

Analysis as Mediated Immediacy: Adorno, Hepokoski & Darcy, and the Dialectics of Music Analysis¹

The methodology of music analysis is characterized by a complex dialectic of generality (general formal patterns) and particularity (the concrete composition and its deviations from these patterns). Drawing on the dialectical philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno, this article exposes the contradictory relation of these elements. Next, it investigates the implications of Adorno's ideas for the recent debate on form and deformation in sonata theory, with a special focus on the theory of James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy. An examination of the methodological foundations of this theory leads to the conclusion that it lacks a sufficiently sophisticated concept of mediation, its obvious Adornian stance notwithstanding. Finally, it is shown how Hepokoski and Darcy's hermeneutic and nominalist view of the sonata genre affects their ideas about both poles of the dialectic of music analysis (the general practice as well as the deformations).

'What does it mean to confront formal structures adequately?'² This is the underlying question driving the recent renegotiations of some basic methodological and philosophical assumptions of formal analysis. One of the most fundamental issues in this debate is how to conceive and, subsequently, how to put into (analytical) practice the relationship between the singularity of the composition under analytical scrutiny and the standard compositional options surrounding it as a more or less normative horizon.

At first sight, the methodology of music analysis – whatever its concrete purport or beliefs – seems to be characterized by a contradiction. For one thing, its aim is to disclose the particularity of a concrete composition (or part thereof) by exposing its formal and harmonic lay-out; for another, music analysis upholds a certain claim to generality, insofar as the analytical results are interpreted as representing a general formal pattern (or a deformation of it), or as examples of a general theory of form (or a deviation from it), which – at least implicitly – has a normative character. Even if this general level is, in the end, nothing but an extrapolation *ex post factum* from a significant and historically defined part of the repertoire, it still never reaches complete identity with the concrete composition under scrutiny of the analyst. If it did so, it would lose its sense and meaning as a general theory. At the same time, however, it is only thanks to such a theory – i.e. a theory with a more than particular truth claim – that the particularity of a composition can come to light. Thus, the *immediate* investigation of scores is *mediated* by its logical counterpart, viz. a general analytical framework. From this, it appears that, as far as its methodology is concerned, music analysis is characterized by a complex antagonism that can be summarized as 'mediated immediacy'. To keep my argument focused, I shall

1 For this article, the author received the Mart J. Lürsen Award of the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory. He presented it as a verbal paper at the Society's Tenth Annual Conference in Maastricht, The Netherlands, on February 22, 2008.

2 James Hepokoski, 'Back and Forth from Egmont: Beethoven, Mozart, and the Nonresolving Recapitulation', in: *19th-Century Music* 25/2-3 (2002), p. 127.

restrict my discussion of this issue to the analytical theory of sonata form, which in the past decade has witnessed a considerable desire to expand the coverage of the general theoretical framework.

It seems as if in this debate, the age-old philosophical dilemma of particulars and universals pops up in a music-analytical guise. However, anyone familiar with analytical theories will know that, in music analysis, the particular and the general are not to be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as mediating each other. Dilemma here becomes dialogue. Among the modern philosophers having thought out this issue and its consequences for music (analysis), Theodor W. Adorno holds pride of place. His oeuvre testifies to a lifelong preoccupation with preserving particularity from the totalizing claims of conceptual thought. Adorno made his whole philosophy pivot upon the non-identical, the particular, the ill-fitting. In the context of the theory of sonata form, the Adornian 'non-identical' refers to those aspects of sonata-form movements that do not conform to conventional practice, that subject the standard options to a deformation or even override the norms altogether.

The challenges these deformations address to traditional textbook models of sonata form have become quite pressing in the last decade. It has led Warren Darcy and James Hepokoski to radically rethink the desirability and feasibility of a general theory of sonata form. As a result of this, their monograph *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (2006) sets a new standard for the analysis of sonata form. In this text, I want to examine the implicit philosophical presuppositions supporting the sonata theory of Hepokoski and Darcy. Adorno's analysis of the dialogue of particularity and generality (in philosophy as well as in music analysis) will thereby serve as a heuristic tool. Two texts will be considered close up, one from the beginning and one from the end of his career: the 1932 lecture *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte* and the 1969 lecture *On the Problem of Musical Analysis*. The latter is one of the last texts of Adorno, and, curiously enough, one of the only two dealing explicitly with music analysis (the other being the chapter 'Analyse und Berg' from his book on Alban Berg). My aim is not only to make explicit the (partly implicit) methodological and philosophical foundations of Hepokoski and Darcy's enterprise, but also to question some options and tendencies of their work, which appear to be problematic when extrapolated.

As a matter of fact(s)

The dialectical relation Adorno sees between universality and particularity can be read as an attempt to correlate two poles of European culture. On the one hand, the occupation with generality refers to the Greek principle of searching for an explanation of the multiplicity and plurality of facts in an 'archè'. By subsuming the multifarious facticity under general concepts, man has acquired a rational grip on the world. The Judeo-Christian principle, on the other hand, fosters a way of thinking that focuses on the particular, on historically and culturally situated facts, in which it brings to light a truth that ultimately transcends the particular constellation it was originally found in. Christian faith is a case in point: the dogmas of the theology of salvation, universal and supra-historical as their scope may be, in the end pivot upon one particular historical event. In the history of philosophy, priority was given alternately to one of these two poles.

Since it will be of interest for the discussion of Hepokoski and Darcy's book, I want to indicate briefly the debate between the nominalist and the realist position, i.e. between opponents and proponents of the priority of universals. According to nominalism, it are the individual things and persons that are real, not the universal concepts under which they can be subsumed. These concepts are but a 'noun' (Lat.: *nomen*), a *flatus vocis*. The realist position, on the contrary, sees those concepts and universals as the ultimate reality: they make a thing to be what it is (e.g. it is the 'horse-ness' that makes a horse to be a horse; consequently, this 'horse-ness' is to be considered more real than any concrete horse).

In *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte* (1932), Adorno thematizes this dialectic of universality and particularity in an explicit manner. As such, this text marks the beginning of a lifelong preoccupation that eventually would amount to *Negative Dialektik* (1966). *Natur* and *Geschichte*: these are the two concepts that are traditionally seen as divergent and even incompatible, but that Adorno wants to correlate to each other. Nature, writes Adorno, is:

‘das, was von je da ist, was als schicksalhaft gefügtes, vorgegebenes Sein die menschliche Geschichte trägt, in ihr erscheint, was substantiell in ihr ist’.

History, on the contrary, is:

‘jene tradierte Verhaltensweise, die charakterisiert wird vor allem dadurch, dass in ihr qualitativ Neues erscheint, dass sie eine Bewegung ist, die sich nicht abspielt in purer Identität, purer Reproduktion von solchem, was schon immer da war, sondern in der Neues vorkommt und die ihren wahren Charakter durch das in ihr als Neues erscheinende gewinnt’.³

Adorno problematizes the traditional idea of the incompatibility of these concepts, with a view to showing how, in their very opposition, they can be seen as mediating each other. His critique is in fact aimed at the post-Husserlian philosophy, which wanted to get beyond the subjectivist position in philosophy in order to clear the way for an *ontological* grasp of the concrete and the contingent.⁴ The post-Husserlian solution for this problem was to accept historicity as a basic ontological structure. Adorno, however, denounced it as a spurious solution, since it remained locked up in general categories and definitions. In his view, the problem of historical contingency is not solved by subsuming particular things and events under the *category* of historicity. In fact, subsuming all things that are ill-fitting under the category of contingency and fortuity is tantamount to admitting the failure of philosophy to encompass the multifariousness of the empirical world. In Adorno’s words:

‘Ich meine nichts anderes, als dass der Versuch des neu-ontologischen Denkens, sich mit der Unerreichbarkeit des Empirischen abzufinden, stets und stets nach dem Schema verfährt, dass gerade da, wo irgendwelche Momente nicht eingehen in Denkbestimmungen, nicht durchsichtig zu machen sind, sondern in ihrer puren Daheit stehenbleiben, dass gerade das Stehenbleiben der Phänomene selbst in einen Allgemeinbegriff verwandelt wird und dem Stehenbleiben als solchem ontologische Würde aufgeprägt wird.’⁵

According to Adorno, the only solution to this problem is to discard the tacit idealistic assumptions of it. Firstly, philosophy has to say good-bye to its claim that all reality can be captured conceptually.⁶ Secondly, according to Adorno, the priority of possibilities over reality has to be given up. In terms of Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, this opposition of possibility and reality is nothing other than the opposition between the subjective system

3 Theodor W. Adorno, *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte* (Gesammelte Schriften 1). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978, p. 346.

4 This subjectivist position points to philosophical systems (such as phenomenology) in which ontological objectivity is grounded in fundamental structures of (transcendental) subjectivity.

5 Adorno, *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte*, p. 351.

6 In *Negative Dialektik*, this view is put as follows: ‘Weil der Fundamentalcharakter jeglichen Allgemeinbegriffs vor dem bestimmten Seienden zergeht, darf Philosophie auf Totalität nicht mehr hoffen.’ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Gesammelte Schriften 6). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978, p. 140.

of categories and empirical multiplicity. The priority of categories, writes Adorno, has proven to be pernicious, to the extent that all facticity that does not insert itself in them is philosophically disregarded. Instead, the rigid and frozen opposition between categories and facticity, i.e. between *nature* and *history*, has to be sublated into a dialectical interplay. Adorno states that an ontological grasp of historical contingency will only have any value to the extent that being as such, as concrete, intrinsic historicity and particularity, is admitted and included. In other words, according to Adorno, the task of philosophy is not to track a state of pure Being within historical contingent being, but to conceive of this very historical contingency as ontological, as 'natural' being. In short, the task of philosophy is 'die Rückverwandlung der konkreten Geschichte in dialektische Natur.'⁷

Adorno insists that the concept of 'Naturgeschichte' (natural history) should not be interpreted as a kind of 'safe' synthesis, in which differences are levelled out. On the contrary, the dialectical tension between the two concepts needs to be intensified to the point where they appear to be mediating each other. Nature becomes a sign of history; history, in its very historical particularity, a sign of nature. In this way, Adorno can state that all being is 'allegorical'. The concluding pages of his text put the reader on the track of the concept of *mediation* he upholds, by indicating what it certainly is not. Natural history is not a sort of historical ontology, *à la* Dilthey, in which a definite historical configuration is hypostatized as the fundamental structure of a whole period.⁸ In this view, the concrete materiality of reality – in Adorno's words 'die material-gefüllte Realität' – is not being taken seriously enough. What the concept of natural history tries to do, on the contrary, is to understand the historical facticity itself as 'natural-historical'. Again, it is important not to think this idea as an *a priori* unity; only by holding out and making explicit the inherent antithesis relentlessly, can the idea of natural history, i.e. the point where these two concepts *mediate* each other, be approached. The foregoing implies that this dialectic of nature and history is all but static or rigid. On the contrary, by the very fact that historicity as such is part of the dialectical interplay, the dialectic has a dynamic character that espouses the changeability of the world.⁹

What Adorno's investigation of the dialectic between nature and history amounts to, is a focus on the present, underpinned by a belief in the historicization of truth. By insisting on the dialectical interplay of nature and history, and refusing to hypostatize either nature or history as a philosophical first principle, Adorno avoided the pitfalls of idealist thinking. Referring to this dialectical interrelation of history and truth, Susan Buck-Morss mentions that Adorno was very fond of the formulation 'History is in the truth; the truth is not in history'. 'What he meant by this rather cryptic statement', she writes, 'was simply that although all truth was historical, although there was no truth above time, the actual process of history was not identical to truth in any metaphysical or ontological sense.'¹⁰

Pinpointing paradoxes

It goes without saying that Adorno's focus on the historicity of truth, and, ultimately, on the *mediation* between the natural and the historical which takes places at the heart of

7 Adorno, *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte*, p. 355.

8 Adorno, *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte*, p. 361.

9 As a contrast to his view, Adorno here points at the philosophy of Plato, whose world of ideas he sees as rigidified and static. As such, it is alienated from the dynamic of the concrete world and of human experience. Therefore, Adorno denounces Plato's views for having succumbed to the temptation of idealism: '(...) der Geist, aus der Welt verbannt und der Geschichte entfremdet, wird zur Absolutheit um den Preis der Lebendigkeit' (*Die Idee der Naturgeschichte*, pp. 363-364).

10 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*. New York: The Free Press, 1977, p.46.

any historical, particular product of human agency has important implications for music analysis. After all, as a historically and culturally located product of human agency, music – in this case, composition in sonata form – is a privileged *locus* of this dialectic. Moreover, since analysis, roughly speaking, has to deal with the technical description of music, it is subject to the same philosophical problems that Adorno explores in all applications of concepts and categories to empirical and historical facticity.¹¹ When transposed to the context of music analysis, then, the idea of natural history stands for the mediation of, on the one hand, the historically situated particularity of the individual composition (possibly sonata form) and, on the other, the prevailing generic or general ('natural') conventions of the genre in question.

Questions arising here are threefold, though not to be separated strictly. Firstly, what does this mediation mean for concrete analytical practice? Are there any analytical guidelines to be deduced from this philosophical investigation? What does it mean for the analyst not to smooth out the opposition between the individuality of the composition and the generality of the conventions against which the composition stands out? Secondly, in how far can individual compositions in sonata form be said to be 'allegorical', i.e. to enounce a truth that, though historicized and localized, pushes beyond the composition in which it originates? Thirdly, how to put into words this truth claim? How to develop a conceptual grasp of analytical facts, without downplaying the unique character of the composition (which, according to Adorno, is the very *locus* of its truth)?

The way in which Adorno, in his text 'On the Problem of Musical Analysis', assesses the analytical views of Heinrich Schenker, leaves no doubt as to his answer to the first question.¹² For Adorno, structure in music does not mean the 'mere grouping of musical parts according to traditional formal schemata', but rather has to do with 'what is going on, musically, underneath these formal schemata'.¹³ Adorno here refers to deviations of the formal schemata, which are not simply 'a second and quite different thing, but [are] in fact mediated by the formal schemata',¹⁴ since they can only be understood *as* deviations through their relationship to these schemata. The task of analysis, then, is to investigate the complex relationship of *deviation* to *schema*, not just the one or the other alone. Identity *and* difference, this is the dialectical interplay analysis has to cast light on. This is also precisely the point where Schenkerian analysis falls short according to Adorno:

'For, in reducing music to its most generalized structures, what seems to him [Schenker, JC] and to his theory to be merely casual and fortuitous is, in a certain sense, precisely that which is really the essence, the being [*das Wesen*] of the music.'¹⁵

In other words, analysis of music that displays a certain formal schema has to take as its point of departure not so much that very schema, but the obvious *deviations* from the schema, in order to investigate the complex dialectical interplay of the individual and the typical. Neither of the two can be prioritized, according to Adorno, since the 'deviations can only be at all understood through their relationship to the schemata'.¹⁶ Adorno is not only critical of analytical theories that get totally absorbed by general structures alone, but also of all kinds of analysis that limit themselves to mere recording of musical facts

11 See also Andrew Edgar, 'Adorno and Musical Analysis', in: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57/4 (1999), p. 448.

12 Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Problem of Musical Analysis', in: *Theodor W. Adorno: Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert. Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 2002, pp. 165-167.

13 Ibidem, p. 164.

14 Ibidem, p. 164-165.

15 Ibidem, p. 165.

16 Ibidem, p. 165.

and details, or, as Max Paddison puts it, that attempt 'to demonstrate that A = A, that a work is its structure, with no remainder'.¹⁷ Both analytical tendencies – the generalizing and the particularizing – are biased to the extent that, in the end, they can be seen as tautological. As to Schenkerian analysis¹⁸, the *quod erat demonstrandum* has been settled *a priori*. The only thing to do for the analyst, in Adorno's view, is to demonstrate the identity of the composition and the fundamental line, often at the cost of stylistic or technical peculiarities – instances of difference or non-identity. The positivistic kind of analysis can also be said to be tautological, to the extent that in this case analysis is in fact a 'transcription' into analytical jargon of what is already written – much better and more precisely than in words! – in the notes and signs of the score anyway. By pointing to the relation of the music with what is outside the music (here: the formal schemata as part of a historically mediated sedimentation of society¹⁹), Adorno emasculates these tautological kinds of analysis.

However, the musical work may be said to contain its own analysis, albeit in a rather different sense, namely 'to the extent that the structure of the individual work is a critical reflection upon the historically preformed material (which is not the same for all historical periods)'.²⁰ This means that the particular structure of a composition contains a specific interaction with a more general level of historically and socially determined musical material, an aspect Paddison aptly calls 'a kind of Saussurean *langue-parole* interrelationship between particular and universal (...)'.²¹ Adorno's philosophical critique of the immediate 'givenness' of objects and phenomena here comes to bear upon music, insofar as individual compositions are released from their monadic isolation and correlated to a context, from which their meaning is derived. In his 'Ideen zur Musiksoziologie', Adorno expresses this idea from a subjective point of view:

'Das kompositorische Subjekt ist kein individuelles sondern ein kollektives. Aller Musik, und wäre es die dem Stil nach individualistischeste, eignet unabdingbar ein kollektiver Gehalt: jeder Klang allein schon sagt Wir.'²²

From this it appears that, as a matter of fact, the task of the analyst is characterized by a paradox: on the one hand, he wants to 'reveal as clearly as possible the problem of each particular work'.²³ On the other hand, revealing this particularity means making

17 Max Paddison, 'Immanent Critique or Musical Stocktaking? Adorno and the Problem of Musical Analysis', in: *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin. Oxford etc.: Blackwell, 2002, p. 218 (italics in original).

18 It should be noted here that Adorno is referring to Schenkerian analysis anno 1969; recent tendencies, especially the investigation of its importance for performance practice by Carl Schachter and others, have proven to be of great interest and to meet some objections of Adorno.

19 Max Paddison, 'Immanent Critique or Musical Stocktaking?', p. 224. Elsewhere, Paddison has convincingly shown that Adorno's concept of mediation actually incorporates three interacting levels: the immanent analysis of artworks, the sociological critique, and the philosophical-aesthetical interpretation of artworks. See his 'Adorno's Aesthetic Theory' [review article], in: *Music Analysis* 6/3 (1987), pp. 355-77, and *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 52-64. To analyse a piece in the spirit of Adorno would entail showing how it mediates between these three levels. As the latter two levels lead beyond the scope of this article, I will limit myself to a discussion of the immanent analytical level.

20 Paddison, 'Immanent Critique or Musical Stocktaking?', p. 225.

21 Ibidem.

22 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Ideen zur Musiksoziologie', in: *Klangfiguren* (Gesammelte Schriften 16). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978, p. 18. Max Paddison (*Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, p. 115) interestingly relates this dialectic of 'I' and 'We' to the 'Master and Slave' section of Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

23 Adorno, 'On the Problem of Musical Analysis', p. 173.

explicit the collective content of the work, by showing how it is organized as a 'force-field' (*Kraftfeld*) around an archetypal problem. In other words, the paradox analysts have to cope with is that the 'uniqueness' or individuality of a composition is only accessible through the dialectical relation of this individuality with the generality of conventions and schemata surrounding it, an idea that particularly holds true for analysis of sonata forms. Paradoxically, it is precisely – and exclusively – by penetrating deeply the specificity of a composition that this specificity is transcended.

'Analysis is more than merely the facts, but is so only and solely by virtue of going beyond the simple facts by absorbing itself into them. Every analysis that is of any value, therefore – and anyone who analyzes seriously will soon realize this for himself – is a squaring of the circle.'²⁴

The paradox present in this view gives us a clue to the second question. By emphasizing the implicit dialogue of a composition with what is outside of it, Adorno can interpret individual compositions dialectically as the 'stage' on which a larger truth appears. When applied to the theory of sonata form, this train of thought can be explained as follows. Suppose we are in 1801, the year in which Ludwig van Beethoven composed his Sonata quasi una fantasia, Opus 27, No. 2, the *Moonlight Sonata*. This individual composition in sonata form displays certain quite remarkable deviations from and deformations of the prevailing conventions at that time. However, in due course, the *Moonlight Sonata* too will be made part of the generic conventions, namely from the moment later generations of composers start to compose sonata forms that stand out against the whole corpus of sonata compositions available at that time, i.e. including the *Moonlight Sonata*. In this sense, each contribution to the sonata-form tradition is at the same time a *re-creation* of this tradition. This allows Adorno to state that 'in Beethoven the forms (particularly the large, dynamic forms like the sonata) could be said to re-emerge from out of the specific process of the composition.'²⁵ Significant contributions to the tradition of sonata form make this general form to reappear in a new way out of the specificity of the composition. I would argue that it is in this way that individual compositions can be said to be allegorical – or, to put it in the terms of *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte*, that history 'speaks' nature: to the extent, namely, that they can be interpreted dialectically as a 'stage' – and indeed, as Adorno emphasized in *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte*, as the only possible stage – of an objective, supra-individual truth, i.e. the 'truth' unfolding in the evolution of sonata form.²⁶

It will be clear by now that the 'generality' that is at play in the dialectical process of analysis (and in sonata theory), as viewed by Adorno, has nothing to do with an objective, fixed theory, deprived of any historical or social interaction, nor with a prescriptive textbook model of formal schemata. At the same time, it will be obvious that in a dialectical and critical view of musical analysis, the undivided attention to the music's details, to its 'small but decisive features', its 'little physiognomic characteristics'²⁷ is anything but motivated by a positivistic preoccupation with fact-collecting. By interpreting a musical composition as the place where a complex mediation between the

24 Adorno, 'On the Problem of Musical Analysis', p. 169.

25 Ibidem, p. 167.

26 Susan Buck-Morss (*The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, p. 106) ascribes the original inspiration of Adorno to interpret concrete historical facts or events as a 'stage' upon which a larger truth appears, to Walter Benjamin (particularly to *Passagenarbeit* (1928), *Einbahnstrasse* (1928), and *Berliner Kindheit* (1930), where concrete figures or memories are used as a kind of prism through which a larger historical period or truth is deciphered or revealed). The reader should note that my use of the word 'unfolding' here is not meant to imply a progressivist view of the evolution of sonata form.

27 Adorno, 'On the Problem of Musical Analysis', p. 166.

particular and the general takes place, Adorno arrived at a very rich and sophisticated conception of ‘analysis’, in which technical, sociological, and philosophical-aesthetical issues are brought into a dynamic constellation that moves interpretively around the artwork. This makes the third question – which in fact boils down to: how to pinpoint paradoxes? – all the more pressing. However, Adorno’s answer only contains a general orientation, a caution not to think too little of the dialectic taking place in the artwork. He does not give any concrete guidelines about how to conceive of analytical ‘facts’ in a way that does justice to this dialectic. Therefore, it is recommendable to take a closer look at a concrete analytical theory of sonata form, namely, the theory of James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy.²⁸

Taxable taxonomies?

One of the most remarkable tendencies in the theories of sonata form of the last decades, is the suspicion of general or standard practices and normative taxonomies, a tendency epitomized in the title of Charles Rosen’s book *Sonata Forms*. As Rosen indicates, the plural ‘forms’ was ‘meant to emphasize that what was eventually to become the canonic type of sonata form developed along with other forms, which influenced each other and were, in fact, interdependent.’²⁹ In an article with the no less telling title ‘The General and the Particular in Brahms’s Later Sonata Forms’, James Webster made a similar point in stating that ‘norms of formal procedures, whether the bad old textbook models or the numerical averages developed earlier in this paper, can never satisfactorily account for the reality of individual compositions.’³⁰ William Caplin, too, deplors the fact that ‘most writers continue to describe the formal organization of this music [i.e., the classical forms of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, JC] using ill-fitting concepts and ambiguous terminology derived from theories that have long fallen into disrepute.’³¹ Nevertheless, few authors are as dedicated to using the traditional formal categories as Caplin. This is not to say that Caplin’s analyses forsake his initial reticence; on the contrary, he appears to be very well aware of the intricate dialectic laid bare by Adorno:

‘One reason that the traditional *Formenlehre* has fallen out of favor with many historians and theorists is their belief that the use of rigid, abstract categories of form results too often in procrustean analyses that obscure diversities in style and distort the individuality of the musical work. Yet forsaking categories would make it almost impossible to generalize about formal organisation, and such a situation runs counter to most musicians’ intuitions that classical form features regularly recurring patterns of conventionalized procedures.’³²

Caplin’s solution to the problem above lies in a flexible use of the formal categories, which can preserve the delicate dialectic of identity and difference at play in individual compositions. Charles Rosen, however, is quite suspicious about these general categories and practices, a restraint that, to my mind, is partly due to a rather one-sided view on generality. Nevertheless, he certainly has a point in saying that ‘the general practice of a period is

28 James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*. New York etc.: Oxford University Press, 2006.

29 Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms*. New York etc.: W.W. Norton, 1980, pp. i-ii.

30 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 etc.: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 75.

31 William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*, New York etc.: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 3.

32 Caplin, *Classical Form*, p. 4.

naturally interesting, but unmediated and uninterpreted it can define nothing,³³ and that 'statistically defined, "general practice" is pure fiction'.³⁴ Justified as this reticence toward a 'bad' generality may be, the alternative Rosen proposes is not entirely convincing. Instead of analyzing compositions, proceeding from their complacency or deviations to an allegedly normative model, he proposes to start from an analysis of the function of elements.

'An investigation of the function of the elements will enable us to examine the work of all the composers of a period without regard to their deviations from a supposed norm, and will also avoid two traps: firstly the definition of form on the basis of a predetermined set of masterpieces, an absurd way of trying to understand music of a large number of composers even if it produced a useful neoclassical model for the nineteenth century; and, second, the postulation of a meaningless statistical abstraction which does not help us to see how the music worked in its own time and still works today (when it does).'³⁵

It is not so much the methodology as such, as the rather narrow view of general practices underneath that raises questions here. To my mind, studying a piece of music as if it were a complacent monade, and pretending to grasp its specific structure without testing it against the larger context in which it is embedded, is as pure a fiction as the general practice Rosen denounces. I would argue here that the specificity of a composition can only be approached adequately when seen in a dialectical constellation with a 'good' generality of standard practices, which is safeguarded against a meaningless, noncommittal kind of 'general practice' thanks to the relentless dialectical interplay with singular compositions. On the other hand, however, I would claim that these general practices are not just a heuristic tool for efficiently tracking the specific features of an individual sonata-form composition. To my mind, such an 'instrumental' view of sonata practices would equal taking a nominalist position with respect to the concept of sonata form. As I will argue below, Hepokoski and Darcy's theory of sonata form tends towards such a position.

Hepokoski and Darcy made some clear-cut methodological and philosophical choices in *Elements of Sonata Theory* and earlier publications. In particular, there is a certain shift of perspective to be observed as to the philosophical status of the construct 'sonata form'. 'Real form', writes James Hepokoski (who to my mind is the philosophical brains behind *Elements of Sonata Theory*):

'exists in that conceptual dialogue with implicit generic norms, which exist outside of the material surface of the printed page and its acoustic realization. This means that the construct that we call 'sonata form' is more a set of tools for understanding than it is a bottom-line practice that must be minimally satisfied in the workings of any given piece before we grant that piece, for whatever purpose, the label of "sonata".'³⁶

33 Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, p. 4.

34 Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, p. 6. Rosen's caution needs to be contextualized further by the fact that, as he mentions in his book, the purpose of the first codifications of sonata form (Anton Reicha, Adolf Bernhard Marx, Carl Czerny) 'was not the understanding of the music of the past but a model for the production of new works' (p. 3). In other words, the general practice Rosen refers to was codified first and foremost to allow for new and original (and, accordingly, deviant) interpretations to come about.

35 Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, p. 7.

36 Hepokoski, 'Back and Forth from Egmont', p. 135. Other terms used to indicate this pole of generality are: patterns, shared gestures, ranges of options, a sense of the typical, (varying degrees of) the normative, (inductively inferred) norms, standard compositional options, sonata norms, regulative ideas, sonata-form genre; all to be found in James Hepokoski & Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, pp. v-vii.

Hepokoski is rather reticent about assigning the construct of sonata form a certain conceptual or normative priority. In another article, he has demonstrated the necessity of going beyond the so-called 'sonata principle', precisely because of its lack of dialectical interaction with singular compositions.³⁷ In (English-language) scholarship based on this sonata principle, Hepokoski diagnoses an unbalanced dialectic, to the extent that, in true Hegelian fashion, exceptions and deviations of the sonata principle in the end confirm the primacy and the systematic completion of it.³⁸ Instead thereof, Hepokoski tries to secure the ill-fitting as a privileged entry to the deeper compositional logic of a composition.

'We should not think that the "rule" is inviolable, much less try to make fractious exceptional cases conform to it. Instead of normalizing puzzling occurrences, we should seize with relish upon "what doesn't fit" and assume that pursuing the strangeness of that moment will lead us more deeply into the work's driving compositional logic. (...) not to smooth out the works into blandly flawless "unities" and "reconciliations" but to savor their spiky eccentricities, to delight in the problematics of their discourse.'³⁹

This quotation reads as a kind of musical adaptation of basic assumptions of Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*. To my mind, Hepokoski's deliberate use and highlighting (with quotation marks) of Hegelian terminology (especially 'unities' and 'reconciliation') is intended as a implicit confession of his adherence to Adorno. The reconciliatory thinking Hepokoski turns down refers to a kind of analysis that does not really take up the challenge of the particular and the eccentric, of the deviatory elements in sonata-form movements. Adorno hits the nail on the head when he calls this Hegelian reconciliation a sophistic solution to the problem of facticity:

'Sophistisch wird die Hegelsche Dialektik, wo sie misslingt. Was das Besondere zum dialektischen Anstoss macht, seine Unauflöslichkeit im Oberbegriff, das handelt sie als universalen Sachverhalt ab, wie wenn das Besondere selbst sein eigener Oberbegriff wäre und dadurch unauflöslich. Eben damit wird die Dialektik von Nichtidentität und Identität scheinhaft.'⁴⁰

The emphasis Hepokoski puts on preserving the non-identity ('spiky eccentricities') of individual works, runs parallel to Adorno's thinking (in particular in *Negative Dialektik*) toward the negation, the explosion of given, reified forms, performed by these eccentricities, by that which does not fit the given analytical categories and forms. Paraphrasing Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*, one could say that a reconciliatory form of analysis, one that

37 James Hepokoski, 'Beyond the Sonata Principle', in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55/1 (2002), pp. 91-154, especially pp. 92-96. Moreover, Hepokoski gives the Adornian dialectic a *subjective* turn, in that he sees the 'generic norms' operating chiefly as generic or standard *expectations* of the listener. See, for example, his 'Back and Forth from Egmont', p. 135: 'Judgments concerning form, therefore, are incomplete if they are confined only to a description of "the music itself". Rather, such judgments must extend to the music's dialogical embeddedness in a web of cultural and generic expectations.' In Hepokoski's view, the individuality of a sonata-form composition then comes to the fore primarily as ear-catching deviations from these expectations. However, this view only seems to hold true for Adorno's 'expert listener'. See: Theodor W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* (Gesammelte Schriften 14). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978, pp. 181-183.

38 James Hepokoski, 'Beyond the Sonata Principle', p. 96: '[A]nalytical appeals to the sonata principle (or to workable adaptations thereof) can be used to provide inappropriately quick solutions to unusual sonata-form pieces.'

39 James Hepokoski, 'Beyond the Sonata Principle', p. 149.

40 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 175.

smoothes out these eccentricities, in fact makes the discrepancies it intended to discard resurface all the more strongly.⁴¹ In the spirit of Adorno, Hepokoski proposes a kind of *Wiedergutmachung*,⁴² after the detriment caused by bad textbook models of sonata-form analysis. To put it in a paradoxical way, Hepokoski and Darcy seem to contend that a theory of sonata form worth its name should be able to think *against* itself, without thereby losing itself. The big issue to be dealt with, then – the third question raised above – is that of how to devise an appropriate theoretical/analytical model and terminology that, in the words of Mark Evan Bonds, ‘can account for conventional patterns and at the same time do justice to the immense diversity that exists within the framework of these patterns’.⁴³

It is, as a matter of fact, their very negative-dialectical option that causes a major problem for Hepokoski and Darcy. For the abundant diversity of eccentricities and deviations in the sonata forms of late eighteenth-century sonatas constitute what Adorno has called the *Erfahrungsgehalt* of dialectical thinking.⁴⁴ Given their obvious un-Hegelian dialectical stance toward analysis, it is all the more surprising to read Hepokoski and Darcy’s response to the challenge addressed to sonata theory by the countless deviations:

‘[T]he 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.’⁴⁵

Unfortunately, Hepokoski and Darcy seem to affirm Max Paddison’s contention that ‘what is generally lacking in musical analysis is a sufficiently complex and sophisticated concept of mediation’.⁴⁶ Admittedly, in the introduction to *Elements of Sonata Theory*, they clarified what is really at stake in analytical theory and practice in an exemplary manner, up to the point where they were fully facing the abundant diversity of sonata-form strategies. At that very point, however, they seem to revert to a safe, reasonable middle ground, a ‘workable hermeneutic space’⁴⁷ for a correspondingly workable analytical theory. However, as was made clear by the references to Adorno’s *Negative Dialektik*, the (analytical) truth does not lie somewhere in between. It is only by driving the opposition of the two poles of the dialectic to an extreme and by fully facing the fierceness and vehemence of this process, that one can reach a point where the opposites can be seen to mediate each other. Hepokoski and Darcy’s “‘middle ground’ solution” seems to be above all a pragmatic solution, born of an otherwise praiseworthy preoccupation with expanding the coverage of their sonata theory. I

41 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 146: ‘Die Gewalttat des Gleichmachens reproduziert den Widerspruch, den sie ausmerzt’.

42 Cf. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 149: ‘Das Subjekt muss am Nichtidentischen wiedergutmachen, was er daran verübt hat’.

43 Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 29 (cited in Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, p. 8).

44 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 163: ‘Dialektik [hat] ihren Erfahrungsgehalt nicht am Prinzip sondern am Widerstand des Anderen gegen die Identität; daher ihre Gewalt’.

45 Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, p. 8 (italics mine).

46 Max Paddison, ‘Immanent Critique or Musical Stocktaking?’, p. 227. In his text, Paddison aims at the mediation of the ‘inner world of the hermetically sealed artwork’ and ‘the outer world of things’ (p. 226). I argue that his view also pertains to the mediation of the general and the particular which takes place in the artwork itself.

47 Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, p. 8.

will conclude by showing how this view affects their theoretical conception of both poles of the dialectic, the generic norms as well as the individual deviations.⁴⁸

Toward a typology of the a-typical

Hepokoski and Darcy maintain an instrumentalist and hermeneutical conception of the general practice at play in their analytical theory. Yet, this is not the point at issue. Rather, it is the consequence this instrumentalist view has for the philosophical status of these heuristic norms that raises questions. The authors take a clear nominalist stance, in that they assign little if any reality to these generic norms. Rather, they maintain, these genre conventions should be understood as regulative guides for the interpretation of sonata-form movements.⁴⁹ Admittedly, Hepokoski and Darcy are right in stating that the label 'sonata form' was unknown in the age of Haydn and Mozart, and was retrojected afterwards in the music of that period. However, I think there was an implicit understanding of what it meant to compose a first movement (form) – an understanding fostered by the way the composers related to the corpus of first-movement forms at that time. In their discussion of sonata-form types, Hepokoski and Darcy touch upon this issue in the following way:

'Given the history of the term and its self-consciously ahistorical application to eighteenth-century works, what one chooses to call a sonata type or a sonata form depends on the interpretive purposes one has in mind for doing so. There is no reality question at stake here. Once one takes a more sophisticated view of a genre (or a form) not as a concrete thing to be found in the music proper but as a regulative idea guiding analytical interpretation, many of the problems associated with this terminological concern become less pressing.'⁵⁰

To substantiate their point, they refer to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*:

'The regulative principle is a principle of reason, which, as a rule, dictates how we ought to proceed in our empirical inquiry, but is unable to anticipate or indicate prior to the empirical inquiry what is given in the analytical object itself. (...) Regulative ideas cannot, therefore, be admitted to be real in themselves; they can only possess a comparative reality. (...) They are to be regarded not as actual things, but as in some measure analogous to them.'⁵¹

Paradoxically, this alleged corroboration lays bare some weaknesses of their nominalist position quite clearly. Firstly, Kant's regulative principle has to be seen as a pure rational structure of transcendental subjectivity, without any content of its own. As a principle of reason, it has to operate on sensorial data coming from outside itself. Therefore, Kant is actually right in denying these ideas, as pure constructs of transcendental subjectivity, to

48 I want to stress that I am dealing here only with the theoretical and methodological assumptions of Hepokoski and Darcy's sonata theory. My critical investigation of these does by no means imply a value judgement of the analyses presented in their book. As stated by Hepokoski and Darcy, 'the essence of Sonata Theory lies in uncovering and interpreting the dialogue of an individual piece with the background set of norms' (p. 11). The quality of their work is not affected in any significant manner by the way in which this dialogue is conceived of philosophically.

49 Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, p. 8: 'These heuristic norms need not be considered as literally existing "things".'

50 Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, p. 343.

51 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn). London: Dent, 1934 (Book 11: 'Transcendental Dialectic', Chapter 2, Section 8, and Chapter 3, Section 7), quoted in Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, pp. 605-606, footnote 6.

have any palpable reality in themselves. However, this does not hold true for the generic conventions of sonata form. I argue that these cannot reasonably be said to be devoid of any empirical content. On the contrary, the dialectical view on analysis developed earlier in this text implies that, as sedimented history of sonata form, these generic norms indeed do have a real, palpable and audible existence, for they can be shown to consist of a sedimentation of all significant contributions to sonata form composition up to a certain period. To put it more bluntly: I doubt whether Beethoven, when composing his first series of piano sonatas (the three sonatas Opus 2 of 1795, dedicated to Joseph Haydn), would have agreed to deny any 'reality-value' to the presence of the sonata-form model developed by his teacher Haydn, or to the impact Mozart's piano sonatas had made on him, etc. Furthermore, the relentless reassessment and recalibration of these generic conventions through new compositions still adds to their reality.

Secondly, I maintain that a nominalist view on sonata-form conventions would preclude a real dialectical interplay of these conventions and individual compositions. How can there be a real mediation of opposites, i.e. a vehement, and even violent, interplay⁵² between a concrete compositional practice, and the generic conventions surrounding this practice, when the latter are a sheer construct of imagination, without any real weight? Is not the weight of these genre conventions too evident in the testimonies of composers struggling with them (Adorno's *Gewalt*!) for us to downplay them as a mere heuristic tool?

Finally, the fact that Hepokoski and Darcy refer precisely to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is somewhat at odds with the Adornian conception of dialectic they developed earlier. For in his philosophical writings, Adorno has repeatedly criticized the aprioric structure of Kant's philosophy for its subjective preformation of objects and phenomena (e.g. in the guise of the regulative principles), which, according to Adorno, obscures the true being, i.e. the non-identity or the *individuum ineffabile*, of these objects and phenomena.⁵³

Hepokoski and Darcy's 'middle ground' conception of mediation also affects the way they handle the eccentricities and deviations of the sonata-form repertoire, at least methodologically and conceptually speaking. What makes their *Elements of Sonata Theory* an enterprise of singular importance is the admirable meticulousness of their terminological and typological labors. As appears from the subtitle of the book – *Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* – they have broadened the scope and the coverage of sonata theory considerably by including theoretical issues concerning structural deformation. The main target was obviously (1) to include as much sonata-form repertoire of the period in question as possible, and (2) to shed light on the staggering amount of exceptions and deviations to the general conventions, by listing them and ordering them into elaborate typologies. In this respect, the table of contents of the book, which takes up thirteen pages (in fine print) listing common and deformational types, speaks volumes. However, the methodological option of drawing up a typology of the atypical raises complex questions, which can benefit more from an explication than from untimely attempts to clear up the matter.

The main question is whether the preoccupation to get a terminological and typological grip on the atypical is not at odds with the authors' initial concern to preserve the non-identity of the compositions from the totalizing claims of theory. For one could argue that the closely-knit terminological frame of their theory reveals a desire to reduce the irreducible 'facticity', the pure 'being-there' [*pure Da-heit*, Adorno] of deviations and eccentricities, by subsuming it under, or, in some cases, transforming it into a more or less general category or type. Is this (typological) identification of the non-identical not

52 cf. Adorno's reference to the vehemence [*Gewalt*] of a dialectical process (footnote 44).

53 See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 148.

tantamount to reducing the dialectic to what Adorno has called a seeming [*scheinhaft*] dialectic? A second, related question is whether these typologies of the atypical are not too narrow-based to function effectively as typologies. Does not the elaboration of typologies of the atypical betray a tendency toward leveling out the structural distinction of specimen and type, in that singular compositions displaying (unique) deformational strategies can be seen to be their own type? Is not the particular – the dialectical stumbling block according to Adorno – here being smoothed to a degree where it brings the dialectic to a standstill?

Conjectural conclusion

‘Was anders wäre, hat noch nicht begonnen.’⁵⁴

54 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 148.