less common selections at different times and different places. Within an individual composition, a markedly exceptional procedure here or there is just that — exceptional. We call such an occurrence a generic deformation: a stretching or distortion of a norm beyond its understood limits; a pointed overriding of a standard option. The term “deformation,” in this specific context, is a narrow-definitional, technical one, grounded in precedents in literary theory and other research areas. In its strictly limited, analytical usage within Sonata Theory, “deformation” carries no negative charge, no negative assessment. On the contrary, such deformations are typically engaging, aesthetically positive occurrences that contribute to the appeal and interest of a piece. As we use the term, it signifies only a purposely strained or non-normative realization of a musical action-space, a surprising or innovative departure from the constellation of habitual practices, an imaginative teasing or thwarting, sometimes playful, of expectations, presumably in order to generate an enhanced or astonishing poetic effect.<sup>22</sup>

Deformations — unusual or strongly characterized, *ad hoc* moments — are common within the works of many different late-eighteenth-century composers. Indeed, they are rampant in Haydn, who delighted in producing surprising effects. Such occurrences, in dialogue with a norm, should not be regarded as redefining that norm unless the composer continued to employ that idiosyncratic feature in other works (thus customizing the norm for his own use) or unless later composers picked up the deformation as one of their more or less standard options. When this later occurrence happens, the original exception is no longer to be regarded as a deformation *per se* but becomes one of the lower-level defaults within the Sonata-Theory system. What was a deformation in Beethoven could become a lower-level default in Schumann, Liszt, or Wagner—part of a larger network of nineteenth-century sonata-deformation families.

The essence of Sonata Theory lies in uncovering and interpreting the dialogue of an individual piece with the background set of norms. This style of analysis considers every aspect of the individual work: themes, harmonic and contrapuntal motion, large- and small-scale shapes, textures, dynamics, instrumentation, tempos, repeat conventions, and so on. The main requirement

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for the application of the method is to grasp the controlled flexibility of the implicit underlying system of conventions. Elaborating that system is the goal of the *Elements*.

At every turn, our aim has been to focus on the most basic features of the sonata and never to forget why we perform and listen to this music in the first place. To overlook fundamental things leads one's analyses astray or renders them sterile, bookish, or irrelevant. The best analytical system is the one that seeks to reawaken or **(p.12)** re-energize the latent drama, power, wit, and wonder within individual compositions. Whenever an analytical system diverts attention from the impact of the music as real experience—or, even more, when it fails to heighten our own experience of the music — then that analytical system is in need of correction. We hope that Sonata Theory, in its practical application, will lead beyond the academic explanations and interpretations of the self-enclosed work into a larger reflection on the changing meanings of this music within society.

In part, we do this by redirecting analytical attention to those portions of the sonata that have been taken for granted or passed over in relative silence in most preceding discussions. These include the composer's treatment of *caesuras* (medial and final), the textural drive toward important *cadences* (including especially the moments of what we call *essential expositional closure [EEC]* and *essential structural closure [ESC]*), the *rotational* aspect of the sonata movement as a whole (its tendency to cycle repeatedly through large, thematically differentiated blocks), and many other considerations. Although this was by no means clear to us when we began this project, one result of our work has been to defamiliarize the sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven — permitting us to hear them in what we have found to be more rewarding ways. To some extent, we discovered early on that we often had to overcome our own patterns of habituation in analysis and understanding “in order [to adapt the words of Viktor Shklovsky] to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony.”<sup>23</sup> The idiosyncratic concerns — even the idiosyncratic terms—of Sonata Theory can help in this regard.

For the authors, one of the most challenging burdens in devising Sonata Theory has been to remain willing to submit all components of currently “orthodox wisdom” regarding sonatas to radical questioning — comfortable trenches of thought that had long been part of our own reflexive modes of approaching this music. From the beginning we sought to listen carefully to this repertory, trying to remain open to what it seemed to want to tell us on its own terms, insofar as we could apprehend those terms in our own, very different times. Before long we came to understand that everything that we had considered to be established about sonata-analysis had to be rethought. If only for this reason, we realize how curious Sonata Theory might at first appear, especially to scholars habituated within other modes of analysis and accustomed to other kinds of theoretical

questions. The value of any analytical system, however, lies in the robustness of its interpretive power. It is that interpretive adequacy that we have been seeking. Whenever existing terminology was adequate, we have retained it; whenever it was misleading or connotatively unhelpful, we have decided to change it; whenever it lacked a term for a crucial concept, we have been obliged to devise a new one.

Readers might initially find that the basic concerns of Sonata Theory are learned relatively quickly—like the moves of chess. These concerns may seem simple precisely because they are simple. At all points in the analysis of a sonata, we have tried to emphasize the most essential features and dramatized musical goals. Beyond the elementary principles of Sonata Theory, though, lies an elaborate network of possibility, nuance, flexibility, sophistication, and detail that takes patience to master. As with chess, again, one may learn the moves rapidly, but to play the game at a fully proficient level is more difficult. Notwithstanding its many postulates and axioms, Sonata Theory is no mechanical system. Rather, in proper application it is an art that requires training, musical sensitivity, **(p. 13)** and much experience with the repertory in question.

At the heart of the theory is the recognition and interpretation of *expressive/dramatic trajectories toward generically obligatory cadences*. For the present, we might only register the degree to which this concern resonates with Heinrich Schenker's much-quoted description of musical motion and dramatized process in *Free Composition* (Der freie Satz 1935):

The *goal* and the course to the goal are primary. Content comes afterward: without a goal there can be no content.

In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and, in short, retardations of all kinds. Therein lies the source of all artistic delaying, from which the creative mind can derive content that is ever new.<sup>24</sup>

Notes:

(1.) But even these broad categories are too limiting. Intermixed throughout them all are the various traditions passed on in the *Formenlehre*, the academic textbooks of form, which seem to have a separate reception-life of their own. In addition, other influential European perspectives that sometimes escape from or provide alternative havens within the above four categories have also proven provocative for current work—one thinks, for example, of the work of Jens Peter Larsen and Carl Dahlhaus. Moreover, in recent years differing scholars have begun to seek new ways to blend together formerly differing methodologies.

(2.) Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1988 [first ed. 1980]).

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- (3.) Donald Francis Tovey, "Sonata Forms," originally two different entries for the 11th (1911) and 14th (1929) eds., the latter of which is reprinted in Tovey, *Musical Articles from the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944) [reissued in 1956 under the title *The Forms of Music*], pp. 208–32.
- (4.) Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, rev. ed., pp. 4–7. Cf. the differing impression conveyed in W. Dean Sutcliffe's review, in *Music & Letters* 79 (1998), 601–4, of Rosen's modest revision of his earlier work *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, exp. ed. (New York: Norton, 1997 [orig. ed., 1971]). This review, in part, calls attention to the earlier book's apparent "emphasis on the normative aspects of the style...stereotypes and formulas" — concerns that raise a host of questions in these more skeptical times and ones that Rosen himself had sought to clarify in the later *Sonata Forms*.
- (5.) Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, rev. ed., pp. 98–99, 229, 287. See also Rosen, *The Classical Style*, exp. ed., p. 33.
- (6.) Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1980).
- (7.) Ratner, Preface to *Classic Music*, pp. xiv — xvi.
- (8.) See, e.g., Eugene K. Wolf, "Sonata Form," in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 764–67. This essay outlines the rhetoricaltonal structure at hand and provides a historical overview of the origins and transformations of the form.
- (9.) In other respects Ratner-related styles of analysis seem to be musicological variants of the well-established sector of music theory, "history of music theory." A more purely music-theoretical analogue is Joel Lester, *Compositional Theory in the Eighteenth-Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).
- (10.) The *locus classicus* of this position is Ratner, "Harmonic Aspects of Classic Form," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 11 (1949), 159–68.
- (11.) Schenker, *Free Composition* (German original, *Der freie Satz*, 1935), trans. and ed. (with additional commentary) Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979). Especially relevant is part 3, ch. 5 ("Form"), pp. 128–145. "Section 3," on "Sonata Form" (including Oster's famous footnote), is found on pp. 133–41.
- (12.) Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. xxi.
- (13.) Also to be noted in terms of Schenkerian and post-Schenkerian analysis is the summary of sonata form in Allen Cadwallader and David Gagné, *Analysis of Tonal Music: A Schenkerian Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 11, "Sonata Principle," pp. 303–59. Similarly, one should mention William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1989),
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particularly ch. 4, "Phrase Rhythm and Form: Some Preliminaries," pp. 102–20. This is an analytically sophisticated discussion of forms in general (including sonata form) and, in part, it seeks to blend some of the concerns of Schenkerians with the more musicological (and often emphatically non-Schenkerian) studies by Rosen, Ratner, and others.

(14.) Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

(15.) Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (London: Faber & Faber, 1967); Ratz, *Einführung in die musikalische Formenlehre: Über Formprinzipien in den Inventionen und Fugen J. S. Bachs und ihre Bedeutung für die Kompositionstechnik Beethovens*, 3rd ed., enl. (Vienna: Universal, 1973 [1st ed., 1951]).

(16.) See, e.g., Donald Francis Tovey, "Some Aspects of Beethoven's Art Forms" and "Musical Form and Matter," in *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 272–73, 160–62; and Tovey, "Sonata Forms," pp. 210–12 ("There are no rules whatever for the number or distribution of themes in sonata form").

(17.) Spies, "'Form' and the *Tragic Overture*: An Adjuration," and James Webster, "The General and the Particular in Brahms's Later Sonata Forms," in *Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. George S. Bozarth (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 391 (Spies) and 75 (Webster).

(18.) Bonds, "The Paradox of Musical Form," ch. 1 of *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 13–52.

(19.) Bonds, "The Paradox of Musical Form," p. 29.

(20.) E.g., as articulated in Wolf, "Sonata Form," *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, p. 766: "By about 1765, however, full sonata form [i.e., with full recapitulation] — though never the rigid textbook variety — was rapidly becoming the norm in fast movements and many slow movements of symphonies and related genres, works for chamber ensemble, and solo and accompanied sonatas in all but a few major centers." Similar observations regarding the increasing normativity of certain kinds of sonata procedures — especially those identified with the Viennese Classicism of Haydn, Mozart, and early Beethoven in the period circa 1770–1800 — may be found in the writings of virtually every author who has investigated such things. See, e.g., the many similar remarks in Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, rev. ed., pp. 145, 153, 156–58, 161, and 286–87.

(21.) At some level the literal, computer-definition concept of *default* — an assumption prebuilt into the large-scale automatic (but alterable) decisions of a software program at the moment of its initialization — is not fully congruent with our free adaptation of it here (in the sense of ongoing, strongly weighted advice, standard choices, and normatively arrayed options). As mentioned earlier, the metaphorical implication, if applicable at all, is to be worn loosely.

(22.) It would be a mistake, therefore, to read into this technical usage any residual connotations of the evaluatively negative, such as the “*de* formed” (in its more typical meaning), the “disfigured,” the “misshapen,” the “*ab* normal,” the “*poorly* formed,” or the “ugly.” Those are not our connotations, and within the framework of Sonata Theory terminology we distance ourselves from them as strongly as we can. The central thing is to be able to grasp the intended nuance of the technical term “deformation” — to be able to perceive in it a genre-enabled, *positive* sense of strain, a deliberately manufactured tension set apart in this aesthetic-analytical, “artificial” context from any implication of criticism or (much less) censure. These connotational points are revisited and amplified in the “Deformation” section of appendix 2, which also offers further reflections on the concepts of *dialogic form* and sonata-form action-spaces.

(23.) Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* [from second edition, 1929], transl. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, 111.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p. 6. In order to accomplish these things, declared the Russian Formalist Shklovsky, “[we have] been given the tool of art.... By ‘enstranging’ objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and ‘laborious’.... *Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant.*” Sher defends his translation, “enstranging” (as opposed to the more traditional choices, “defamiliarizing” and “estranging”), on p. xix.

(24.) Schenker, *Free Composition*, p. 5.

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