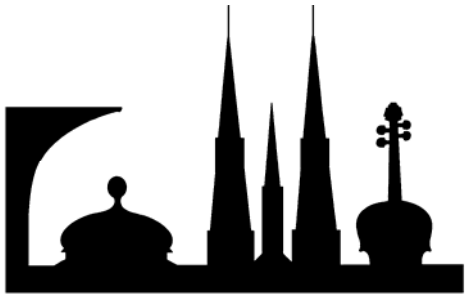
Developing Variations

An Analytical and Historical Perspective

Berk Sirman



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ABSTRACT

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Developing variations is a term by Arnold Schönberg that is coined to describe constant modification of motives and ideas in a theme, or possibly throughout the whole work. This is thought to be superior to exact repetitions. Developing variations was used by Schönberg to analyze the music of Brahms, whose compositions represented the most advanced form of developing variations. This paper investigates the analytical grounds of developing variations and historical criticisms against it, mainly on the charge of anachronism. Historical criticisms are valid, but developing variations is analytically sound nevertheless. Therefore it is not undermined by such criticisms.

CHAPTER 1

I-Introduction

Developing variation is "the construction of a theme….by the continuous modification of the intervallic and/or rhythmic component of an initial idea" (Frisch 1990: 9). The concept developing variation dates back to Arnold Schönberg's writings about Brahms, arguing that Brahms was a progressive composer despite his reputation of being quite conservative and academic compared to his contemporary Wagner. The significance of developing variation to Schönberg was that it prevented literal repetitions which he considered were inferior to the developing kind. Brahms' music contained developing variations to a large extent whereas Wagner often used literal repetitions (thus Brahms, the progressive). The idea of developing variations applied to all homophonic music and Brahms' music manifested its most advanced examples during common practice era. Developing variations is also Brahms' link to new music because literal repetition is almost completely rejected by Schönberg, his followers, and some other 20th century composers.

II-Aim of Essay

The aim of this essay is to analytically approach the developing variations from a conceptual and historical perspective. I will tackle two questions that are crucial for developing variations. The first is whether the concept is a justified one; What is it that sets developing variations apart from traditional thematic-motivic work? The second question I will focus on is whether it is a kind of anachronism to use a 20th century concept to analyze 19th century works of Brahms.

III-Previous Works

The main literature on developing variations is Schönberg's own, which is collected in the book *Style And Idea.* The individual article that is the most significant is "Brahms the progressive" (1947) which is based on Schonberg's 1931 and 1933 radio lectures. Walter Frisch has written the book *Brahms and the principle of developing variations*, the most extensive work on the subject in recent years but it does not deal with the historical criticisms against the concept. Carl Dahlhaus has written much about Schönberg's written work as well as his music. Among the many articles "What is developing variation?" and "Musical Prose" has direct relevance to our study since they deal with the analytical grounds of developing variations. Michael Musgrave's "Schoenberg's Brahms", Friedhelm Krummacher's "Reception and Analysis: On The Brahms Quartets, Op. 51 No. 1 and 2" and Christian Martin Schmidt's "Schönberg und Brahms" state some objections against Schönberg's concepts which will be discussed in this essay.

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IV-Method and Delimitation

This essay aims to present a historical concept analysis of developing variations. To do this the concept will be defined first and put into historical perspective later. Accordingly, in the second chapter the concept of developing variation will be defined in more detail, and with the help of examples. In the process, Schönberg's concept 'musical prose' will also be defined as it is closely related to the subject. This will be followed by a discussion of the area of application of developing variations and how it can be demarcated from conventional motivic-thematic work. In the third chapter the historical criticisms against developing variations will be discussed. The three writers whose objections will be handled are Friedhelm Krummacher, Michael Musgrave and Christian M. Schmidt. This will be followed by my own remarks on the final chapter.

I will limit my discussion of developing variations to Brahms' music. There is much to be written about the application to developing variations to music of other composers who came before or after Brahms, but it is beyond the scope of this essay.

CHAPTER 2

Developing Variations: The Concept

I-History

Arnold Schönberg's concept of developing variations can be traced back to his writings from as early as 1923. In the article "Twelve Tone Composition" from 1923, Schönberg stated that one important difference between polyphonic and homophonic music was that in homophonic music development takes place by means of a variation in a single voice rather than the alteration of "the mutual relationship of simultaneous sounds" as in polyphonic music where the theme is "practically unchangeable" thus variation in a single voice is less likely. In 1931's "For A Treatise In Composition" he stated that "repetition is the initial stage in music's formal technique, and variation and development its higher developmental stages" (Schönberg 1984: 265). Also, in "Linear Counterpoint" from the same year, he wrote "Whatever happens in a piece of music is nothing but the endless reshaping of a basic shape…or in other words, there is nothing in music but what comes from the theme, springs from it and can be traced back to it; to put it still more severely, nothing but the theme itself" (ibid: 290) Here we observe that Schönberg uses several terms like 'theme' and 'basic shape' which need to be precisely defined in order to carry out an analytic study. Unfortunately, Schönberg did not provide us with those definitions. Moreover, he did not use these terms consistently, as we will shortly see. Nevertheless, there is a system to his thought despite the initial difficulties.

Schönberg's most influential writings on 'developing variations' come from two radio interviews from 1931 and 1933 and his article "Brahms the Progressive" that is based on these interviews. In 1931, Schönberg appeared on Radio Frankfurt with a lecture to accompany the broadcast of his Orchestral Variations, op. 31. In the lecture Schönberg said "New music is never beautiful on first acquaintance …(because)… one can only like what one remembers" He explains that greatest popular composers used exact or parallel

repetition in order to make their melodies memorable, and he adds that "…a stricter style of composition must do without such convenient resources …It demands that nothing be repeated without promoting the development of music, and that can only happen by way of far reaching variations" (Frisch 1990: 4)

Schönberg here gives Brahms as the exemplary composer who avoided exact repetitions in favor of 'developing variations'. His example is the main theme of Brahms' cello sonata No. 2, op. 99. Schönberg makes an unconventional analysis of the theme, which we will study later, and concludes that the whole theme is a developed variation of the initial motive. When you add this to big leaps and metrical ambiguities in the eight bar theme it is not a surprise that this sonata was not very popular when it was first composed. This is the first solid example Schönberg gives for developing variation.

The above mentioned analysis also explains how come Schönberg argues that Brahms is a "progressive" composer in the radio interview of 1933, and the article "Brahms the Progressive" (1947), despite the common belief that Brahms is a conservative "academician" composer. Brahms keeps the symmetrical phase structure and regular movement forms on a higher level (as in op. 99), which may explain part of the reason why he is seen as conservative. However, what interests Schönberg happens at a more abstract level, dealing with the inner elements of the themes.

Schönberg's article "Criteria for the Evaluation of Music" (1946) compared Brahms to Wagner who "in order to make his themes suitable for memorability, had to use sequences and semi-sequences, unvaried, or only slightly varied, repetitions differing in nothing essential from the first appearances, except that they are transposed to other degrees" (Schönberg 1984: 129). Schönberg then gave examples from Tristan und Isolde's act.1, scene 2. He dismissed this technique as 'inferior' to Brahms' developing variation.

Finally in 1950's "Bach" Schönberg wrote

> Music of the homophonic-melodic style of composition, that is, music with a main theme, accompanied by and based on harmony, produces its material by, as I call it, developing

> variation. This means that variation of the features of a basic unit produces all the thematic formulations which provide for fluency, contrasts, variety, logic and unity on one hand, and character mood expression, and every needed differentiation, on the other hand – thus elaborating on the idea of the piece (ibid:397)

Schönberg's first sentence here suggests that there may be a larger application of developing variation, than the themes he analyzes in his examples.

II-Schönberg's Analysis of Brahms' op. 99 Theme

According to Schönberg, the main theme of the first movement of Brahms' op. 99 was quite difficult to grasp, because of the unusual intervals (ninths), and syncopations which disguised the actual meter of ¾. Moreover, the theme developed very rapidly. In his 1933 radio lecture, he gave an unconventional analysis of the main theme in which the theme was "developed" from the initial motive, the first two notes. The irregular phrase structure started with the two notes, the first shorter in duration, leaping up a fourth, which he argued was inverted to a fifth later[1]. In measure four, the durations of the two notes in the motive were equalized. Also, the suspended note from the previous measure made measure four sound like it was in 4/4. The two note phrase was then developed into a three-note phrase in measure five. Corresponding to measure four, measure eight sounded like it was in 5/4 due to the suspended note from measure seven. Nothing in this measure repeated literally, everything was developed immediately after its introduction. Nevertheless, the theme was symmetrical on the surface, the first four measures being the antecedent and the last four consequent (ibid: 5). This example clarifies what Schönberg meant by developing variation, quoting Frisch:

> Brahms builds a theme by means of a very free, but recognizable, reinterpretation of the intervals and rhythms of a brief motive. Although the process can result in considerable metrical ambiguity, the phrase structure remains essentially symmetrical on a higher level (ibid: 5)

Brahms' op. 99 cello theme, thus, is an example of developing variation that grows out of a brief motive and develops rapidly through various means as stated above. Not only

[1] The "inverted fourth" can be observed in Schoenberg's analysis in figure 2. Frisch contests Schoenberg on this and mentions that the G-D interval does not appear on original score as such. (Frisch 1990:5)

these transformations cause metrical ambiguity but also they cause “difficult” intervals as the ninth at times. However, the theme remains symmetrical at a higher level, keeping the tradition of eight-bar theme consisting of a four bar antecedent and four bar consequent.

The op. 99 example fits Schönberg’s concept perfectly, both in the sense that it is an overt example of developing variations and because the sonata was not very well received at the time, in part due to its unconventional main theme. Schönberg said that one can like only what one can remember. The rapid and unrepeated transformations of op. 99 theme made it hard to remember and therefore harder to like. It was therefore an example of Brahms avoiding exact repetition and easy intelligibility, at expense of popularity.

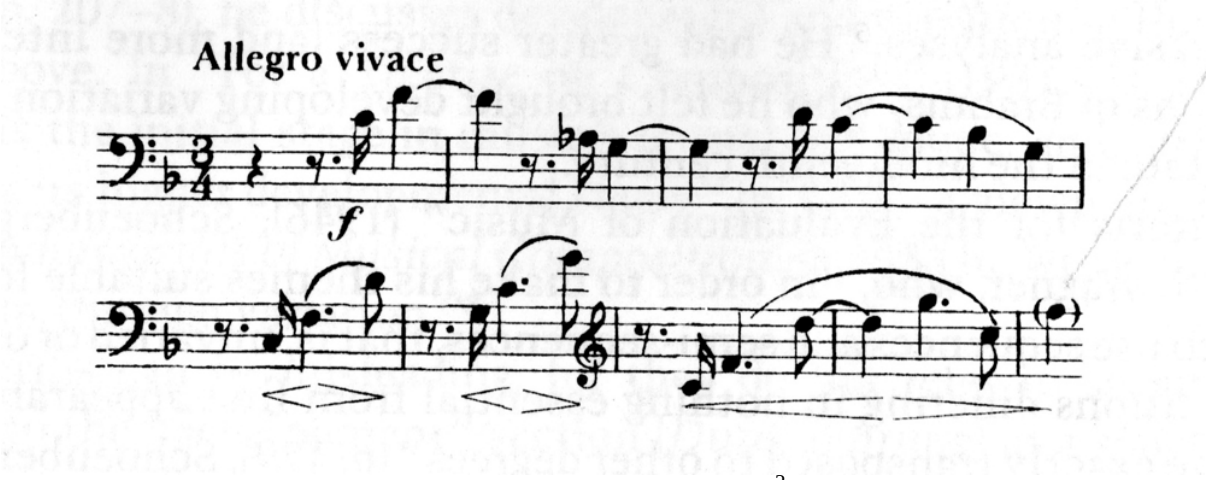


Figure 1: Brahms’ op. 99 cello sonata. Main theme[2].

[2] Figures 1,2 and 3 reproduced from Walter *Frisch’s Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* pp. 4-5

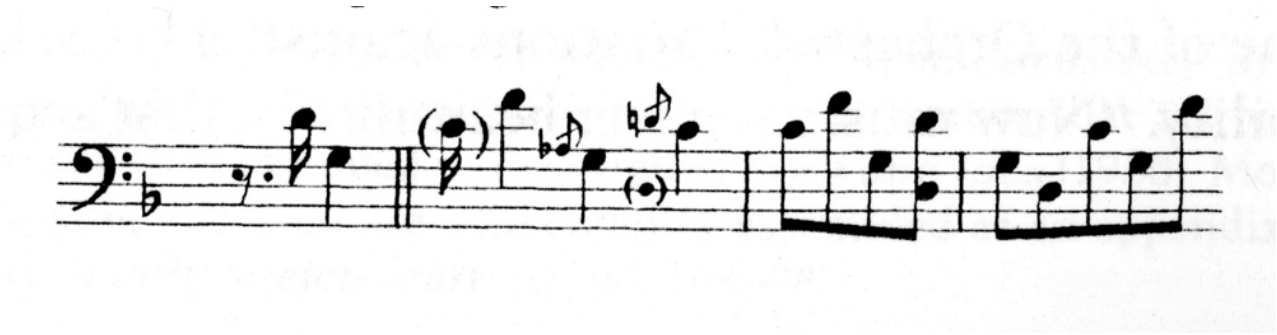


Figure 2: Schönberg's abstract of op. 99 theme

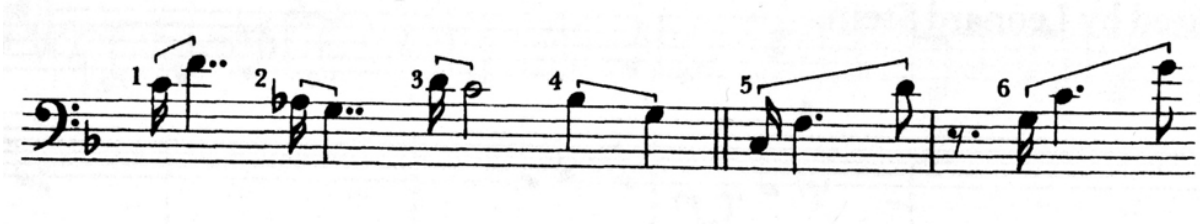


Figure 3: Developing variations in main theme

III-Musical Prose and Developing Variations

In "Brahms the progressive", Schönberg gives several examples of asymmetrical phrase structures in Brahms, as well as some of his predecessors. This means combination of phrases of varying lengths, and numbers of measures not divisible by two, four or eight (Frisch 1990: 6). One of the Brahms examples Schönberg gives is the second movement of op. 51/2 string quartet which I will discuss later. For Schönberg, asymmetrical phrase structures were a consequence of what he called "musical prose" which meant a "direct and straightforward presentation of ideas without any patchwork, without mere padding and empty repetitions" (Schönberg 1984: 415) or as Frisch formulated it "music that does not fall into regular, predefined or predictable patterns (Frisch 1990: 8) For Schönberg, empty repetitions were found in more often popular music, the epitome of which was Johann Strauss' Blue Danube Waltz where the same melody repeated no less than six

times in a row**.** However, similar kind of repetition could even be found in Wagner, as in the examples from Tristan and Isolde which Schönberg discussed earlier.

For Schönberg, what caused asymmetry, and thus musical prose, was the idea that expressed itself in music, rather than a formula that "imposed itself by repetitions and symmetries" (Dahlhaus 1988: 106). The latter made up "musical verse" like in Strauss' Blue Danube Waltz, which Schönberg dismissed. The formula was a matter of 'style', which was not the essence of music; the style was a more temporary thing that could change as fashion does. What remained was the "idea" that could express itself best in musical prose (Schönberg's article "Criteria for Evaluation of Music" deals with style/idea distinction). Moreover, musical prose also provides also a criterion for the strength of melodic ideas, as "melodic ideas should be self-sufficient without the support of symmetries and correspondences as are dissonances without their resolution to consonances" (Dahlhaus 1988: 105). Therefore, Schönberg's idea of musical prose, or emancipation of asymmetry, is analogous to his emancipation of dissonance. All of Schönberg's arguments about music center on the musical "idea" as opposed to musical "style". The former is the true essence of music that lasts, and that is accessible only to the trained mind, while the latter is populist and restrictive.

Developing variations is inherently linked to musical prose. Following Frisch's definition:

> To summarize: by developing variation Schoenberg means the construction of a theme (usually of eight bars) by the continuous modification of the intervallic and/or rhythmic components of an initial idea. The intervals are developed by such recognized procedures as inversion and combination, … (and) the rhythms by such devices as augmentation and displacement. Schoenberg values developing variation as a compositional principle because it can prevent obvious, hence monotonous repetition. And Brahms stands as the most advanced manifestation of this principle in the common-practice era, for Brahms develops or varies his motives almost at once, dispensing with small-scale rhythmic or metrical symmetry and thereby creating genuine musical prose (Frisch 1990: 9)

Therefore, developing variations contribute to musical prose which serves the unrestricted expression of the "idea" in music.

IV-Schönberg's Analysis of Brahms' Op. 51/2 Andante Theme

The article "Brahms the progressive" also contains an analysis of the andante theme from Brahms second string quartet. The theme is significant to Schönberg both as an example of developing variations, and of musical prose. Schönberg's analysis is illustrated on page 16.

According to Schönberg, the andante theme "contains motive forms that can be explained as derivatives of the interval of second" In his analysis motive form *a* is the interval of ascending second, *b* is inversion of a, *c* is a+b, *d* is part of c, *e* is b+b (which is an ascending fourth), and *f* is abstracted from the inversion of e. The following is Schönberg's analysis of the theme's six phrases.

> The first phrase - c – thus consists of a plus b. It also contains d which also functions as a connective between the first and the second phrase. The second phrase consists of e and d; with the exception of its upbeat (the eighth note E) and the two notes C# and B, it presents itself as a transposition of the first phrase, one step higher. It also furnishes the interval of fourth, f. The third phrase contains e twice, the second time transposed one step higher. The fourth phrase is distinctly a transformed transposition of c. The fifth phrase, though it looks like a variant of the preceding phrase, merely contains c, connected with the preceding by f. The sixth phrase, consisting of e, d, and b, contains a chromatic connective B#, which could be considered as the second note of a form of a. This B# is the only note in the whole theme whose derivation can be contested. (Schoenberg 1984: 431)

The phrase structure of the andante theme is also interesting. There are six phrases in the eight bar theme. The first, six quarter-notes long, ends in the middle of the second bar immediately followed by the second theme of equal length, lasting until the end of the third bar. The third phrase, which is also the same length, takes us to the middle of the fifth bar where the consequent section of the theme begins. The last three phrases all begin in the middle of the measure. The fourth and fifth phrases are four quarter notes long, and the last six quarter-note long like the first three.

Schönberg notes the inventiveness of Brahms with placing the second phrase right after the first phrase, instead of waiting for the third bar as many other composers would have done (ibid: 435). Overall, this andante theme is an example of musical prose of irregular phrases that are not bound by regularity and predictability. These phrases are presented in

an organic unity that is built on motive forms derived form the interval of second through developing variations.

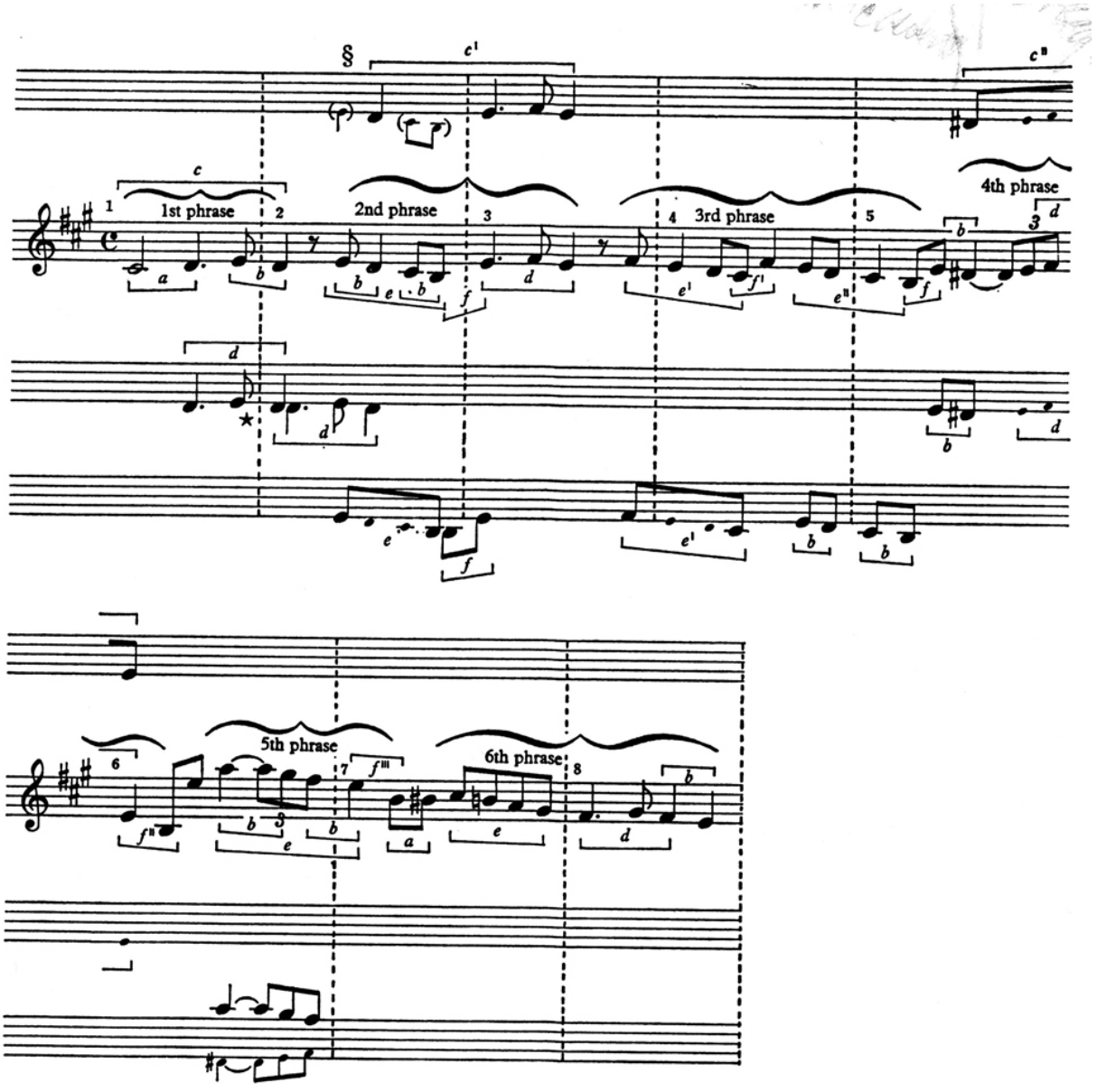


Figure 4: Schönberg's analysis of Brahms' op. 51/2 Andante theme[3]

[3] reproduced from Arnold Schoenberg's "Style And Idea" p. 430

V-Area of Application

From an analytical point of view, Schönberg limited his developing variations only to the theme, as nearly all examples he gave from Brahms' music involves only the themes. One immediate question that naturally follows is whether there is any developing variations beyond the theme. Some music theorists and intellectuals in the Schönberg tradition have attempted to apply developing variations beyond the theme, and Walter Frisch provides us with a brief summary of them. In this section, I will paraphrase Frisch's summary of these applications.

Philosopher Theodor Adorno, in *Philosophy of New Music*, argues that Schönberg was "the first twentieth century composer to grasp and carry out the historical tendencies of western art music", one of which is "continuous transformation or reshaping of the musical material" (Frisch 1990: 19). Accordingly, this tendency can be observed clearly in Beethoven and Brahms; in the former development becomes associated with variational techniques which extends over the whole sonata ('total development' as Adorno calls it), while the latter takes a further step. In Brahms

> the development….took possession of the sonata as a whole. While still composing within the total framework of tonality, Brahms by and large rejects the conventional formulae and fundamentals producing a unity of the work which….is renewed at every moment. He consequently becomes the advocate of universal economy refuting all coincidental moments of music. (ibid: 19)

Frisch notes that Adorno's stand is ideological rather than analytical, but it is significant nevertheless from the point of developing variations.

Here we must note that Schönberg also had an ideological stand on the issue. When he wrote that music of the homophonic-melodic style of composition produces its material by developing variation, his observation was not as much of an analysis but instead a general statement on western music and how it historically evolved from counterpuntal composition, where the play is between the voices (of usually predetermined material, like fugue theme), towards music of theme-accompaniment, where there can be development within single voice and thus numerous new possibilities. Therefore, Adorno's ideological point is not that far away from Schönberg, who has one foot in composition and analysis, and other in ideology.

Among the theorists who applied the concept beyond the theme are Schönberg's students Erwin Ratz and Joseph Rufer. Ratz, in his "Einführung in die musikalische Formenlehre", gives an analysis of the whole of Beethoven's Hammerklavier sonata using Schönbergian methods. However, Frisch discards this analysis for "failing to grasp the basic principle behind Schönberg's analytical methods, the dynamic or generative powers of the motive" Accordingly, Ratz does not give account of the external form as "outgrowth of motivic development" but rather as a "succession of phrases" (ibid: 20)

Josef Rufer, in his "Composition With Twelve Tones", discusses the significance of developing variation for large-scale composition and one of the analyses he makes is of Beethoven's sonata op. 10 no. 1, where he notes "in order to ensure the thematic unification of a work and thus the unity of its musical content, all the musical events in it are developed…..out of the basic shape" Accordingly, the first four measures of the sonata contains the basic shape and Rufer attempts to analyze the sonata (again, in vain according to Frisch) with reference to the first bars. (ibid: 21)

Rudolf Reti in his *The Thematic Process in Music* analyzes whole pieces of music to show that they evolve organically from a single motive, using the term "thematic transformation", which, according to Frisch, is his equivalent to Schönberg's developing variations. Reti attempts to give a more comprehensive historical account of developing variations than the other theorists above. However, some of his analyses suffer from random isolation of pitches with little regard for rhythmic or harmonic context. Reti "simply relegates to small print any notes that do not fit the shape he is trying to construe"(ibid:23) According to Frisch, this discredits Reti's analyses of Brahms. It is also an example of inappropriate selection of elements of a composition on which to build an analysis of developing variations. Dahlhaus deals with this as we will shortly see.

Arno Mitschka in his *Inaugral-Dissertation* (1961) on Brahms demonstrates the "thematic continuity across broad segments of the sonata structure" by a term he coins

"varying development", which turns out to be the same as Schönberg's developing variations. Mitschka argues that Brahms' sonata movements have a careful balance between "striving" and "restraining" forces that bring about "the rush of development" and "the risk of disintegrating into small, lyrically rounded units". Mitschka analyzes three works: Piano Sonata op. 5, Piano Quintet op. 34 and Cello Sonata op. 38 to demonstrate his model but then claims that Brahms abandoned "varying development" after op. 38. (ibid: 24-25)

Carl Dahlhaus in his monograph on Brahms' D-minor piano concerto, op. 15, analyzes the first movement in clusters which are six in double exposition, one in development and four in recapitulation and coda. The relationship between these clusters can be explained by developing variation which Brahms uses to alter the themes. This organic relationship within the movement overshadows traditional sonata structure. Quoting Dahlhaus:

> Brahms continually presents the main theme in different shapes, without even going back to an earlier version…..The "plastic" element of the grouping and the logical" element of continuing…variation support each other mutually (ibid: 26).

However, as Frisch notes, this kind of developing variation is different from how Schönberg originally put it, as Dahlhaus is not dealing with the continuous modification of motives but the reinterpretation of the theme at different stages of a movement, which, according to Frisch, brings the concept closer to compositional methods of Viennese classical composers (ibid: 26). However, in *Issues in Composition*, Dahlhaus argues for the uniqueness of Brahms by the example of op. 25 piano quartet. Dahlhaus analyzes the quartet as based on the continuous variation of two motives which are introduced on the first and eleventh bar of the movement. This process, which Dahlhaus argues became the primary expositional procedure in Brahms, is a solution to a quest of 19th century composers: to create long pieces of music on very concise thematic material while avoiding conventional "filler" material to complete a standard form.

Dahlhaus' article "What is Developing Variation?" gives more insight about his position on the concept. According to Dahlhaus, "developing variations' is not a technique but an

idea, and the difficulty in grasping it comes mainly from the overlap of the terms ‘theme’, ‘basic shape’ and idea’ that Schönberg uses inconsistently. He adds that

> …the ambiguity that turns the concept of the idea into a category that eludes definition (due to the above inconsistency) – a category whose significance whose definition extends from the initial motif of a movement, through the method of mediating between the various shapes, to the form as a whole – is certainly not a meaningless coincidence but rather the linguistic manifestation of an ambiguity within the concept itself. For the relationship between the idea and presentation, theme and developing variation, basic shape an abundance of shapes, is in a strict sense dialectical, and the exaggerated assertion that the substance of a movement is already implicit in the theme should be avoided just as much as the opposing one-sided view, that the idea of a work is nothing but the sum of relations between the shapes through which it leaves its mark, without any priority being given to the material stated at the beginning[...].Instead of complicating the concept of the theme, one should keep open the choice among the various possible ways in which the theme may be related to the form as a whole, for this connection cannot be determined in terms of a general principle – that is, by applying a doctrine – but only in respect of each case, that is, with regard to the unique quality of a work. (Dahlhaus 1988: 129-30)

Dahlhaus suggests a case by case study of the works and observe what the basic unit of analysis should be.

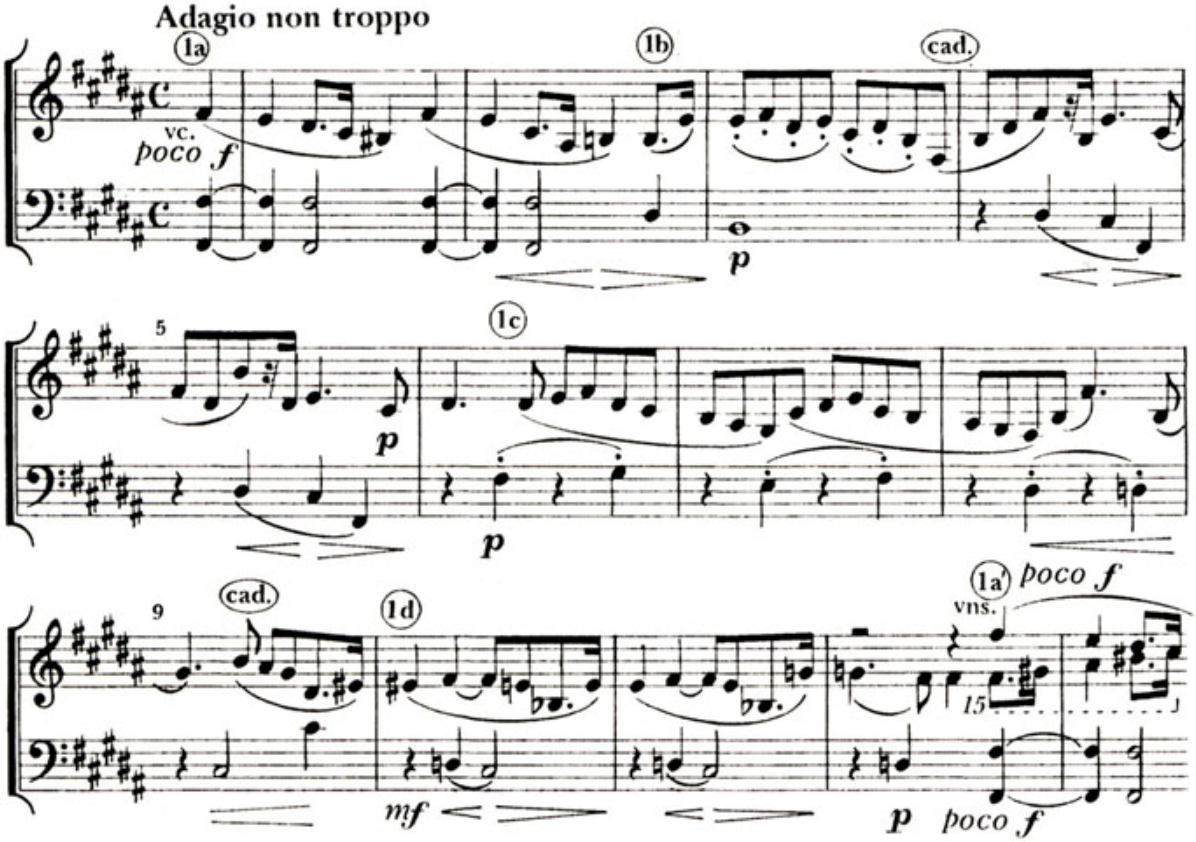
> Whether it is appropriate to start out from an interval structure, a melodic outline, or a specific rhythmic-diestematic shape can only be decidedfrom case to case….When as in Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations,* diestematic, rhythmic and syntactic elements…are seperated from a theme one by one and eloberated in isolation, it would be inappropriate merely to follow Rudolpf Reti’s method of reconstructiog a ‘basic shape’ or ‘cell’ which consists of nothing but a structure of intervals……On the other hand, in other works such as the first movement of Beethoven’s *Les Adieux* Sonata, it may well be useful to speak of a subthematic structure which exists as an abstract, dieatematic entity without the defining features of rhythm, metre or harmony (ibid: 132).

Dahlhaus’ insight on the application of developing variations relieves the difficulty in the unsystematic introduction of the concept to a certain degree. Still, as Frisch states, Dahlhaus’ use here may seem different than how Schönberg laid it out in his analysis of Brahms’ op. 99 cello sonata theme, but it is not a return to the conventional thematic-motivic development either. This difference will be dealt with later. But before that I will present one of Frisch’s own analysis of Brahms’ movements, using developing variations, where the concept will apply to the movement as a whole.

VI-Op. 73 Adagio Movement: An Example of Frisch's Own Developing Variations Analysis, Expanding Through the Whole Movement

Walter Frisch himself analyzes many works of Brahms in his *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variations* and I will summarize his analysis of the Adagio movement of Brahms' second symphony, op. 73, as an example of developing variations through the piece. This movement is almost a sonata form having an exposition consisting of two major themes in B-major and F-sharp-major. A development section follows the exposition. The recapitulation uses much of the material from exposition, though not following exposition too literally. Frisch's diagram of the main themes is as follows:

The movement starts by theme Ia in obscurity due to metrical displacement and harmonic ambiguity. Theme Ia starts with a descending line to an unstable B# and then the main figure repeats, only ending in the tonic, B-natural, this time. This is followed by theme Ib elaborating the descending line of Ia, but embellished by neighbor notes. Ib only has one descending line, instead of two. The B in the bass in the first beat in measure three establishes the meter. Ib lead to a cadence in measure four which does not resolve to the tonic, and instead suspends the dominant F# into measure five. Theme Ic starts on measure six and has two descending lines like Ia, but they are embellished like Ib. Ic displaces the meter and ends in deceptive cadence in D-major, instead of F# major. Brahms also uses linkage technique here where the tail of Ic is the beginning of Id. (Frisch 1990: 123-125) The main theme then is an example of musical prose, featuring many asymmetries and no exact repetitions. The basic shape is the descending line of Ia which is developed into the whole theme. The main theme enters again but now is further varied and leads to the second theme in bar 27.



Brahms op. 73 Adagio theme[4]

The second theme is more "poetic" than the first theme with its symmetrical phrase structure. The closing theme 2b (not shown on diagram on this paper) on bar 45, however, surprises us by developing into the whole development section by way of an imitative (fugal) part. The development exhibits many features of musical prose. Even the end of development section blends into recapitulation; the three-note motive from the closing theme of exposition is superimposed with theme Ia. But this is not a simple superimposition of two different ideas. Quoting Frisch:

> The three note motive is simple rhythmic variant of the ascending third that appears as dotted rhythm as counterpoint to Ia. This recapitulation plays tantalizingly with our normal concept of musical process, for the main theme is in a sense reborn here from a motivic element that it has itself created at the beginning of the movement (ibid: 127).

[4] Reproduced from Walter Frisch's *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* p. 124

A similar instance happens between the end of recapitulation and beginning of coda, again generated by theme 2b. Frisch goes on to explain the developing variations in this movement as follows:

> Brahms has fashioned a splendid image of how the principle of developing variation can permeate – can seem to actually generate – all levels of a sonata structure. The individual themes unfold by progressive idea of a brief idea, as in 1a, which descends from F# to B# and then repeats but alters the gesture to descend to the tonic B. The higher level succession of themes is governed by the same principle: Ib, and then Ic, explore the musical essence (the descending scale) of Ia. And just as the themes grow from each other, so do the segments of the sonata form. The tail of the exposition (theme 2b) engenders the development section; the recapitulation coalesces gradually out of development; and the last motive in capitulation (the three-note figure) gives rise to the coda. (ibid:128)

Therefore, the second movement of Brahms' second symphony, op. 73, can be analyzed by developing variations and musical prose. Developing variations plays a role throughout the whole movement because not only are the individual themes are developed from a brief idea but also that development transcends to the whole movement. This explains the coherence of the movement. Moreover, the musical prose is also very apparent in the first theme for example, where the ideas are presented without exact repetitions or similar patchwork[5].

VII-Developing Variations: A Necessary Term or Just Another Kind of Thematic-Motivic Development?

In order to give an analytic account of developing variation we need to clearly define its relationship with conventional thematic-motivic development. Is developing variations essentially different concept, a subclass of thematic-motivic development or just plain old motivic development presented as Schönberg as some novelty?

Carl Dahlhaus in his article "What is Developing Variation?" sets the criteria for determining the difference between developing variations and thematic-motivic work as

[5] Actually there is a sequential passage in theme Ic but that does not take away much from the musical prose of the whole theme.

the level of abstraction when defining the basic unit of a work. Accordingly, developing variation "permits and even requires" a higher level of abstraction than thematic-motivic work (Dahlhaus 1988: 130)

Dahlhaus then goes on point the difference between the conventional and Schönberg's analysis of Brahms op. 51/2 quartet, andante movement.

> A conventional analysis would proceed from a four-note motif in which diestematics and rhythm have coalesced as a concrete structure; then, through the use of concept such as the addition and subtraction of notes, the sequence and inversion of phrases, the delimitation of motifs and the displacement of metrical stress, it would make the way in which the following are derived from the first two more comprehensible. Compared with this, Schönberg's method of deducing all the motifs from the interval of ascending and descending second is abstract, inasmuch as it ignores rhythm and articulation with a thoroughness which flies in the face of the face of ordinary listening habits derived from tradition – and thus reduces the results of the analysis to a statement about merely latent processes. (ibid: 130)

Then he adds that

> (T)he decisive factor is not whether a level abstraction falls short of the historically determined limits of audibility but whether it must be assumed in order for us to be able to comprehend and analyze the inner unity of a work (ibid: 130).

Therefore, there is an essential difference between thematic-motivic work and developing variations, but an analysis with the latter is not necessarily something we can 'hear' in the conventional sense. However, this does not make it invalid, especially to Schoenberg for whom "intervals or complexes of intervals (diastematicism) (were) the true substance of music, whereas the other features of the composition, from rhythm through harmonic and metrical function to the delimitation of motifs were treated as the mere 'surface', more a matter of 'presentation' than the 'idea'." (ibid: 131).

This method of analysis drew much critique, especially from theorists with historical concerns, such as Krummacher, as I will go into in the next chapter. But it is also possible to make an analytical criticisms against it. When it comes to Dahlhaus' argument on the difference between thematic-motivic work and developing variations, it is not completely unproblematic to separate rhythm from motivic work, and focusing merely on intervals. Since no motive is without a rhythm, as no note is without duration, it may be an

"invalid" move to focus on merely intervals. Then, developing variations as used by Schönberg in his A-minor quartet analysis would be an "incomplete" motivic-thematic analysis, and thus still related to the conventional motivic analysis but in an unfavorable way. However, such a criticism would miss Dahlhaus' comment that the decisive factor is not whether an analysis falls short of audibility, but whether it contributes to comprehending the inner unity of a work. Also, the difference between conventional thematic motivic work and developing variations is not that developing variations is conventional thematic-motivic work *minus* the regard for rhythmic values. The difference is in the level of abstraction. The question whether such a high level of abstraction is justified. In this case it seems to be so, as developing variations amplifies our knowledge of the inner unity of the piece of music in question.

Laying out the analytical grounds for developing variations as (abstract) diastematicism is vital to understanding the concept, as otherwise it may easily blend into conventional thematic-motivic work.

CHAPTER 3

Developing Variations: The Criticisms

In the previous chapter, the concept of developing variations was presented. Like everything else that is associated with Schönberg developing variations drew a lot of criticism. The criticisms usually focus on the historical concerns about analyzing a 19th century works from a 20th century (modernist in this case) position. This is understandable since Brahms lived between 1833 and 1897. The string quartets in question were published in 1870's.

Schönberg, however, was active in the first half of 20th century and wrote most of his articles through 1920's to 1940's, which came after his emancipation of dissonance (1908), introduction of 12-tone composition (1923), both of which met strong resistance. Therefore, Schönberg was a known figure as a composer and theorist long before developing variations came out. He was often charged with writing atonal music (a term he despised) that betrayed his Austro-German musical roots. Schönberg spent a good part of his career arguing against this; he believed he was actually a heir of the great masters, and the steps that he took in his music were necessary ones, following the flow of German musical history he so believed in. However, even arguing how he was a continuation of the tradition was hard since his idea of what was progressive was also against the common-held view. Schönberg argued, as stated before in this essay, Brahms was in some ways more progressive than Wagner, who was seen as the progressive force in late 19th century music. The progressive aspects of Brahms' music had influenced Schönberg a great deal, both in his tonal and post-tonal music. Brahms' bold use of remote tonal regions is what Schönberg appreciated in his harmony. Developing variations was what Schönberg thought was the greatest progressive aspect in Brahms' music, what set him more progressive than Wagner and what influenced Schönberg the most.

In this chapter I will take up some common criticisms to Schönberg's model of Brahms, and developing variations. These come from three people, although there are many more stating similar concerns. Michael Musgrave focuses on the non-objective stance of Schönberg in his Brahms analysis. Friedhelm Krummacher takes up the anachronism that arises from evaluating Brahms' without the correct historical context. Christian Schmidt mentions the importance of developing variations in Brahms' non-accidental (necessary) tonal context vs. Schönberg's post-tonal one.

I-Michael Musgrave

In his article "Schoenberg's Brahms" Michael Musgrave, after discussing developing variations, discusses the objectivity of Schönberg's presentation of Brahms. According to Musgrave, Schönberg's presentation of Brahms is a result of picking the features of Brahms that would make him fit Schönberg's model. This does not make the picture of Brahms that Schönberg draws wrong, but it makes it one-sided. Musgrave is not remarkably critical of Schönberg's model, but draws the reader's attention to the non-objective nature of Schönberg's writings by way of some examples.

Schönberg's analyses of Brahms' op. 99 allegro and op. 51/2 andante themes, to demonstrate developing variations, for example, are not so obvious anymore once they are taken in context with the accompaniment and harmony as opposed to by themselves. He also states that some other examples from Brahms that Schönberg chose are not representative of Brahms on general. Brahms' Op. 111 string quintet theme, the song "Meine Liebe ist grün" op. 63/5 and Rhapsody in G-minor op. 79/2, that Schönberg referred to, are unique examples and do not resemble many others of the same kind that Brahms composed. Musgrave also points out that there were sequences and literal repetitions in Brahms despite Schönberg only focused on developing variations (Musgrave 1990: 133). These do not make Schönberg's analyses invalid, but his image of Brahms theory-laden.

Musgrave goes on to say that "what interested Schoenberg was not rounded analysis, but historical tendency, and, to be more precise, tendency towards his own music" (ibid:134). He gives two examples to support this argument, the first of which is Schönberg's comments on Brahms' Fourth Symphony in his book *Fundamentals of Musical Composition.* Schönberg, after a discussion of modified vs. exact repetitions, the former being the one Schönberg focuses on Brahms, gives examples of how motives may be transformed. In the process he refers to Brahms' Fourth Symphony as an example but Schönberg "has improved upon his model because not all of these features (that Schönberg has listed) are present in the Fourth Symphony…Aspects of these forms appear in the work, but never in the form Schoenberg gives." (ibid: 135). Another example is from Third Symphony where Schönberg links the Ab note in the bass in the very beginning of the symphony to the second theme in the median. Musgrave argues that Schönberg is simply forcing it to find an organic logic in Brahms' music. (ibid: 136)

These are all examples supporting Musgrave's claim that Schönberg's aim was mainly ideological. The fact that Schönberg presented the op. 99 analysis in the radio lecture just before the performance of his op. 31 Orchestral Variations also supports Musgrave's claim. Musgrave asks "what resemblance does (Schönberg's) Brahms bear to the Brahms we all know and love, the Brahms who fills concert halls, the great melodist, the lover of the dance, the irresistible waltzes, passionate gypsy songs, touching German folk-songs?" (ibid: 131). But then he states Schönberg never claimed he sought to give a rounded picture of Brahms. Schönberg would naturally agree with the above stated description of Brahms, in fact Schönberg loved Viennese popular music himself. But this was not what was important to him about Brahms' music. According to Schönberg, a piece like Strauss' Blue Danube Waltz was a symbol for simplicity in music, with the literal repetitions, accessible harmony and symmetrical phrasing and nothing straining for the mind: music for children (ibid: 132). Brahms on the other hand represented a tradition, as Schönberg understood it, of more challenging, sophisticated music that developed an idea, and avoided the properties that made Strauss' waltz "music for the children" Thus, Brahms represented the most advanced form of a tradition of a higher music, whose distinguishing features Schönberg pointed to in the expense of more general features that

are impossible to ignore. But again, Schönberg never sought to give a rounded picture of Brahms; therefore his observations on Brahms are immune from the accusations of being invalid for ignoring the obvious.

We, however, also need to take Schönberg's image of Brahms in context. Musgrave says that "in a period when it is no longer necessary to pay an advocate for Brahms, Schoenberg's view may well seem partial and extreme" (ibid: 136) We need to remember that when Schönberg's philosophy was taking shape in Austria around the turn of the century, Brahms was seen as the classicist and the academician while Wagner was regarded as the progressive. In that context, Schönberg's arguments fall in place as he does not need to stress what is obvious to everyone about Brahms. Schönberg brings out what is not obvious, which is more significant historically.

II-Friedhelm Krummacher

Friedhelm Krummacher in his article "Reception and Analysis: On the Brahms Quartets, Op. 51 No. 1 and 2" poses a stronger criticism against Schönberg's image of Brahms. In summary, Schönberg's analysis of Brahms is an example of anachronism. While this does not mean a denial of its significance, we should note the danger that comes with this anachronism.

Krummacher's aim in the article is to demonstrate how Brahms is not taken in historical context. There are many reasons to this, and not all relate to Schönberg. However, it is now easier to view Brahms' works as looking back to or anticipate temporally distant works as his historical context fades even more in time. Therefore care should be taken to avoid anachronistic approaches.

Most current analyses of Brahms' string quartets focus on motivic relationships based on intervallic structure after Schönberg's concept of developing variation. Krummacher argues that these analyses disregard the "rule that analysis should use historically appropriate categories" which they do out of an aesthetic principle that "a work proves its

aesthetic merit independent of its time". However "it would not be amiss to attempt to sketch the historical context at least in outline" (Krummacher 1994: 25)

Krummacher notes the potentially conflicting expectations from19th century works which were novelty, individuality and also that they followed the traditions of their genre. The prevalent view on Brahms' string quartets were that they could be understood in relation to the classical models (ibid: 25)

Here Krummacher gives the examples of Max Kahlbeck's and Florance May's writings on Brahms quartets, which link them to the masterworks of Mozart and Beethoven as well as Haydn and Schubert. There is relatively little written about Brahms' string quartets in relation to his contemporaries such as Bruch, Volkmann or even Tschaiovsky, Smetana or Dvorak. The reason is that there is hardly any other genre (other than string quartets), where the standards set by classic masterpieces are so dominating that the later pieces are not even on the map. The only string quartets from late 19th century that are "in the map" are Brahms', which have been compared to Schubert's, Beethoven's, Mozart's and Haydn's, who were all temporally removed from Brahms.

The modernists come into the picture precisely at this point by their success at transforming Brahms' image from looking back to his predecessors to anticipating his successors. In other words, 'Brahms the great heir' became 'Brahms the prophet'. This, Krummacher argues, is as one sided of a view as was the previous one. However, it permits new insight to Brahms that was not available before. The original text to this transformation is Schönberg's "Brahms the progressive" (ibid: 27).

Krummacher lists some analyses in Schönbergian tradition. The most important one being Schönberg's own where he segregates harmony, rhythm and motivic material, citing op. 51/1 as an example of harmonic extension and op. 51/2 for motivic development. This methodological isolation, Krummacher argues, makes analyzing the work as a whole scarcely possible (ibid: 27) Allen Forte's analysis of op. 51/1 also suffers from such isolation of parameters, where he runs into a risk of picking intervals

without regard for their functional context. According to Krummacher, all these analyses build on the idea that:

> as a parameter intervals can be separated not only from rhythm, harmony and dynamics but also from procedural unfolding of form. If examples are divorced from context without regard to their function, then the form becomes a schema at the disposal of the analyst. In the search for provable facts, the ideal of precise analysis betrays its debt to the spell of scientific reasoning. Analytical positivism is able to dispense with aesthetic and historical considerations (ibid: 29)

Anachronism is "the representation of someone as existing or something as happening in other than chronological, proper, or historical order"[6]. Representing Brahms' music with mainly its intervallic structure is anachronistic, as it was in 20th century, not 19th, that intervallic structure was utilized in analysis the way Schönberg did. Similarly, tying Brahms only to early 19th century was also anachronistic. Krummacher acknowledges the merits of Schönberg's analysis but does not explain how those merits would be accomplished without the anachronism.

Krummacher goes on to give an argument of why Schönberg's analysis of Brahms' op. 51/2 andante theme is inadequate. He asks "how such a wealth of events can be derived from such space material", that is, the interval of second that Schönberg emphasized. Then he suggests:

> Instead of puzzling out a diastematic substrata, it is possible, by assuming the unity of the musical material, to investigate the wealth of transformations comprising the actual course of the movement. A first step might be to consider the intervallic and metrical structure, not in isolation but in conjunction with its harmonic and dynamic disposition (ibid: 35)

Accordingly, in the first five measures we see a two-voiced texture; the first violin states the theme accompanied by cello, which is doubled by violin. The accompaniment is a strict eighth note texture. The viola and the cello diverge in the fifth bar for the first time, followed by the addition of the second violin the next bar. The fifth bar also introduces triplets for the first time, which are repeated in the sixth bar. These two bars mark the climax of the theme. The harmony also changes in measure five, adding diminished chords. The violin does leaps in measure five and six, contrasting the initial stepwise

[6] Definition quoted from www.dictionary.com, accessed 2006/4/25

motion. So, the theme gradually grows from two voices to four voices, increasing the intensity in the way. By the last two measures even the distinction between melody and accompaniment, that was so prominent at first, is suspended, as the homogeneity between the voices increases (ibid: 36). Krummacher summarizes his analysis:

> In retrospect, the first eight measures comprise a process in which meter and phrasing provide the regulating background at the same time their normalizing tendencies are being undermined. The "developing variation" – to retain the term – presents a multilayered process that is not restricted to the intervallic dimension." (ibid: 36)

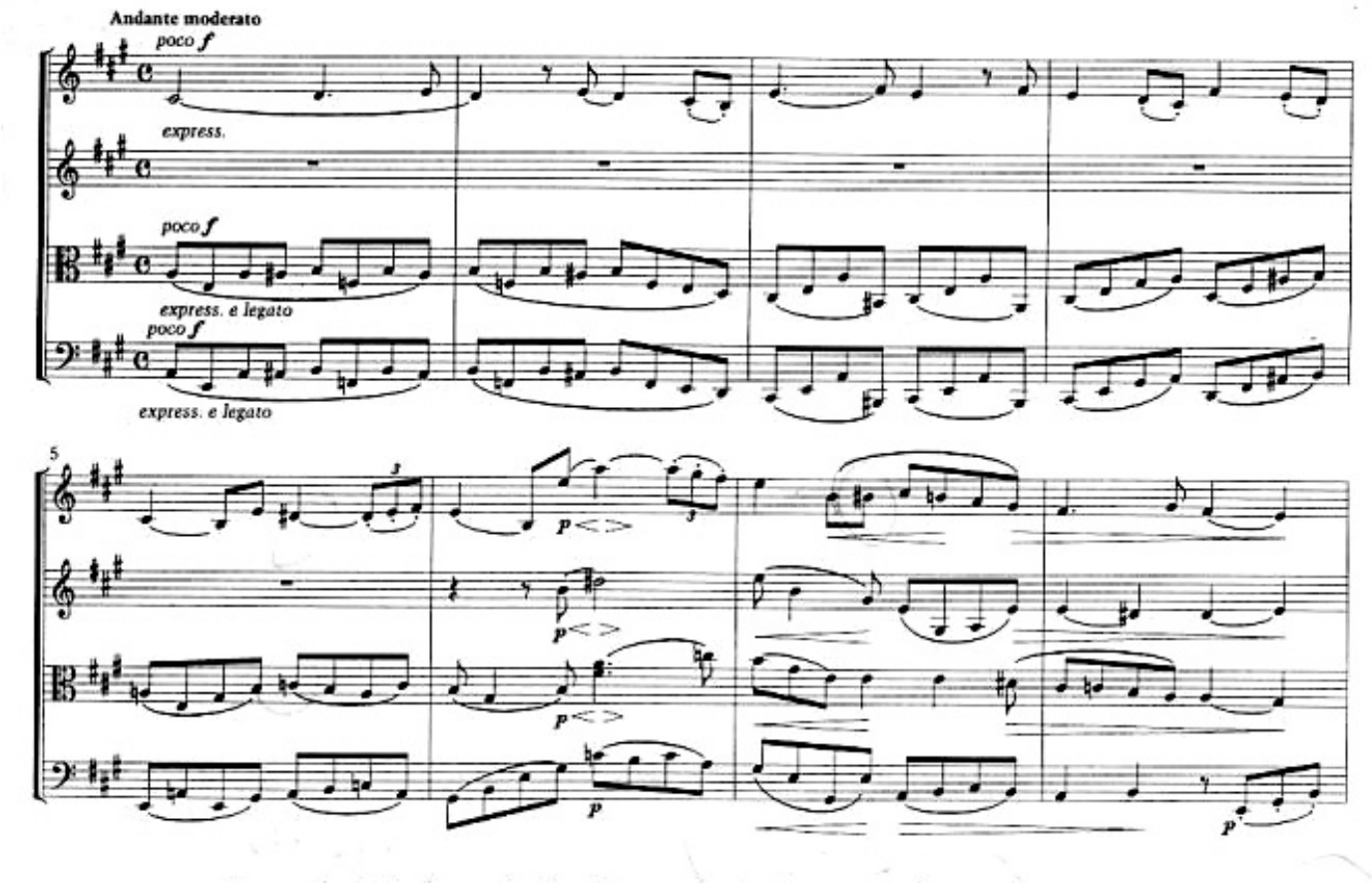


Figure 5: Op. 51/2 Andante theme, with accompaniment[7]

[7] reproduced from Friedhelm Krummachers, article "Reception and Analysis: On the Brahms Quartets, Op. 51 No. 1 and 2", p. 35

Krummacher's argument is strong but not flawless. It is true that Schönberg focuses on intervallic structure, and that op. 51/2 Andante theme is his prime example of this in Brahms' music. However, as I have stated in previous chapter, musical prose is also important in Schönberg's model, probably more so than developing variations. Schönberg writes at least as much about the musical prose in Brahms, and op. 51/2 Andante theme is an example of it. Unlike his developing variations analysis, Schönberg's remarks about the musical prose covers so much more than intervallic structure. Krummacher overlooks this and charges Schönberg with ignoring everything but intervallic structure, which is not true. Schönberg explains the "multilayered process that is not restricted to the intervallic dimension" with the help of focusing on phase structure. It is true that Schönberg does not analyze the harmonic structure, but this is understandable. The harmony of op. 51/2 Andante theme is pretty straightforward, and Schönberg would not be adding anything new to the discussion by mentioning the obvious. He focused on more advance harmony, and pointed out what most people missed instead by analyzing remote regions in the harmony of op. 51/1 allegro movement. Developing variation seems to apply to Schönberg's writings, too, where he refrains from repeating the obvious, or what has previously been said, and exclusively points out what is new.

III-Christian Martin Schmidt

Christian Martin Schmidt in his article "Schönberg und Brahms" presents and critically evaluates Schönberg's developing variations and develops some new criticisms at the end.

According to Schmidt, there is an essential difference between what developing variations means in Brahms' music and Schönberg's own music, which Schönberg tries to justify as we have stated above. An indispensable property of Brahms' music is that it is tonal. Tonality is an essential way of building coherence and form within the work. Schönberg moved away from tonality quite early in his career, therefore motivic

relationship for Schönberg was necessary to build form as he did not have anything else. Whereas in Brahms developing variations was complementary to tonal framework that made internal coherence, though not alone. (Schmidt 2001: 116) This is also historically significant. A critical argument in the line of Krummacher would say that it is "anachronistic" to argue for the coherence of a 19th century *tonal* work on motivic connections alone.

We have seen Musgrave's, Krummacher's, and Schmidt's objections to Schönberg's developing variations above. Musgrave focused on the fact that Schönberg only stressed the parts of Brahms' music that would serve his grand argument. Therefore his image of Brahms was far from being objective. Krummacher argued that it was an anachronistic attempt to analyze Brahms' music on intervallic data alone while the criteria to evaluate music in Brahms' own time was so different. Schmidt mentioned the inadequacy of explaining the coherence of Brahms' eminent tonal music via developing variations.

CHAPTER 4

Analytical or Ideological? An Assessment of Developing Variations In The Light of Historical Criticisms

One immediate question about Schönberg's developing variations is whether it is an analytical tool or an ideological concept. The difference among the two is hard to define, as there is no analysis that approaches the subject with a blank eye, or that is not theory laden in any way. And, we only see what we look at. Nevertheless, we can talk about a distinction here, not in terms of 'pure' analytical or ideological, but in terms of how much each weighs at some particular moment. Even then we will never reach a certain conclusion but this does not make the question trivial.

The distinction is noted by Walter Frisch when he calls Theodor Adorno's comments on Schönberg's musicology 'ideological' as opposed to 'analytical' (Frisch 1990: 20), but Adorno is not the only one subject to this question. Schönberg's articles themselves have two sides and the historical criticisms stated in the previous chapter only make this clear. Schönberg's analytical side is dealt foremost by Frisch and Dahlhaus, among the writers mentioned in previous chapters. Musgrave, on the other hand, and Krummacher to some extent, stress the ideological side.

What I mean by analytical is that developing variations points to something new, it helps us to see some truth about the piece it analyzes that we have not seen before. The concept is analytical as far as it is primarily concerned with the piece of music in question. It is ideological as far as it serves something else, be it a greater idea, a pattern or model of though or simply the analyst, in this case Schönberg and his music. I will follow scientific realism here, and assign the intrinsic goal of the analysis to be truth. Any goal or outcome of the analysis that serves something other than knowing more about the truth of the piece of music then would be considered an extrinsic goal. The more the extrinsic goal of the concept outweighs the intrinsic goal, the more it becomes more ideological. I

must note that these are by no means the standard definitions of ideological or analytical but in this case they may do the job of demarcation.

Frisch and Dahlhaus write about Brahms' music, how Schönberg's concept applies to it and what part of it the concept illuminates. Musgrave writes about the non-objective nature of Schönberg's analysis and how it was in fact the historical tendency to his own music was what interested Schönberg. This undermines the analytical strength of the concept as the extrinsic goal takes priority.

What should the criteria for evaluating Schönberg's concept be, given the ideological side? Should we dismiss it, based on the fact that Schönberg was actually interested in the historical tendency leading to his music? After all, even if there is analytical worth to developing variations, it still serves Schönberg in a way. But is this enough to render it worthless?

I would suggest that if there is analytical strength to developing variations, it is worth something, it has an intrinsic worth. Ideological side will sure lead to criticisms but these criticisms will not completely take over as long as developing variations is an analytical tool.

The general opinion is that there is an analytical strength to developing variations. Not only names like Frisch and Dahlhaus support this claim, but even critics like Krummacher agree that developing variations pointed to things that we did not see before. Schönberg's examples and articles point to something that is original even though his musicology is not systematically organized. For example he uses the terms like 'idea', 'basic shape' very loosely. He also does not make the connection clear enough between developing variations and musical prose. Much of the criticism of Krummacher that I have mentioned in the previous chapter results from not including musical prose when evaluating developing variations. If Schönberg laid out his ideas more clearly, maybe he could avoid such criticisms.

In order for developing variations to have analytical worth the concept should be justified, i.e. it should not be an abundant term that is actually a hidden synonym to a conventional term. Dahlhaus' argument concerning the difference between conventional motivic-thematic work and developing variations has thus utmost importance here.

That developing variations is analytically justified does not mean that it is without any flaws. The explanatory power of developing variations, for example, is clearly suffering at times. Krummacher catches one of these instances in the analysis of andante theme op. 51/2, measure seven. Schönberg writes that the B# note is a second note of motive *a* but its derivation of can be contested where conventional wisdom would say it is simply a chromatic passing note between B and C# and not investigate it much further. Schönberg's explanation is forced, almost trying to force the model onto something that does not need it. One other instance is the upward leap of fourth between measure two and three that Schönberg explains as being abstracted from the preceding stepwise descent of a fourth, by inversion. In this instance Schönberg's move is *ad hoc*, functioning to fit the example to the model, rather than explaining phenomenon in the example by using an independently justified principle.

Schönberg's comments need also be taken in context. At the time, Schönberg was seen as an outsider in Austro-German music due to several reasons. First of all he was not formally educated; Schönberg is a proud auto-didact. Being away from musical institutions had disadvantages but it also allowed Schönberg to build his own original ideas away from the conventional teachings. This lead to quite unconventional ideas and compositions, which alienated him from the musical scene even more. On top of that he was Jewish, so socially and politically he was an outsider, too. All these lead Schönberg to attempt to prove that he was actually a part of the musical tradition, and not in denial of it as many blamed him. It is part of the reason why he gave many arguments for his place in tradition.

What about the claims of anachronism? Musgrave writes "If every analyst sought to give a perfectly balanced view of the past, there would be no future. Progress happens because

people see what they want to see, when they need to see" (Musgrave 1990: 136) We should therefore not be too worried about the non-objective side of Schönberg's analyses as long as we are aware that they are so. We should however take care to not let over-ambitious attempts to avoid anachronism prevent us from making statements about past phenomenon. After all we do not want to prevent ourselves from learning something new about Brahms' music, do we?

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