

The Role of Secondary Parameters in Musical Shaping: Examining Formal Boundaries in Mendelssohn's C minor Piano Trio from the Performer's Point of View

Cecilia Oinas

Formal boundaries, at least when they are marked with an unequivocal cadence and followed by new thematic material, are something that most performing musicians intuitively recognize while playing a work. Indeed, if a musical work does not have a particularly exceptional formal layout, the form is not usually problematized among performers *per se*. Rather, practical issues such as choosing the tempo, trying out the balance between players, finding the right characters, agogics, or intonation are more likely at the center of performers' attention during a typical rehearsal.

The situation becomes more complicated, however, when a formal boundary is somehow smoothed between two successive units, so that the motion from one unit to the next unfolds without a noticeable change in dynamics, texture, articulation, register or timbre, for example. These parameters have traditionally been called 'secondary' in the analytical literature in contrast to the 'primary': melody, harmony, rhythm. While most present-day theorists acknowledge the importance of their role in the musical drama, secondary parameters' role in shaping formal events have not been excessively studied.

This paper aspires to open up the discussion by exploring ways in which secondary parameters affect and shape formal boundaries in the opening sonata-form movement of Felix Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in C minor (Op. 66). I will present how my piano trio (myself at the piano) approached the boundaries during rehearsals that took place in the spring of 2013. The analytical discussion includes some general considerations on sonata form, phrase structure and meter, together with dramatic aspects as explained for example by Kofi Agawu and John Rink.¹ Throughout the study the analytical examination is reconsidered by the performers' insights; aspiring to incorporate the performer-based approach into a more theoretical context.

Background

The analytical discussion of primary and secondary musical parameters are mostly emblemized by the assumption that while secondary parameters are non-hierarchic, they are, on the other hand, more easily perceivable. Indeed, Leonard B. Meyer argues that secondary parameters

seem able to shape experience with minimal dependence on learned rules and conventions. (Meyer 1989: 209)

Furthermore,

gradually rising pitches, increasingly loud dynamics, faster rates of motion, and the growth in the number of textural strands heighten excitement and intensity; while descending pitches, softer dynamics, slower rates of motion, and so on, lean towards relaxation, repose, and cessation. (ibid.)

For the present study, I would like to elaborate on a few issues in the above citation: firstly, while perceiving secondary parameters may need no theoretical experience, to control these parameters in performance requires a delicate ear and technical ability to adjust the finest nuances. Secondly, the heightening intensity Meyer describes often leads to various types of climaxes or high points in music. Occasional attempts have been made to incorporate this phenomenon – so familiar to every performing musician – into music analysis in the past few decades: for example, Kofi Agawu describes them as “the most decisive turning point in the piece” (Agawu 1984: 160). Moreover, Agawu remarks that high points are usually situated near the end of a formal unit rather than at the end, especially in works of the Romantic era² (Agawu 2009: 62).

Example 1 presents three hypothetical formal units with high points at various places.³ The first two examples, 1a and 1b are more typically

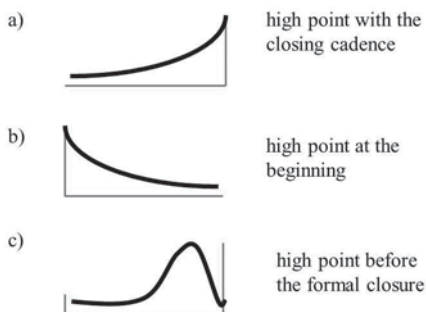
¹ See Agawu 1984 and 2009, and Rink 1999 and 2002.

² John Rink likewise argues that the structure of nineteenth-century music is generally end-weighted, and often includes an “apotheosis-like conclusion” (Rink 1999: 113–114).

³ High points are often graphically depicted by simply drawing a contour, called in the analytical literature as ‘dynamic curve’, ‘dramatic contour’, ‘intensity curve’ to name few.

Example 1.

The position of high point in a formal unit



found in Classical works where the dramatically culminating moments are either at the beginning or at the end, thus articulating the boundaries.⁴ In the third example (1c) however, the dramatic and formal goals are dispersed. When this happens, it may affect the working out of the actual formal ending so that the boundary becomes less observable – often with the help of secondary parameters. Thus, whenever a formal boundary is obscured, it may be valuable to take a closer look at the dramatic unfolding of the whole unit as well.

The subtle boundary play between the first two phrases of the C minor Trio

The first movement of Mendelssohn's C minor Trio begins with two large phrases that both end with a perfect authentic cadence in the home key: the first phrase (mm. 1–22) introduces a forward-going, *quasi* Bach-style primary theme, while the second phrase (mm. 23–42) begins with a beautifully arched lyrical melody first introduced by the violin (Ex. 2 provides the score of these two phras-

es with analytical considerations). For the sake of clarity, I shall call these two phrases P¹ and P² in the following text.

How did our trio initially approach these opening phrases, and what issues caught our attention in the musical score? Here are some remarks.⁵

First, both the violinist and cellist commented that there are lots of repetitions (for example, the sequence between mm. 15–19 where strings and piano alternate between the eight-note stream, and mm. 29–36 which include no more and no less than four deceptive cadences, twice to G minor, then to E flat major and finally to C minor. The problem is, from the performers' point of view, how to maintain the intensity and yet not over-emphasize each repetition.

Second, quite soon we noticed that the dynamic instructions do not always begin (or end) simultaneously on the three instruments. For example, at the end of P¹ the piano has a *diminuendo* mark half a bar earlier than the strings.⁶ Similarly, at the end of P² (mm. 38–42) the violin begins both the *diminuendo* and the *pianissimo* later than the other instruments. While most of the time this is probably explained by the fact that Mendelssohn wants to create flexible polyphonic motion between the melodic lines, there may also be other reasons, as I shall argue later on.

Third, all of us agreed that mm. 38–40 is a culminating moment and should be brought out in a different way than the material before. To use our cellist's words, these measures, with the single Neapolitan chord harmony is the "magic point" where everything stops for a moment before the closing cadence.

Dynamic layer

As one notices, the rehearsal discussion is mostly concentrated on individual observations taken from the score and parts rather than any broader,

⁴ To give some familiar examples, the dramatic contour of 1a is found in Mozart's C major Piano Sonata K 545 (I mvt, mm. 1–8). An example of 1b would be the opening phrase of Haydn's F sharp minor "Farewell" Symphony No. 45 (I mvt, mm. 1–16).

⁵ The remarks are taken from the author's informal rehearsal diary on preparing Mendelssohn's C minor Trio for performance in 2013.

⁶ That the markings do not coincide is, of course, not uncommon in chamber music works. Still, it created some initial communication problems with our trio during the first rehearsals when the string players who, seeing only their own part, noticed that not everyone played in the same dynamic. In this particular example, Mendelssohn originally wrote the *diminuendo* at the same place for all instruments, the second half of m. 20 in the initial handwritten manuscript (Mendelssohn 1845, Ms. 537). In the published versions, however, the dynamics do not correspond anymore but we do not know whether this is an engraver's error or that Mendelssohn actually decided to change the location of the *diminuendo* marks.

Example 2. First movement of the C minor Trio, first two phrases.

Piano Trio Op. 66
I Allegro energico e con fuoco

Felix Mendelssohn

Allegro energico e con fuoco $\text{♩} = 92$

Violino

Violoncello

Piano

hypermetre: 1 2 3 4,

(compound 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4,)

syncopated:

5

1 2 3 4, 1

10

2 3 4, 1 2

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Example 2. Cont.

15

f *sf* *sf*

15

f *sf* *f* *sf*

20

dim. *p* *p* *p*

23

$p^2 \longrightarrow$

20

dim. *p* *p* *p*

$V^7 - I$
(PAC)

24

p

24

Example 2. Cont.

Musical score for measures 27-29. The system consists of three staves: two vocal staves (treble and bass clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clef). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The vocal lines feature long, flowing melodic lines with slurs. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. Dynamics include *cresc.* (crescendo) in the vocal lines and piano accompaniment.

Musical score for measures 30-32. The system consists of three staves: two vocal staves (treble and bass clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clef). The key signature is two flats. The vocal lines feature melodic lines with slurs and dynamic markings *sf* (sforzando), *f* (forte), and *dim.* (diminuendo). The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. Dynamics include *sf*, *f*, and *dim.*.

Musical score for measures 33-35. The system consists of three staves: two vocal staves (treble and bass clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clef). The key signature is two flats. The vocal lines feature melodic lines with slurs and dynamic markings *sf* and *dim.*. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. Dynamics include *sf* and *dim.*.

V $\begin{matrix} 8 & \text{---} & 7 \\ 6 & \text{---} & 5 \\ 5b & \text{---} & 4 & \text{---} & 3 \end{matrix}$

Example 2. Cont.

36

39

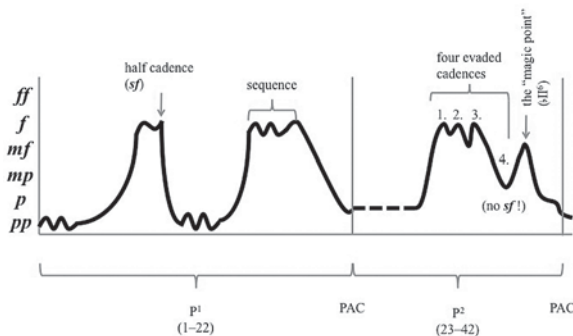
Tr - zone →

VI

I (PAC)

Example 3. First movement of the C minor Trio.

The dynamic layer of P-zone



overarching issues such as formal outline. Yet, I believe that the above insights may be incorporated into formal analysis as well. Example 3 presents the dynamic layer of P¹ and P². It shows that both phrases begin and end with a relatively low dynamic, which enables an elegant, smooth motion from one phrase to the next. On the other hand, there are four dynamic peaks located in between the phrase boundaries, which serve as dramatic highpoints from a local perspective.

The first peak is the most straightforward, especially when viewed as a local event.⁷ As such, it reminds us of the previously presented example 1a with a dramatically culminating moment at the end of the antecedent. The second peak at first seems to build the crescendo the same way as the previous one. This time, however, the *forte*-area lasts five measures instead of two and includes a sequence with *sforzatos* in every other measure. The third dynamic peak is the most turbulent with its numerous *sforzatos*, *forte* accents, *diminuendos* and *crescendos*. As such, they emphasize the harmonic uncertainty of this passage since at this point P² has the potential of becoming a transitional area that leads to the secondary key by destabilizing the initial tonic key and adding fragmentation. Instead, Mendelssohn presents two self-standing phrases in the home key, creating a *grandioso* atmosphere for the movement right from the beginning.

Finally, just before the final closure of the primary-theme zone, there is brief, yet a very balanced *crescendo-diminuendo* peak. This is the “magic point,” discussed earlier by our cellist. Notice, however, that the last peak does not attain a *forte* dynamic since there is only a brief *crescendo* followed by a *diminuendo*.

Meter

The above example explains the broad dynamic layout of the first two phrases and their relation to the formal issues, which gives a fairly good overview on the dramatic events of the primary-key area.⁸ Another noteworthy issue raised by the

performers was the question of dynamic markings that differed among the instruments, especially at the phrase boundaries. This detail becomes even more influential when we take a closer look at the metrical structure of the two opening phrases, especially at their boundaries (see again Ex. 2).

While the antecedent of P¹ (mm. 1–8) has a fairly unproblematic hypermeter in four, the second half is already more complicated and includes a metrical reinterpretation (3=1) in measure 15 where the sequence begins. More importantly, when the concluding tonic of the first phrase is reached in measure 22, it may, at first, be interpreted as a metrically weak bar where the piano’s new sixteenth-note figuration is a lead-in to the following, metrically strong measure. However, if we look at measures 20–22, the piano and string parts emphasize the music in a slightly different manner. For example, at the beginning of measure 20, the piano has a diminuendo mark together with a change of melodic direction and a constant stream of eight notes, while the strings begin the diminuendo half a bar later and continue the melody a measure earlier (m. 19). This may seem a small detail, yet I believe it affects the internal shaping in such a way that the piano part already shifts its meter from odd to even measures at the beginning of measure 20 – thus creating a phrase overlap – while the strings do not.

Interestingly, metrical issues were also among the genuinely analytically oriented discussions our trio had over the primary-theme zone. For example, to maintain the musical flow we decided not to emphasize the piano’s eight-note rest in measure 22, which would create a too obvious gap between the two phrases. Instead, we agreed that the pianist should rush slightly towards the syncopated note (the second beat of measure 22), thus emphasizing a metrical downbeat in measure 22 while the violin and the cello maintain the odd-accented metrical structure and lean on to measure 23.⁹

In his article “Strange dimensions: regularity and irregularity in deep levels of rhythmic reduc-

⁷ Thus the lower-level subphrases of P¹ (the antecedent in mm. 1–8 and the considerably elaborated consequent in mm. 9–22) are not smoothed, while the boundary between P¹ and P² is.

⁸ As Rink notes, “the [dynamic] graph provides an excellent overview of the dynamic terrain as well as the opportunity to sense it as it passes by” (Rink 2002: 48).

⁹ Eventually, the even-accented meter suggested by the piano at the beginning “wins” only at the final phase (mm. 36–41) of P² and continues the even-accented structure almost throughout the entire transitional zone.

tion" Frank Samarotto presents a term, "shadow" meter, where one hears another meter that is not together with the main meter (Samarotto 1999: 235). The shadow meter can prevail until the phrase (or some other) unit dissolves, usually in the final measures (ibid.). Seen in this light, the boundary of P¹ and P² might be such an instance.¹⁰ Therefore, I propose that the piano and strings carry a metrically different structure at the boundary between mm. 20–23, which is one of the many beautiful examples how Mendelssohn elegantly smoothes phrase boundaries in his music.

Even in cases with no extreme boundary blurring, such as the above example, a more detailed investigation may endorse how secondary parameters succeed – this time especially the dynamics and the slightly ambiguous meter – in causing delicate tension against the otherwise articulated boundary. However, the c minor Trio also has a more extreme case where the secondary parameters' essential role comes into formal play.

An unusual dramatic contour? The new contrasting theme as a global high point of the exposition

In measure 42, a new phrase begins with the primary theme material.¹¹ Soon it becomes clear that the transitional phrase towards the secondary key area (mediant) is on its way with transitional signs such as the growing increase in tension, fragmentation in harmony and rhythm and, finally, a dominant pedal (dominant lock) from measure 56 onwards. Indeed, in measures 61–62 the fragmentation leads to three so-called "hammer-blows," which is a particularly classical gesture in a work written in the middle of the nineteenth century.¹²

Surprisingly, the increasingly energetic motion over the dominant pedal, together with *forte* dynamics and sixteenth note accompaniment does not, however, end nor culminate in a powerful half cadence (of III) but *continues beyond it* dynamically, rhythmically and even texturally. More

importantly, in the midst of the turmoil, a new victorious theme introduces itself in E flat major, although it begins *in medias res* with the intermediate supertonic harmony.

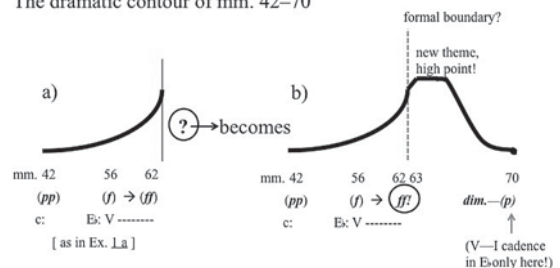
From a dramatic point of view, measure 63 is indeed "the turning point" of the exposition. It begins as a prolonged high point area – lasting eight measures – where Mendelssohn uses the *fortissimo* dynamic together with the instruction *marcato e con forza* for the first time. But what is the status of this theme – is it the contrasting secondary theme, which opens a new formal unit, or does it still belong to the transitional area? Rather than further problematizing the passage from the analytical point of view, I shall first present how our trio approached and shaped measures 42–70 during the rehearsals and then proceed to draw some analytical conclusions.

Firstly, the balance during the dominant pedal in mm. 56–60 was considered problematic: the cellist complained that the piano sounded "too loud," especially since the cello has important material to play. Our solution was that I used almost no pedal at all (or very light), and tried to maintain the dynamic in *f* (not yet *ff* which in any case only begins in m. 62).

Secondly, since the new theme is dramatically such a heavy event, we felt an urge to play the beginning measures a little slower compared to the regular tempo (the violin took a little more time towards the high a flat, like the way a singer pre-

Example 4. First movement of the C minor Trio.

The dramatic contour of mm. 42–70



¹⁰ Moreover, the even-accented meter suggested by the piano at the beginning "wins" only at the final phase (mm. 36–41) of P² and continues the even-accented structure almost the entire transitional zone.

¹¹ The score is easily found from the internet, such as the IMSLP score library (imslp.org).

¹² See for example James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy's discussion on the dominant-chord 'hammer-blows', which typically emphasize the arrival of the "medial caesura" that ends the transitional area in a Classical sonata-form movement (Hepokoski, Darcy 2006: 34).

Example 5. First movement of the C minor Trio, mm. 56–64.

pares for a high note). This is naturally something that should not be exaggerated; yet if one plays this moment in a strict metronome tempo, our trio agreed that Mendelssohn's gradual preparation would perhaps not reach its fullest height. (However, at the beginning of m. 70 the string players were insistent that we must restore the initial tempo; they noted that the following piano solo tended to slow down too much.)

As is obvious from the above rehearsal marks, these measures were far from being considered easy and unproblematic, although the question of "secondary theme or not" was not directly disputed. The remarks point out, however, that the dynamic and dramatic issues needed more active shaping than the opening phrases.

Example 1a presented at the beginning of this paper illustrates fairly well the dramatic contour of mm. 42–62. However, since there is more to come and that the new theme must be played with an even more increased dynamic, the cellist's caution on not playing too loud at the beginning of the dominant pedal is justifiable. Thus the dramatic contour of mm. 42–70 is instead something like Ex. 4.

Indeed, these measures are a wonderful example in how formal ambiguity is created with secondary parameters, which refuses to change

when the new theme enters.¹³ In addition, despite the broad motion from the beginning of the transitional zone until the imperfect authentic cadence in E flat major in measure 70, Mendelssohn delicately articulates measure 63, now from a registral point of view (Ex. 5).

At the beginning of the dominant pedal, the cello plays the eight-note motive in the lowest register, whereas the piano's left hand is positioned one octave higher. Now, during the hammer-blows in mm. 61–62 the piano's left hand and the cello are in the same register for a brief moment. Finally, when the new theme enters the cello plays in an unusually high register, whereas the piano plays low bass notes in octaves. Thus the piano's register descends from a fairly high register back to "normal," whereas the cello's register moves from normal cello register to unusually high.¹⁴

As a result, if we accept that measure 63 is the beginning of a new unit, introducing the secondary theme (no matter that it will be re-evaluated later on because of the turn to G minor and the E flat major's inability to produce a successful cadential closure¹⁵ we have the opposite case of smoothing the boundary: one that moves from one unit to the next *during the dramatic high point*, calming down later on.¹⁶

¹³ From a harmonic perspective, Mendelssohn also smoothes this boundary by evading the dominant chord (V of III) to a dominant four-two chord in m. 62.

¹⁴ The violin is, not surprisingly, registrally the most flexible instrument by first staying in the piano's right hand register, then moving even higher during mm. 59–61, suddenly dropping two octaves lower in the middle of m. 61 until returning to high register.

¹⁵ In Hepokoski and Darcy's *Sonata Theory*, this is called as "an essential expositional closure," i.e. the EEC (see for example Hepokoski, Darcy 2006: 24–25).

¹⁶ Indeed, the subsequent events are equally problematic, since the E flat major key does not succeed in creating a perfect authentic cadence and closing the exposition in major, since during mm. 91–94 the expected dominant chord in E flat major does not occur and the music turns to G minor instead. However, it only reintroduces the primary theme in varied form, which means that m. 63 begins the only contrasting non-tonic theme for the whole movement, which is why I do not see any other option than to call it the "secondary theme."

Concluding remarks

This paper aspires to show that capturing the ways performers discuss a piece can bring fresh and new ideas towards the analysis and performance studies that have, until recently, been dominated by the analysis-to-performance discussion.¹⁷ Moreover, the motion from one formal unit to the next – even in unambiguous cases – is often an event that gets attention among performers when they are rehearsing a work together. To quote Susan Tomes, pianist of the celebrated Florestan Trio:

I'm reminded of yesterday [...] what it was that identified a composer as himself when you hear the music. [...] [V]ery often it's the manner of transition that identifies a composer. Not even one idea, or another, but the way

of arriving at an idea, or leaving one. Transitions have always fascinated me and I believe they fascinate all of us in Domus. Certainly we find ourselves discussing them in a rehearsal a great deal. (Tomes 2004: 35)

Indeed, the way in how Mendelssohn smoothly leads the previous unit to the following one seems to be an important hallmark of his compositional style. To conclude, written in the middle of the 19th century, it is no wonder that Mendelssohn's C minor trio has come far from the classical sonata form practice with its many daring, unexpected deviations. Yet the 'romantization' of the work does not only come from formal anomalies. Rather, it is in the textural, metrical, dynamic and dramatic layers that we find Mendelssohn's most original solutions in this work.

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- Informal rehearsal discussion** documented in the author's rehearsal diary during 9.01.2013–4.05.2013 (co-members: Elisa Rusi-Matero, violin, and Csilla Szilvay, cello).

¹⁷ The reason for this partly comes from the tradition of analytical writing, where the potential influence of performance has usually remained tacit. For further discussion on performance having an impact on analysis, see for example Joel Lester (Lester 1995).

Sekundaarsete parameetrite roll muusika kujundamisel: Mendelssohni klaveritrio c-moll vormiliste liigenduskohtade esitajaperspektiivist teostatud vaatlus

Cecilia Oinas
(tõlkinud Kerri Kotta)

Vormilised liigenduskohad, eriti kui need on markeeritud ühemõtteliste kadentsidega, millele järgneb uus temaatiline materjal, on midagi, mida enamik interpreete tajub teost esitades intuiitiivselt. Kui teose ülesehitus pole just väga erandlik, pole vorm kui selline interpreedile üldjuhul eraldi väljatoomist nõudev probleem. Teose ettevalmistamisega kaasnevad praktilised küsimused, nagu näiteks tempovalik, kõlaline tasakaal, õige karakteri leidmine, agoogika või intonatsioon, hõlmavad interpreedi tähelepanust ilmselt hoopis suurema osa.

Situatsioon muutub keerukamaks, kui vormiline liigenduskoht kahe teineteisele järgneva üksuse vahel ähmastub nii, et liikumine ühelt üksuselt järgmisele toimub näiteks ilma märgatavate muutusteta dünaamikas, faktuuris, artikulatsioonis, materjali registrilises paigutuses või tämbris. Kõnealuseid parameetreid on analüütilises kirjanduses nimetatud traditsiooniliselt ka sekundaarseks neid esmastele ehk primaarsetele – meloodiale, harmooniale ja rütmile – vastandades. Kuigi enamik tänapäeva teoreetikuid tunnustab sekundaarsete parameetrite olulisust muusikalise draama ülesehituses, pole nende vormiloovat rolli eriti analüüsitud.

Käesolevas artiklis püütakse selleteemalist mõttevahetust avada, uurides erinevaid võimalusi, kuidas sekundaarsed parameetrid mõjutavad ja kujundavad Felix Mendelssohni klaveritrio c-moll *op.* 66 sona-divormis I osa vormilisi liigenduskohti. Ma näitan, kuidas ansambel, milles ma esitasin klaveripartiid, jõudis vormiliste liigenduskohtade teadvustamiseni proovide käigus, mis toimusid 2013. aasta kevadel. Töö analüütilises osas puudutatakse sona-divormi, muusikalise lauserütmi ja meetrumi ning dramaatiliste aspektidega seonduvat temaatikat viisil, nagu seda on käsitlenud näiteks Kofi Agawu (1984, 2009) ja John Rink (1999, 2002). Siinses uurimuses testitakse kõiki analüüsi tulemusi omakorda lähtuvalt interpreedi intuitsioonist, et asetada interpreedikeskne lähenemine piiritletud teoreetilisse taustsüsteemi.

Esimeses näites uuritakse teose kahte esimest muusikalist fraasi ning tuuakse välja võtted – mis on antud juhul seotud eelkõige dünaamika ja kergelt ambivalentse meetrumiga –, mille kaudu muidu võrdlemisi traditsiooniline vormiline liigenduskoht pingestatakse. Teises näites tutvustab töö autor äärmuslikumat juhtu, kus sekundaarsed parameetrid võtavad üle vormilise struktuuri artikuleerimise. See juhtub sidepartii üleminekul kõrvalpartiiks, kus Mendelssohn loob vormilise ambivalentsuse just sekundaarseid parameetreid kasutades – viimastes ei kaasne uue teema sissetulekuga oodatud muutust. Uue teema saabumine on ühtlasi kogu ekspositsiooni üks kõige olulisemaid kulminatsioonihetki.

Käesolevas uurimuses püütakse näidata, et viis, kuidas interpreedid teost enda jaoks tõlgendavad, võib anda värskeid ideid nii muusika analüüsile kui ka esitusuuringutele, milles on kuni viimase ajani domineerinud analüüsijalt esitajale suunatud lähenemine. Ühtlasi väidetakse, et see, kuidas Mendelssohn sulatab kokku kaks vormiüksust, näib olevat tema heliloojastiili üks iseärasusi. Et Mendelssohn kirjutas trio c-moll aastal 1845, siis pole ilmselt midagi imestamisväärset selles, et see sisaldab palju ootamatuid lahknevusi klassikalise sona-divormiga võrreldes. Siiski ei usu selle artikli autor, et teose vormilistes „anomaaliates“ oleks süüdi vaid ajastu „romantiseeriv“ mõju. Pigem seisneb mõju teose faktuurilistes, meetrilistes, dünaamilistes ja dramaturgilistes kihistustes, milles Mendelssohni kompositsioonilised ideed avalduvad kõige originaalsemalt.