

Mozart and the English Suites: Borrowings, Isorhythm, and Plasticity

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I. Introduction

The playful improvisatory interlude that separates two massive sequences near the end of the first-movement exposition of Mozart's C major Piano Concerto, K. 467 (Example 1a) is among the most mysterious passages in Mozart's music.¹ We sense that it refers to something, but to what? With its offer of repose after a dramatic series of Baroque *Fortspinnungen*, the Interlude—however distantly—brings to mind the leisurely second theme of the Allegro (compare the tilted square brackets in Example 1a with those in Example 1b, and note the correspondence between the falling steps at the end of each group of four tones). Yet in its dreamy, even foggy way, the Interlude also recalls a very different kind of music: the Sarabande from Bach's G minor English Suite, and specifically the serpentine and anguished arpeggiation of a diminished seventh chord that occupies the center of the Sarabande (compare the tilted square brackets in Example 1a with those in Example 1c; the Sarabande is reproduced in its entirety in Example 20).

This surprising and quite Bloomian transformation of Bach's discourse

¹ I thank Floyd K. Grave and David Shohl for reading earlier versions of this paper and offering many helpful suggestions for its revision.

peers also through Mozart's second theme itself, which alludes, however obliquely, to the very same serpentine passage. The allusion, however, is not to the Sarabande proper but to the Sarabande's ornamental *double* (compare the brackets in Examples 2a and 2b).² It so happens that these are not the only references to Bach's Sarabande in Mozart's Allegro; there are several others, and I shall point to them later on. Before doing so, however, I should like to emphasize that despite the fascination such borrowings hold for us, their significance will emerge only if we retrace also the larger context in which they appear. To establish such a context for Mozart's borrowings in K. 467, we must digress substantially—indeed, embark on a major detour—and examine the two sequences that intervene between Mozart's second theme and his Interlude, as well as their sources. To complicate things further the two sequences derive not from the English Suites but from a little-known Bach suite—the Suite in A minor, BWV 818a—which is one of two suites that were originally earmarked for the six *French Suites* and then dropped from the set altogether.³ Both sequences derive from the *Prélude*, marked *Fort gai*, that opens the Suite (it is reproduced in its entirety in Example 22). Mozart's first sequence and the passage from Bach's *Prélude* from which it derives, are both reproduced in Example 3. Mozart's second sequence and the opening measures of Bach's *Prélude*, which the sequence

² Bloom 1973/1997. The principal applications of Bloom's theories to music analysis are Korsyn 1991 and Straus 1990. Korsyn's work has influenced mine considerably.

³ These suites were soon replaced, apparently because their many leisurely forays into the galant style and into a very self-conscious kind of sentimental *Empfindsamkeit* did not fit well with the stringently contrapuntal and terse character of the remaining four suites. Hogwood 1984 provides the most detailed and persuasive account of the two suites' and the French Suites' tangled history.

compresses several times, are reproduced in Example 4. (Double brackets and brackets in the style of Lerdahl and Jackendoff—hereafter referred to as L & J brackets—illustrate the relationship between the excerpts).⁴

If we look at a synopsis of Mozart's entire dominant area—Example 5, which also doubles as a preview of things to come—we shall see that the dominant region spans four discrete evocations of Bach. Each of these is marked by a distinct rhythmic similarity to its source. The rhythms of Mozart's borrowings are identified by the annotations that appears in boxes, and the annotations in turn summarize the relation of Mozart's rhythms to Bach's.

Now besides these rhythmic parallelisms, the most important feature to which the synopsis calls attention is the *order* in which the evocations of Bach appear. Mozart's second theme and his later Interlude come from the G minor Sarabande, whereas the two sequences intervening between them come from the A minor Prélude. The continual and surprisingly regular alternation between the two sets of borrowings indicates that there might be some kind of system to this network of appropriations. As we might suspect, this apparent system is no simpler than the appropriations it brings together. It has to do with what I call *isorhythmic plasticity*, a notion that is meant to complement (rather than to contradict) Frank Samarotto's notion of *temporal plasticity*.⁵ It is the need for

⁴ Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983 (L&J in later citations).

⁵ Samarotto 1999a, 1999b, and 2001. I shall take up the similarities and differences between Samarotto's approach and mine later on.

For a thoroughgoing treatment of hypermeter in the second sequence under discussion and in the closing pages of the exposition see Rothstein 1989 (*Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*), pp. 38-37, Example 3.16, and Peter Kaminsky's review (Kaminsky 1992), p. 150S [sic].

isorhythmic plasticity that triggers the borrowings and at the same time calls for the steady alternation between them. The need for flexible isorhythm also explains the deeper rhetorical significance of each borrowing. As I use it, isorhythm refers to the repetition of relatively short rhythmic figures that underlie the surface of the music—*figural isorhythm*— and to the repetition of more extended figures that underlie the surface at deeper levels of the metrical grid—*structural isorhythm*.

Because isorhythmic plasticity is manifest on several levels, its study necessarily entails the introduction of a rather complex isorhythmic vocabulary, with potentially intimidating terms (such as the aforementioned *figural isorhythm* and *structural isorhythm*) appearing in both the singular and the plural. This new vocabulary, which supplements the pacing vocabulary I introduced in a number of earlier studies and in my dissertation, is needed in order to account for the temporal phenomena that underlie Mozart's borrowings at various levels of durational structure.⁶ (Throughout the paragraphs and examples that follow, brackets of various types continue to refer to thematic resemblances unless otherwise specified; rhythmic and isorhythmic connections are shown mostly by means of pitchless noteheads above the score. Much of the discussion focuses on rhythmic rather than on motivic parallelisms.)

II. Mozart and Bach, pacing and isorhythm

⁶ Willner 1998 and 1999, with further references; and see my dissertation, chapter 1.

The confluence of appropriations we find in K. 467 is by no means unusual. Mozart was in possession of Prince Karl von Lichnowsky's copy of the English Suites from 1782 to 1788, Prince Karl having copied them by hand from Johann Forkel's copy a few years earlier at the University of Göttingen.⁷ Mozart's later music is replete with borrowings from these suites: The solo passagework and the orchestral comments in the C minor Piano Concerto, K. 491, contain many passages based on the Prélude to the D minor Suite; the chromaticism and perhaps also the even pacing of the first movement from the "Coronation" Concerto derive from the chromaticism and pace structure of the Allemande from the E minor Suite; and the opening Allegro from the D major Piano Sonata, K. 576, is based on the Gigue from the F major Suite. One could go on and on in a similar vein, and one could also lengthen the list to include borrowings from Bach's French Suites and Partitas for Clavier, as well as from some of his orchestral works. For good measure, one could go even a step further and include many borrowings from Handel's keyboard suites, and from Domenico Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas. But again, a comprehensive documentary account will shed little light on the reasons for Mozart's heavy reliance on the earlier composers' music or on the earlier era's phrase rhythm. A more thorough look at the web of connections between several adjacent borrowings in our C major Concerto movement—and at the impact these borrowings have on their surroundings—will offer more insights into the intricacies of Mozart's working habits and the complex setup of his workshop.

⁷Bach, *Neue sämtliche Ausgabe sämtliche Werke*, Series V, Band 7, *Kritischer Bericht* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1981), pp. 441-42. See also Schmid 1950, p. 301f.

Before we return to the four borrowings under discussion and to the Interlude with which we began, we should survey briefly a few of the other appropriations from the G minor Sarabande and the A minor Prélude in the orchestral and solo expositions of K. 467, this in order to get a sense of the kaleidoscopic, combinatorial quality of Mozart's transformation of his two sources. Then we'll be in a better position to reflect on why it is that Mozart navigates so frequently between his many sources. The survey will also help us understand the nature of Mozart's reinterpretation of his sources, and to gauge its impact on the Concerto's *rhetorical tone*, to borrow Elaine Sisman's evocative term.⁸ As we go along, we must bear in mind the following principle, which applies to most borrowings throughout the tonal repertoire: Where obvious borrowings prevail, less apparent borrowings masquerading either as distant allusions or else as stylistically generic idioms prevail too. Borrowings that by contrast appear in isolation from other borrowings, no matter how suggestive they might be, need to be scrutinized with a good deal of circumspection. There are, fortunately, few isolated borrowings in K. 467.

Mozart derives the middle of his first theme (bars 5-8) from the opening measures of Bach's Prélude (see the L&J brackets in Example 6). These are the same measures from which he will later fashion his second sequence, as well as many other passages.⁹ For the mock second theme (bars 28-35, Example 7), which

⁸ Sisman 1997, p.45n.

⁹ Throughout the opening Allegro Mozart detaches the rhythmic outline of the Prélude's first measure from its surroundings and lets it stand at the head of a new thematic group; see, for instance, bars 5-6, 9-10, 12-19 (in augmentation), 44-46, and so on.

returns only as a parenthetical aside to replace Mozart's Interlude during the recapitulation (bars 351-58), Mozart chooses the funereal falling thirds of Bach's Sarabande along with their doleful left-hand accompaniments (see the double brackets in Example 7). And for the soloist's stormy, transitional stretch in G minor (on the way from C major to G major, bars 109ff.), Mozart adopts the Bb major passage that begins the Sarabande's second reprise, turning its rhetoric on its head (see the variously shaped brackets in Example 8).¹⁰ Bach's Bb arpeggio marks the only ray of hope in his otherwise grim and gloomy Sarabande; Mozart's transformation, in sharp contrast, embodies the only touch of pathos in his exuberant solo exposition. It is equally remarkable, in the larger scheme of things, how close this transformation is to the sequential borrowings in the dominant area (which we already met), and how varies Mozart's design is, given that the distance between the borrowings is so small.

It appears that only the transitional orchestral passage that leads to the mock second theme (bars 20-26) comes from a Classical source, namely the second theme—such as it is—of the first movement from Haydn's Symphony No. 73 in D, "La Chasse" (Example 9).

The rising first half of the theme that closes the orchestral exposition (bars 52-56^a and 56-68^a, Example 10a) and prepares for the flute's dramatic overlap with the keyboard's entrance (bars 72-74, Example 10b) derives, at least in hindsight, from the conclusion of the G minor English Suite's Gavotte (bars 26^b - end, Example 10d). The connection is disclosed by the conclusion of Mozart's

¹⁰ Note how both Mozart's and Bach's arpeggios are set apart from the figures that follow by the long note value of each arpeggio's last tone, and by the more rapid figural continuation in a considerably lower register, which follows both arpeggios.

development section (bars 259-64, Example 10c), which augments the exposition's rising theme and at the same time reproduces both the outline and figural passagework of the Gavotte's conclusion (the Gavotte is reproduced in its entirety in Example 22). Note especially how the flute's dramatic ascent (Example 10b) now soars, enlarged and extended, over the piano's filigree (Example 10c).¹¹

III. Mozart and isorhythm

With this broad and necessarily selective overview in mind, we can now go back to the dominant region of Mozart's Allegro and see how the appropriations from Bach's G minor Sarabande and A minor Prélude point to the most significant feature of Mozart's borrowings—their rapid succession and alternation. Mozart's quick-silver rotation of his sources is both facilitated and made necessary by the extensive repetition of figures, motives, and themes that constitute the lingua franca of his Concerto. All tonal music—but eighteenth-century music above all—relies very heavily on thematic repetition, either literal or lightly varied. Of necessity, and in a rather obvious way, such repetition quickly acquires an isorhythmic quality, even when it incorporates many thematic transformations and developing variations.

Figural isorhythm and rapid paces. In a composition such as K. 467, the thematic design's isorhythm is apparent at the surface, where it is expressed by motives

¹¹ The rhythm of the Gavotte's opening left-hand leaps seems to presage that of Mozart's opening gambit (Example 10e), but the viability of this speculative observation (which is bolstered by the rhythms and contours of the second Gavotte) remains for the reader to decide.

and figures comprising sixteenths, eighths, and quarter notes. One might refer to foreground isorhythm of this type as *figural isorhythm*. The slurs in Example 11a, from Mozart's second theme, indicate how Mozart's isorhythmic repetitions at the surface and near the surface—I call them *figural isorhythms*, in the plural—add variety and shape to the even, normalized paces of the underlying counterpoint. The paces on which they elaborate govern the metrics of the surface and the normalized counterpoint just under the surface: They are the Allegro's *figural paces* of eighths and quarter notes. Both the figural isorhythms and the figural paces come to light when we reduce the music contrapuntally and restore its network of underlying time spans, as I have done in the lower system of Example 11a. (By pace I mean the underlying, normalized, and largely even movement of the outer voices. At least three levels of pacing emerge upon reduction and normalization: the figural pace we've just encountered, the *basic pace*, which we'll encounter soon, and the *obligato pace*, of which more later.)¹²

Structural isorhythm and sustained paces. The more drastic reductions in Example 11b illustrate how Mozart's isorhythm extends to the higher levels of the metrical grid, where it spans complete melodies and articulates several slower normalized paces. One might refer to this much broader isorhythm as *structural isorhythm*. Here the notes involved are quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and tied whole notes; the tied whole notes, which appear in the reductions of Example 15, often extend further than two measures, in bass pedal fashion, across a complete phrase

¹²For extended descriptions of the pace hierarchy which I use here see Willner 1998 and 1999, and my dissertation. The procedure of normalization, by now a standard analytical tool used by many theorists, has been described in detail by William Rothstein in Rothstein 1981 and 1990.

or subphrase. Like many underlying tones in traditional tonal reductions, a good number of the longer notes are for the most part implicit; the full length of these notes is supplied tacitly, by our inner ear. Their length materializes in at a deeper level of reduction, namely in the later sketches of this essay (Examples). In these sketches when the pace reductions make more extensive use of normalization and in so doing restore the original time span of each underlying tone at the deepest level of durational structure (see, for instance, the notes in parentheses in the reductions of Example 14b).

The slurs in Example 11b illustrate how Mozart's underlying isorhythm gives shape to the even half-note movement of the *basic pace*—to the normalized, deeply underlying counterpoint of the outer voices—and to the whole-note movement of the *obbligato pace*. Obbligato pace is the term I use to describe the harmonic rhythm of the chords sustained under the surface. The slurs in Example 11b also illustrate how Mozart's underlying isorhythm rhythmicizes the Allegro's prolongations at the level of the segment and the subphrase. Because it thrives only at the deeper levels, structural isorhythm has less to do with the mechanics of the borrowings as such than it does with the more abstract reasons for their proliferation. I shall therefore take it up later on, in the closing pages of this study.

It is important to bear in mind that all three paces—figural, basic, and obbligato—may expand and contract; that there may be more than one obbligato pace; and that quarter notes may belong to either the figural level or the structural levels of isorhythm—or, most often, to both, at one and the same time. In much eighteenth-century music the quarter note represents a kind of durational common denominator, a note value that is prominent in both the short motives and longer themes at the surface, and in both the figural and the structural isorhythms below.

As for expansion and contraction, the basic pace may expand to movement in whole notes or double measures, but by the same token it may contract to movement in quarter notes. Indeed, in cadential areas, the basic pace often contracts further and accelerates briefly to movement in eighths. We shall soon encounter examples of all these fluctuations.

For now, let us simply glance at the table in Example 12 and, without going into detail yet, observe visually how the various levels of figuration, pacing, and isorhythm relate to each other. Three potentially confusing features of the isorhythmic levels emerge quite readily. First, the two types of isorhythm, figural and structural, overlap at the quarter-note level, as I just mentioned. Second, isorhythm (unlike pacing) does not expand or contract. Third, sixteenth notes, which lie at or just under the surface, and thirty-second notes, which serve an ornamental purpose, do not rely on a deeper, even pace.¹³ The very short figures and diminutions expressed by sixteenths and thirty-second notes do not sustain sufficient autonomy to project a long-range, tonally based pace.

Hidden repetitions and isorhythmic melodies. The hidden rhythmic repetitions which several scholars have observed across the first and second themes in Mozart's A minor and C minor Piano Sonatas, K. 310 and K. 457, all embody the principles of structural isorhythm; see Example 13.¹⁴ I mention them here because

¹³ For a more detailed table of paces, and pace fluctuations, including fluctuations in triple meter, see Willner 1999, pp. 195-96.

¹⁴ A minor Sonata: Schachter 1976, p. 328, , Example 19, and 1999b, p. 47, Example 1.19; C minor Sonata, Kamien 1983, pp.164-67, Example 6; and Nolan 1993-94, pp. 123-30, Examples 3-6.

Geoffrey Block has referred to such repetitions as *isorhythmic melodies*—in connection, it so happens, with K. 467—and because it is Block's study, as much as Frank Samarotto's work, that the present essay is intended to complement.¹⁵ Example 14 reproduces one of the isorhythmic melodies that Block found in the Allegro of K. 467.

IV. Mozart's borrowings and isorhythms in the second theme and beyond

The second theme (bars 128ff). As we return to the Allegro's second theme and to Bach's Sarabande (and, soon, to Mozart's Interlude), we need to take another look at the summary of Mozart's borrowings in Example 5 and the reductions of the second theme in Example 11. The two examples disclose that it is the very first round of figural isorhythms—Mozart's evenly falling fifths—that refers or alludes, however obliquely, to a similar group of isorhythms in Bach's Sarabande; see the boxed annotation in Example 5a and the slurs throughout Example 11. If this unusual connection and some of the other connections under consideration appear unlikely or doubtful, we must again remember that where relatively obvious borrowings prevail, less apparent borrowings—often hiding as generic, commonplace idioms—proliferate also.

The first sequence (bars 147ff.). Retaining a mental note of Example 3 and the summary in Example 5, let us move on to the relatively obvious borrowing from

¹⁵Block 1991. Most of my examples from K. 467 differ from Block's but they embody the same isorhythmic principles. Block's landmark essay is the trailblazer in the application of isorhythmic principles to the study of tonal rhythm.

Bach's A minor Prélude in Example 15. The Example depicts the first of the two sequences that frame the improvisatory Interlude with which I began this essay, and it offers figural-pace as well as basic-pace reductions of the first four measures of the sequence. Again, it is the figural isorhythms in the score—Mozart's four groups of sixteenths and their sequential grouping in two bars, highlighted by the long slurs in Example 15b—that derive from Bach; recall the boxed annotation in Example 5b. (The addition of the left hand's sixteenths in Example 13a, which are out of phase with the right hand's, is Mozart's; the slurs in Example 15a represent traditional ties between tones, not isorhythms.) The later level of reduction in Example 15b shows a double sequential expansion of the type I discussed in my study of Handel's expansive sequences.¹⁶ As a double expansion, the sequence decelerates the half-note basic pace to a two-bar pace, rather than to a one-bar pace (cf. the tied whole notes in the bass and in the uppermost voice). The reductions in Example 15b illustrate the distinction between isorhythm and pacing I made earlier: Only the pace hierarchy expands.¹⁷ Owing to this expansion, the various isorhythms acquire more durational space to work with, and the newly forged durational space promotes the introduction of still more elaborate figural isorhythms, isorhythms that extend for longer periods of time. In Example 15, the figural isorhythms which benefit from the double sequential expansion shown at (b) are the piano's cascading sixteenths, shown at (a): Each group of sixteenths goes on for two measures, rather than one. (The double pace expansion also promotes broader structural isorhythms, but these need not detain us now.)

¹⁶ Willner 1999, pp. 195-96.

¹⁷For a detailed account of what expands, and what stays put within the pacing hierarchy, see *ibid.*, pp. 209-11, "Expansion and Species Counterpoint."

The Interlude (bars 163^bff.). We return at last to the Interlude with which we began. At the top of Example 16a we find the foreground of Mozart's Interlude. The brackets in Example 1 and the boxed annotations in Example 5 already suggested how Mozart's playfully rising and falling isorhythms are anxious copycats of the mournful isorhythms of Bach's Sarabande. The remaining reductions in Example 16 resemble the corresponding reductions in Examples 9 and 15: The lower system at (a) shows by means of slurs how the right hand's and the left hand's figural isorhythms are out of phase with each other. The reductions in Example 16b illustrate how the Interlude restores the Allegro's half-note basic pace and how it maintains the shorter one-bar length of the Concerto's isorhythms thereby. (These, we recall, were extended to a two-bar length by the double expansions of the first sequence, shown in Example 15b.)

Although the Interlude and the sequence that precede it seem to have little in common durationally, the underlying figural isorhythms of quarter notes (groups of eight in the sequence, Example 15b, groups of four in the Interlude, Example 16b), as well as the underlying structural isorhythms of half notes (groups of four in the sequence, Example 15b, groups of two in the second theme, Example 16b), link the two areas subliminally.

The second sequence (bars 171ff.). Finally, at the top of Example 17a we find Mozart's second sequence. Its entire *isorhythmic constellation* of right-hand melody and left-hand scales compresses the sprawling opening theme of Bach's Prélude and its dramatic left-hand scales into one-bar sequential components (recall Example 4). Like their counterparts in Example 16, these one-bar

isorhythms conform to the length established by the isorhythms throughout the Allegro, and in so doing they help articulate the half-bar basic pace that runs throughout the movement (see the lower system in Example 17b). Once again, the sequence seems to share little by way of duration with the first sequence and the Interlude, but a comparison between Examples 15b, 16b, and 17b will disclose that the figural isorhythms of four quarter notes and the structural isorhythms of two half notes are holdovers from the first sequence and the Interlude. What the three groups don't share is the constellation of figural isorhythms at the 8th-note and 16th-note levels (Examples 15a, 16a, and 17a).

V. The rhythmic and plastic framework of Mozart's borrowings

Changes in figural isorhythm. The question we must now address is, why? Why would Mozart change his figural isorhythms, and along with them his entire design, four times in the dominant area alone, and why would he summon up a different type of Baroque thematization each time? The answer is at once simple and complex: simple, because it involves the norms of sonata form and the principles of Classical thematization; and complex, because there are deeper stylistic reasons for Mozart's reliance on Bach in such a systematically kaleidoscopic manner.

First the simple explanation. In sonata form, the traditionally developmental needs of the dominant area require an ongoing exchange between brief but intense lyricism and extensive developmental *Fortspinnungen*. At the same time, the ensuing dialogic narrative—the exchange of gestures between solo and tutti, and between the lyric and the dramatic—must retain the freedom of

improvisatory play that inheres in the Classical style. Switching from one source of borrowing to another in the manner of *ars combinatoria* and using each borrowing to jump-start a new dramatic twist in a wordless narrative of surprise is a very effective and also a very common way of simulating an artfully improvisatory game.¹⁸

And now for the complex explanation. It has to do with the relationship between pace, counterpoint, and stylistic levels throughout the eighteenth century. The high style of Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti is marked by even pacing—the fundamentally even progress of the basic pace—which is maintained in each movement despite frequent expansions and contractions. Although the basic pace apparently went into hiding during the earlier days of the Classical instrumental era,¹⁹ it reemerged in those works of Mozart and Haydn that asserted an elevated mode of expression, and above all in those pieces that drew directly on Baroque sources. The underlying rhythms of Mozart's first sequence (Example 15b) are emblematic: They illustrate how Mozart, who maintains a strict half-note *alla breve* pace throughout the Allegro of K. 467, expands the basic pace to a two-bar pace, just as Bach would, when the sequential setting so requires (see again the tied whole notes in the bass and the very high top voice in

¹⁸Winemiller 1994 discusses at length the venerable but rather controversial tradition of ascribing Handel's dependency on borrowings to a need for jump-starting melodic and thematic invention and development.

Ratner 1970 remains the foundational introduction to *ars combinatoria*; but see also Eckert 2000, Newman 1961, O'Beirne 1968, and Hedges 1978. In my dissertation (Introduction, p. 13 and pp. 29-31, and chapter 4, p. 254 and especially pp. 335-39), I discuss the close relation between borrowings and simulated improvisation.

¹⁹It probably survived in sacred vocal music that feigned an archaically contrapuntal manner.

Example 15b).

And therein lies the rub—as well as the source of our complexity. Although the basic pace is a wonderful resource of momentum and continuity—not to mention the union of meter and counterpoint—it can become too much of a good thing, especially outside the framework of the quintessentially pithy Baroque *allegro giusto*. To put it another way, the use of the basic pace carries the risk of rhythmic monotony. The Baroque composers of the high style got around this danger by expanding and contracting the basic pace frequently, by maintaining a large font of figural isorhythms and isorhythmic themes for use in each movement, and by recombining and reimagining their figural isorhythms on a perpetual basis. Even so, in Handel’s music (and perhaps in Bach’s and Scarlatti’s as well) such preventative strategies did not lessen appreciably the need for a continual, ad-hoc change in the source of pre-existing materials. Changing the source of borrowings ensured automatic alterations in the isorhythmic design, and in so doing it lessened the risk of rhythmic monotony.²⁰ At the same time, as we have observed (recall the discussion of Examples 15b, 16b, and 17b), it did not prevent at least some of the figural isorhythms and some of the structural isorhythms associated with the previous borrowing(s) from continuing to operate right through the new borrowing. This also ensured that the all-important

²⁰ For extended discussions of rapidly changing composite borrowings in Handel’s music see my dissertation, chapters 1, 4, and 5, especially the discussion of Couperin sources for Handel’s D minor Allemande (chapter, 4, pp. 329-39 and Examples 4.24-4.27), Scarlatti sources for the third movement, Allegro, from the E minor Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 3 (chapter 1, pp. 107-10 and Examples 1.18-1.19; chapter 5, pp. 367-71), and Couperin sources for the fourth movement, Allegro, from the G minor Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 6 (chapter 5, pp. 371-77 and Examples 5.10-1.15).

continuity and *moto perpetuo* characteristic of the high Baroque and of music that appropriated or evoked the high Baroque be maintained. Mozart's solution is very similar, but it has a much more systematic quality to it, probably because both the periodic grid and the thematic grid of sonata form have, by Mozart's time, become highly stylized phenomena.

Isorhythm and isorhythmic plasticity. One might be tempted to say, with more than a hint of organicist nostalgia, that Mozart's and Bach's figural isorhythm, close to the surface of the music, is “merely” a product of their workshop, the result of matchless technical artifice, and that their structural isorhythm—their long-span isorhythmic melodies and hidden rhythmic repetitions—is by contrast a product of their inspired art. But from a practical point of view both types of isorhythm contribute equally to the composition's artistic legacy, and in an equally tangible way. The foundational importance of figural and structural isorhythm lies in the motivic *qua* rhythmic variety, flexibility, and plasticity that its continual variation and alteration brings to the surface. The resources of thematic transformation and developing variation aside, it is the combination of drastic and perpetual change on the one hand and steady subliminal maintenance on the other of Mozart's basic isorhythmic setting that accounts for the effect of malleable improvisatory play, facilitating its regeneration over extended periods of time. Small wonder that some scholars have counted as many as seven discrete thematic areas in Mozart's concerto expositions.²¹

I don't think it would be going too far to surmise that the maintenance of

²¹Grayson 1998, chapter 2, cites some of the more enlightened and restrained of these scholars. There are some who have gone farther.

such *isorhythmic plasticity* throughout the Classical style often hinges on constant, rapid-fire changes in the composition's source material.²² Moving on to a new or different source of borrowings at the right moment allows the composer—in this instance Mozart—to change as much of the basic temporal premise of the foreground as needed, while keeping that of the background at least partly intact, as if by sleight of hand. To put it in Jonathan Kramer's and Frank Samarotto's terms, each new borrowing moves us into a different kind of time;²³ it has us embark on a different *temporal plane*.²⁴ Like the act of writing, which according to Rousseau attempted to capture the magic of *ex tempore* speech, Mozart's isorhythmic plasticity seeks to re-create the wizardry of his keyboard improvisations.²⁵ But it is a very carefully orchestrated bit of magic.

VI. Structural isorhythm and isorhythmic plasticity

My notion of isorhythmic plasticity differs from Frank Samarotto's *temporal plasticity* in that it centers on the mechanics of temporality and motivic work close to the foreground. Samarotto's plasticity, by contrast, describes the confluence of long-range tonal and durational forces as they converge on the site of

²²The proliferation of Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti borrowings (and frequently Rameau and Couperin borrowings as well) throughout Mozart's Haydn's, and Beethoven's music would seem to indicate as much; see Willner 2000 and 2004.

²³Kramer 1988 and Samarotto 1995.

²⁴Samarotto 1999b.

²⁵On Rousseau, speech, and writing, see Derrida 1998, chapters 2 and 4. On the relation of speech and writing on the one hand to improvised and composed music on the other see Willner 2000, and my dissertation, chapter 4.

uninterpreted pitches and exert their temporal pull on those pitches and on the events that the pitches describe.²⁶ Despite these differences, the two kinds of plasticity often intersect in practice; a short illustration from K. 467 will show how. See Example 18.

If we compare the deeper layers of Mozart's first and second themes (Examples 18a and 18b), we'll see that in their first four measures they share the same structural isorhythm: Two groups of four half notes, each highlighting a marked change of harmony and a rising step on the third half note; see the arrows in the two Examples. The first theme's first pair of third and fourth half notes (bar 2) describes a falling diminished fifth, and its second pair (bar 4) describes an embellished falling third that is born of the falling fifth; see the tilted square brackets in the two Examples. Now both of the second theme's falling half notes, in the theme's second and fourth measures, describe falling fifths that evoke the first theme's falling fifth and falling third (see again the brackets in Examples 18a and 18b). The connection is clear despite the rush of the first theme's figures and the steadiness of the second theme's figures. The later figures, then, embody temporally plastic improvisations on the first theme's elfin, almost evasive fifth and its partly hidden third (bars 2 and 4). The two themes' structural isorhythm – the movement in four groups of malleable half notes that repeatedly emphasize the rising step linking the second and third note -- then, presents the tool that allows Mozart to play out his falling figures' temporal plasticity.

²⁶ To put it another way, temporal plasticity results from the meeting of dialogic forces both tonal and durational; it is the long-range outcome of that meeting. Isorhythmic plasticity might be described as the actual conversational exchange between these forces. See also the gestural encounter of inertia and magnetism, as related by Steve Larson, in Larson 2006.

The plasticity of the first and second themes' falling fifth (bars 2 and 129) comes into its own at the second and fourth measures of the Interlude; see the brackets in Example 18c. With help from Bach, Mozart puts the earlier structural isorhythm aside and builds a new isorhythmic figure just around that fifth. Ornamented by appoggiaturas, enclosed by suspenseful pauses, and transformed to look like a sixth and then like a fourth, the fifth proudly celebrates its figural independence even as it maintains its tonal and temporal links with its ancestry.

Looking back at the stormy G minor transition to the second theme (Example 18d), we now realize that Mozart's conciliatory response to the agitated G minor arpeggio which opens the transition—a calmly conversational falling fifth outlining a C minor triad (see the brackets in Example 8d)—is no mere pacifier. It is, in fact, nothing less than a temporally plastic motivic preparation for the falling fifths of the upcoming second theme and the later Interlude.

VII. Epilog: The anxiety of Bach's influence

If we want to come full circle now, we need to go back for a moment to our analytical starting point—that is, to Harold Bloom²⁷—and ask ourselves whether we can really hear some anxiety in Mozart's cheerfully drastic misprision of Bach's mournfully inflected affects. I think we can. Once we become aware of Bach's shadowy presence, we can feel his ghost hovering over K. 467 in somewhat the same way that Beethoven's ghost hovers over Chopin's graveyard in the "Funeral March" Sonata, a relationship so beautifully captured by Wayne C.

²⁷ Recall my reference to a "Bloomian transformation," p. 1.

Petty in an important essay.²⁸ For a taste of what is involved, let us scan the evolution of Mozart's dramatic transformations of the transitional G minor arpeggio figure I've just mentioned (Example 18d) during the Concerto's remaining two movements.

Example 19a reproduces again Mozart's stormy G minor remake of the Bb arpeggio that opens the second reprise of Bach's Sarabande; Example 19b suggests that the arpeggio's enlargement in space and in time takes thematic control over Mozart's Andante in a temporally plastic way; and Example 19c brings to the fore the arpeggio's apotheosis during Mozart's closing Rondo. Since that apotheosis coincides with the arpeggio's liquidation—its jubilant celebration during the Rondo is the last we hear of it—we may consolidate our impressions and draw the following, decidedly speculative conclusion about Mozart's relationship with his Baroque precursor. It appears that the initial outburst in the minor projects both apprehension and assertive defiance; that its twofold reappearance as the Andante's bass motto and as the Andante's principal theme portrays beatific reverence; and that its triumphant transformation during the Rondo asserts autonomy and certitude—a victory of resourceful invention over the precursor's thematic stranglehold.²⁹ This continually unfolding narrative of aural impressions emerges over an extended period of time—the Concerto is about 30 minutes long—but it is quite clearly organized. It begins on a note of defensive belligerence, and it ends on a note of aggressive, bellicose jubilation. Not only does

²⁸Petty 1999b.

²⁹For the portrayal of certitude in music, with further references, see Lockett 1992. For a substantial discussion of the cyclic treatment of themes across nineteenth-century compositions see Schmalfeldt 2004, again with further references.

it narrate an anxious, ever-changing struggle with a precursor; it tells us that Mozart's relationship with Bach and with the Baroque evolves rhetorically across the intersection of thematic and durational lines. Mozart's anxiety of influence, then, accounts for the highly conspicuous but otherwise elusive thematic connections between the three movements of K. 467. Each movement articulates a turn in a story of shifting influence, a story enacted by rhythms and by tones.

In the early stages of the Concerto, the preliminary round of borrowings and transformations appears to respond only to temporal necessity. The Allegro's ancestral connections, as such, remain an ancillary dramatic issue, although one that shows great potential for development. As Mozart realizes this potential by describing a theatrical victory over his sources (and perhaps over his own proprietary self-doubts) during the second and third movements, he ties his motley collection of borrowings together and recasts it as a self-contained—and highly prominent—narrative thread. And as that thread gains ever greater prominence and ever greater independence, it gradually becomes the Concerto's guiding idea. Bach's English G minor Suite and his A minor Prélude, in other words, turn out to be the Concerto's *Supplément* in the best Derridean sense of the word.³⁰

³⁰Derrida 1998.

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