The 'Problem' of Schubert's String Quintet

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Contextual Processes in the Music of Franz Schubert

Eschewing the polemic surrounding Franz Schubert's private life, as well as the habit of judging his art by Beethovenian criteria, many musicians now have chosen to focus on unique aspects of the composer's *œuvre* in order to illuminate its distinctive aesthetic values. In particular, some have sought to isolate and explain contextual processes responsible for compelling perceptions of drama and unity in Schubert's later instrumental works. The objects of their inquiries consist of progressive sequences of internally defined musical elements, relations and events that confer effects of internal momentum and comprehensive coherence on Schubert's music. These contextual processes complement tonal, formal and thematic procedures in Schubert's compositions and reveal an ingenious artist engaged in a restless search for new ways of organizing music.

Edward T. Cone described one such contextual process in his classic essay 'Schubert's Promissory Note'.[1] Discussing the *Moment musical* in A♭ major (Op. 94, No. 6; D780; 1824), Cone demonstrated how an emphatic chromatic event elicited expectations whose fulfilment was systematically delayed. The theorist's metaphor of deferred recompense offered an intuitive grasp of an elusive yet essential aspect of the composition, one not shared by any other piece, and not foreseen by traditional or Schenkerian tonal theories.

More recently, Richard Kurth drew upon logical and verbal metaphors to account for a process of pervasive metric ambiguity in Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony in B minor (Op. post.; D. 759; 1822).[2] Delineating the conflict between simple triple and compound duple patterning within the *Allegro moderato*, Kurth defined instances of 'metric antinomy', where metric relations seem to be contradictory, and 'metric colloquy', where they appear complementary. In

[1] Edward T. Cone, 'Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 5/3 (1982), 233–41. Cone revealed how a striking E♮ in bar 12, a raised fifth scale degree belonging to a V/vi, was deflected from its immediate goal, thus becoming a 'promissory note … a troubling element of which one expects to hear more' (236). On several occasions, the 'promissory note' returned, sometime enharmonically respelled, and sometimes in other octaves, yet it was prevented from satisfying earlier implications. Only in bar 47, with the surprising arrival of its alluded-to goal, an F prominently articulated in the expected register, is Schubert's 'promissory note' redeemed.

[2] Richard Kurth, 'On the Subject of Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony: *Was bedeutet die Bewegung?*', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 23/1 (1999), 3–32.

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what Kurth dubbed an 'agonistic discourse', simple triple metre ultimately fails to attain convincing stability and resolve its antinomic relation with its rival by the end of the movement.[3] Like the 'promissory note' of Schubert's *Moment musical*, the metric 'discourse' of the first movement of Schubert's 'Unfinished' symphony is characteristic of and unique to its setting, a feature determined by its context.

While these instances impress, perhaps more remarkable are the extensive contextual processes evident in Schubert's late chamber music. For instance, I have shown that a musical dialectic spans the four movements of the String Quartet in A minor (Op. 29; D. 804; 1826).[4] Within the Quartet, opposing melodic ideas introduced in the opening bars seem to converse and contend with one another, sustaining their conflict throughout the work until a climactic synthesis near the end brings resolution.[5]

In contrast, a musical narrative emerges gradually and covertly in Schubert's Piano Trio in E♭ major (Op. 100; D. 929, 1828), as I have shown.[6] There, in the finale, a theme from the second movement interacts with a melodic gesture from the first movement, producing a surprising, triumphant and culminative transformation.[7]

Comprehensive contextual processes distinguish the Quartet and Trio, producing broad impressions of teleology and organicism that span all four

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3 Kurth, 'On the Subject of Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony, 24.

4 James William Sobaskie, 'Tonal Implication and the Gestural Dialectic in Schubert's A Minor Quartet', in *Schubert the Progressive: History, Performance Practice, Analysis*, ed. Brian Newbould (Aldershot, 2003), 53–80.

5 The first of these gestures is introduced at the beginning of the Quartet in A minor and is represented by the opening descending arpeggiation of the tonic triad (E–C–A). It is expressed unembellished by the first violin in the upper register, its characteristic 'voice'. The other is represented by the subsequent rising arpeggiation of the dominant (E–G♯–B), expressed more elaborately by the cello in the lower register, its characteristic 'voice'. For more on these two gestures, see Sobaskie, 'Tonal Implication and the Gestural Dialectic in Schubert's A Minor Quartet', 66–70. Throughout the Quartet, these distinctive gestures seem to engage in a kind of dialogue, each maintaining its distinctive identity. At the midway point of the finale, a broad, descending, elaborated arpeggiation of the subdominant (A–F♯–D), heard in the lower register of bars 167–223, emerges as a compromise between the two long-opposed gestures. Confirmed by subsequent repetition in bars 249–70, and later by a resounding climax, this reconciliation of the two gestures concludes the Quartet's dialectic. See Sobaskie, 'Tonal Implication and the Gestural Dialectic in Schubert's A Minor Quartet', 74–5.

6 James William Sobaskie, 'A Balance Struck: Gesture, Form, and Drama in Schubert's E♭ Major Piano Trio', in *Le Style instrumental de Schubert: sources, analyse, contexte, évolution*, ed. Xavier Hascher (Paris, 2005), 115–46.

7 The narrative of the Trio in E♭ major, in which themes assume distinctive dramatic characters, clearly emerges in its finale. There, the B theme of the movement reveals the quality of modal variability – that is, it appears in the minor as well as the major. When this theme is juxtaposed with the reprise of the elegiac theme from the second movement (bars 477–513), which heretofore always appeared in the minor, the elegiac theme quietly assimilates the same trait of modal variability. Later, when the elegiac theme reappears in the tonic major (bars 819–27) and concludes with a triumphant and transcendent rising gesture that recalls the opening theme of the first movement (bars 827–31), the Trio's narrative is complete. For more on this thematic interaction, see Sobaskie, 'A Balance Struck: Gesture, Form, and Drama in Schubert's E♭ Major Piano Trio'.

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movements of each work. Neither the Quartet nor Trio is patently cyclic, at least not like Schubert's own 'Wanderer' Fantasy (Op. 15; D. 760; 1822), where transformations of the main theme open every movement.[8] Similarly, neither is truly programmatic, though both feature borrowed melodies and thus contain external allusions.[9] My use of the metaphors 'dialectic' and 'narrative' do not imply any extra-musical utterances or story, but merely serve to elucidate the musical relations responsible for perceptions of flow and continuity in these works. Imperfect as they may be, these metaphors enable the identification and comprehension of dramatic musical processes that are readily perceived, yet challenging to explain.

An extraordinary contextual process unfolds within Franz Schubert's String Quintet in C Major (Op. post. 163; D. 956; 1828). Initiated within the very first phrase by a dissonant harmony that is not conventionally resolved, the Quintet's contextual process involves the continuous pursuit of a satisfactory state of stability, a quest that covers the four movements of the composition. Within this process, the opening musical gesture and the dissonant sonority that serves as its crux return in many transformations, and the motivic elements of which each is comprised are subjected to playful and progressive development. Associative harmony, precursive prolongation, chromatic complementation, and the 'Golden Mean' proportion all contribute to its outcome, as do Schubert's distinctive approaches to tonality and voice leading. With these means, the Quintet's internally defined scheme produces engaging impressions of drama and unity in a purely musical manner, penetrating to all levels of its structure and all of its parts.[10]

Indeed, the striking sophistication and intensive integration of this comprehensive plan urges us to revise and refine our image of the composer. Given the improbability of new documentary discoveries pertaining to Schubert, the evidence of this structural scheme offers valuable insight on the composer as well

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8 For a broad study that pursues the 'wanderer' premise within Schubert's keyboard music, see Charles Fisk, *Returning Cycles: Contexts for the Interpretation of Schubert's Impromptus and Late Piano Sonatas* (Berkeley, 2001).

9 The second movement of Schubert's String Quartet in A minor (Op. 29; D. 804; 1825) features a lyrical theme that appears in his incidental music for *Rosamunde* (no op.; D. 797; 1823) and in his Impromptu in B♭ major (Op. 142; D. 935; 1827), while the third movement quotes the beginning of his Lied, 'Strophe aus "Die Götter Griechenlands"' (D. 677; 1819). The second and fourth movements of Schubert's Trio in E♭ Major (Op. 100; D. 929; 1828) feature the elegiac melody of the Swedish folksong 'Se solen sjunker' ('See, the sun is setting'). For a study of this borrowing, see Manfred Willfort, 'Das Urbild des Andante aus Schuberts Klaviertrio Es-Dur, D 929', *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift*, 33, 277–83.

10 The analysis presented in this essay is not the only one to suggest that the four movements of the Quintet are mutually dependent and structurally bound. Nicholas Rast has proposed that the source of the Quintet's comprehensive coherence is a grand fundamental line, an octave-span that unfolds over the course of its four movements. See Nicholas Rast, 'Schubert's C Major String Quintet D 956', *Schubert durch die Brille*, 21 (1998), 111–25. While tonal hyperstructures that extend over multiple movements are not impossible, Rast's analysis – which indicates that the primary tone of the grand line, C6, is established in the first movement and sustained throughout the second movement as a dissonance, before a preliminary descent to G5 in the first section of the *Scherzo* and a conclusive descent in the finale – is questionable. See Rast, 'Schubert's C Major String Quintet D 956', 121.

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as his music. Simply put, the Quintet's unique musical design does not square with the still-common view of Schubert as a spontaneous and somnambulistic creator who wrote rapidly and rarely revised, a melodist ill-at-ease with motivic development and unable to manage large forms.

Of course, a thorough grasp of the Quintet's contextual process demands a thorough analysis. However, the complexity of its contextual process is such that the metaphors of dialectic and narrative do not suffice as hermeneutic tools. Fortunately, an alternative exists.

Schoenberg's Concept of Musical 'Problem'

Arnold Schoenberg's concept of musical 'problem' may seem unfamiliar, perhaps because sustained discussions went unpublished and passing references were widely scattered in his writings. The most explicit exegesis appears in his essay 'Beauty and Logic in Music':

> Musical ideas are such combinations of tones, rhythms, and harmonies that require a treatment like the main theses of a philosophical subject. It [the musical idea] raises a question, puts up a problem, which in the course of the piece has to be answered, resolved, carried through. It has to be carried through many contradictory situations, it has to be developed by drawing consequences from what it postulates, it has to be checked in many cases and all this might lead to a conclusion, a *pronunciamento*.[11]

As this suggests, Schoenberg considered the ultimate source of a composition to be a multifaceted musical idea consisting primarily of pitch and durational relationships that he formally termed the *Grundgestalt*, or basic shape. Within the composition, the basic shape initially manifests itself within the opening theme of the work, a statement that may be said to be the presentational form of the idea. A divinely given and guided inspiration, in Schoenberg's view, the basic shape embodies a musical problem, an imbalance or unrest that demands a unique and appropriate response. Intimately bound and reciprocally related, the basic shape and its inherent problem depend on and define one another.

In a discourse on counterpoint, Schoenberg offered a more expansive explanation of his concept of basic shape, which yields a fuller understanding of his concept of musical problem:

> Whatever happens in a piece of music is nothing but the endless reshaping of a basic shape. Or, in other words, there is nothing in a piece of music but what comes from the theme, springs from it and can be traced back to it; to put it still

[11] Arnold Schoenberg, 'Beauty and Logic in Music' (Wien [T 67.02]). Schoenberg's unpublished essay, handwritten and in English, appears on several sheets of music paper, together with some musical sketches, and is preserved in the Arnold Schoenberg Centre in Vienna. I thank Eike Feß, archivist at the Arnold Schoenberg Centre, for sending me a digital facsimile of the document. A partial transcription of this document appears in Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea, and the Logic, Art, and Technique of its Presentation*, ed. Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York, 1995), 395–6.

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> more severely, nothing but the theme itself. Or, all of the shapes appearing in a piece of music are *foreseen* in the theme. (I say that a piece of music is a picture-book consisting of a series of shapes, which for all their variety still (a) always cohere with one another, (b) are presented as variations (*in keeping with the idea*) of a basic shape, the various characters and forms arising from the fact that variation is carried out in a number of different ways; the method of presentation used can either 'unfold' or 'develop'.)[12]

To clarify, Schoenberg added:

1. In a contrapuntal piece the idea is compressed in the form of a theme whose constituent elements, sounding together, form a kind of 'point of departure.'
2. This 'point of departure,' this theme, contains all the possibilities for future redeployment of the elementary material.
3. In the course of the piece, the new shapes born of redeployment (varied forms of the new theme, new ways for its elements to sound) are unfolded, rather as a film is unrolled. And the way the pictures follow each other (like the 'cutting' in a film) produces the 'form.'[13]

Thus, each restatement of the basic shape represents a reappraisal of the problem it embodies, a new attempt at resolution. The 'reshaping' of the basic shape that takes place within a composition simultaneously recasts the components of the problem, and both evolve as the piece unfolds. In this sense, such reformulations represent musical 'hypotheses'.

The surrounding musical fabric, in turn, arises through creative elaboration and exploration of the components of the basic shape. Indeed, Schoenberg envisioned the basic shape's problem as a creative *stimulus*:

> The furtherance of the musical idea … may ensue only if the unrest – problem – present in the *grundgestalt* or in the motive (and formulated by the theme or not, if none has been stated) is shown in all its consequences … Just how the *grundgestalt* is altered under the influence of the forces struggling within it, how this motion to which the unrest leads, how the forces attain a state of rest – this is the realization of the idea, this is its presentation.[14]

According to Schoenberg, the 'unrest' of a musical problem stems from the implications of the theme and the expectations it elicits, as do accompanying perceptions of 'motion' and 'conflict'. Systematic exploration of the problem's implications through creative development fulfils these expectations. Throughout the piece, the basic shape transforms, eventually reaching a contextually satisfying configuration that represents a resolution of its problem and an end to its quest. Simultaneously, its components become more familiar through ongoing parallel development. These processes are mutually nourishing and vitally progressive.

12 Arnold Schoenberg, 'Linear Counterpoint', in *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley, 1975), 290.

13 Ibid., 290.

14 Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea, and the Logic, Art, and Technique of its Presentation*, 226–7.

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Schoenberg also held that a musical problem undermines the preeminence of tonic:

> … the tonic, once placed in question, must wander through all regions and prevail over every single one after having allowed each to display its full power. And only after conquering and neutralizing all opponents – at the end, in other words – can the power of the tonic prove itself and a state of rest again prevail.[15]

Thus, the subordinate tonal regions that emerge in the course of the composition do so because of the problem. Even chromatic harmonies and pitch events that challenge the tonic may arise from the problem. Musical form is the arena in which this process plays out, as Schoenberg suggests: 'Every succession of tones produces unrest, conflict, problems. … Every musical form can be considered as an attempt to treat this unrest either by halting or by limiting it, or by solving the problem.'[16] As this quotation indicates, Schoenberg recognized that in music, as in life, some problems might not have perfect or completely conclusive solutions.

Regrettably, Schoenberg left no formal analytical applications of his concept of musical problem.[17] However, in recent years, Patricia Carpenter, Severine Neff and Murray Dineen have examined musical problems in various works from the tonal repertoire.[18] Proceeding from the perspective of Schoenberg's theories, including his concepts of monotonality and regions, they have demonstrated how the notion of musical problem may explicate dramatic and dynamic effects that have proven elusive.

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15 Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea, and the Logic, Art, and Technique of its Presentation*, 104–7. Schoenberg's statement, 'the tonic … must wander through all regions and prevail over every single one after having allowed each to display its full power', should not be taken literally. That is, he does not assert that tonal progression is random or aimless harmonic movement. Similarly, he does not require that each tonal composition tonicize and then undermine every possible key. Rather, Schoenberg simply suggests that all degrees, to the extent they are emphasized within a given piece, ultimately defer to the primacy of the tonic.

16 Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (New York, 1967), 102.

17 While Schoenberg may not have used his concept of musical problem as an analytical tool *per se*, he did describe musical problems in some detail on a number of occasions. Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff offer an insightful gloss on Schoenberg's discussion of Brahms's Piano Quartet, Op. 60, from his unpublished essay, 'The Constructive Function of Harmony', in Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea, and the Logic, Art, and Technique of its Presentation*, 63–86. I thank Severine Neff for directing me to this discussion, and for her close reading of an earlier version of this essay.

18 For instance, see Patricia Carpenter's discussion of the first movement of Beethoven's *Appassionata* piano sonata, Op. 57, in her essay 'Tonality: A Conflict of Forces', in *Music Theory in Concept and Practice*, ed. James Baker, David Beach and Jonathan Bernard (Rochester, 1997), 97–129. Severine Neff analyses Schubert's Lied 'Der Wegweiser' in her essay 'Schönberg and Goethe: Organicism and Analysis', in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, ed. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago, 1993), 409–33. Finally, Murray Dineen explores a character piece by Brahms in his article 'Schönberg's Logic and Motor: Harmony and Motive in the Capriccio No. 1 of the Fantasien Op. 116 by Johannes Brahms', *Gamut*, 10 (2001), 3–28. I thank Murray Dineen for sharing a copy of this essay with me, as well as for his advice.

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Yet, Schoenberg hinted at a most intriguing analytical application. When he wrote, 'It is my assertion that at least a movement, if not an entire work, is formed from a single motive',[19] Schoenberg suggested an intriguing possibility: perhaps an entire multi-movement composition might be understood in terms of a single musical problem. While Schoenberg's concept of basic shape offers an elegant image for an integral complex of generative components in a composition, his concept of musical problem is a truly *motivic* notion: it represents what we perceive in music as a dynamic impulse towards a forthcoming tonal goal. To see an entire piece as the pursuit of one problem acknowledges organic unity at its ultimate level.

Let us see how Schoenberg's concept of musical problem may illuminate the contextual process within Schubert's String Quintet. While the 'problem' metaphor, like those of the dialectic and narrative, may be an imperfect analogue for a purely musical process such as that within the composition, it may provide us with a firmer grasp on what we already perceive. Moreover, if the notion heightens our awareness and increases our understanding of the unique structural features and dramatic relations within the Quintet, then it also sheds new light on the nature of Schubert's musical genius.[20]

The Quintet's Basic Shape and its Problem

The first movement of Schubert's String Quintet, an *Allegro ma non troppo*, immediately introduces the composition's *basic shape*:

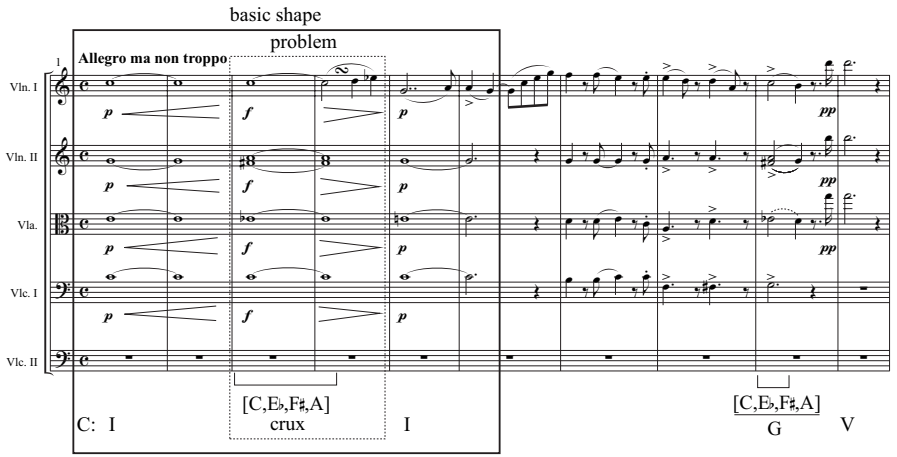
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[19] Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea, and the Logic, Art, and Technique of its Presentation*, 91.

[20] While many brief references to Schubert's String Quintet have appeared in the literature over the twentieth century, extended and detailed studies have only begun to appear with any frequency in recent years, corresponding to the burgeoning resurgence of interest in the composer. See: James Webster, 'Schubert's Sonata Form and Brahms's First Maturity', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 2 (1978/79), 18-35; Peter Gülke, 'Zum Bilde des späten Schubert: Vorwiegend analytische Betrachtungen zum Streichquintett op. 163', in *Musik-Konzepte Sonderband: Franz Schubert*, ed. von Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich, 1979), 107–66; Peter Gülke, 'In what Respect a Quintet? On the Disposition of Instruments in the String Quintet D 956', in *Schubert Studies*, ed. Eva Badura-Skoda and Peter Branscombe (Cambridge, 1982), 173–85; David Beach, 'Schubert's Experiments with Sonata Form', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 15/1 (1993), 1–18; David Beach, 'Harmony and Linear Progression in Schubert's Music', *Journal of Music Theory*, 38/1 (1994), 1–20; John Gingerich, 'Schubert's Beethoven Project: The Chamber Music', *1824–1828*, PhD dissertation, Yale University (1996), 364–441; Rast, 'Schubert's C Major String Quintet D 956', 111–25; John Gingerich, 'Remembrance and Consciousness in Schubert's C-Major String Quintet', *Musical Quarterly*, 84/4 (2000), 619–34; Lauri Surpää, 'The Path from Tonic to Dominant in the Second Movement of Schubert's String Quintet and in Chopin's Fourth Ballade', *Journal of Music Theory*, 44/2 (2000), 451–85; Xavier Hascher, 'Eine "traumhafte" *barcarola funebre*: Fragmente zu einer Deutung des langsamen Satzes des Streichquintetts D 956', in *Schubert und das Biedermeier, Beiträge zur Musik des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts (Festschrift für Walther Dürr zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Michael Kube (Kassel, 2002), 127–38; and Susan Wollenberg, 'The C Major String Quintet D956: Schubert's "Dissonance" Quintet', *Schubert durch die Brille*, 28 (2002), 45–54. While several of these address motivic relations in Schubert's Quintet, none specifically invokes Schoenberg's concept of musical problem.

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Ex. 1 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 1–10



As this illustration suggests, the basic shape appears at the start of the *Allegro*'s first theme, dominating its antecedent phrase.[21] Its effect is that of an oscillation bounded by a C major harmony, an impression intensified by the accompanying wax and wane of volume. However, the oscillation seems somewhat unstable, as if ready to spin outward. The empty bass register and the doubled G of bar 5 certainly contribute to a perception of imbalance.[22] However, the E♭ (♭3), which sounds in the viola part of bars 3–4 and the first violin part in bar 4, plus the F♯ (♯4), which sounds in the second violin part of bars 3–4, are even more important. These chromatic pitches direct our attention away from and beyond the confines of diatonic C major. Thus, the Quintet's basic shape may be characterized as a *centrifugal* oscillation.[23]

From Example 1 we see that the basic shape's problem is internal, predicated upon the diminished-seventh sonority [C,E♭,F♯,A] in bars 3–4. This simultaneity may be said to represent the *crux* of the Quintet's problem. Its bold swell almost

21 Here, the ten-bar antecedent phrase exceeds the paradigmatic four or eight bars because of the thematic function it fulfils in conveying the basic shape. Similarly, its consequent stretches to nine bars. Charles Rosen has suggested that this may reflect Schubert's continuing study of Mozart's music, specifically the first movement of Mozart's String Quintet in C major, K515, which features five-bar phrases. See Charles Rosen, 'Schubert and the Example of Mozart', in *Schubert the Progressive*, ed. Brian Newbould (Aldershot, 2003), 2–13.

22 For ease of reference, I generally shall refer to specific pitches by their pitch-class designations. Thus, the harmony in bar 3 of Example 1, which consists of C4, E♭4, F♯4, A4, and C5, is expressed by the pitch-class collection [C,E♭,F♯,A]. To facilitate harmonic comparison, diminished seventh sonorities will be represented by their pitch classes enclosed within brackets. The pitch classes of German augmented sixth sonorities and dominant-seventh homonyms will appear within bolded bars, while those of French augmented sixth sonorities will be notated within curly braces.

23 Schoenberg often described chords and progressions that implied motion away from the tonic as 'centrifugal'. See Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony* (New York, 1969), 2.

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seems to force the violin to rise, fall and flutter as it does in bars 4–6.[24] Surely the dissonant chord suggests some forthcoming harmonic motion, perhaps to the dominant. Its F♯ emulates the behaviour of a leading note in G major.[25] In this way, it alludes to a forthcoming tonicization of that degree. Similarly, we might expect the diminished seventh's E♭ to continue downward to D, the fifth of a G major harmony. In that regard, the E♭ imitates the behaviour of ♭6 in G. Consequently, we may anticipate the lowered submediant degree to play a significant role later in the work.[26]

However, the crux sonority's implications remain, deferred by the rise of the E♭ to E♮ in bars 5–6, which results in a swing back to the tonic harmony at the conclusion of the basic shape. Later, in bar 7, the F♮s in the first violin further frustrate expectations, contradicting the F♯ in the crux chord. Both of these voice-leading moves generate what we perceive as 'tension', as they allude to future possibilities.

As Example 1 shows, the second half of the opening phrase eventually escapes the tonic by a determined motion toward the dominant harmony. Certainly its more energetic character contrasts and complements that of the basic shape. Even so, echoes of the basic shape linger in the neighbour motion of the second violin and viola melodies of bars 7–9. Undoubtedly the crux's return over the dominant degree at the cadence in bar 9 recalls the original problem. Nevertheless, the chord's subsequent surrender to the dominant fails to meet our expectations, obliging pursuit of a more satisfactory solution. Before tracing this intriguing process further, however, let us examine the basic shape and its problem more closely.

The Quintet's basic shape is a complex musical gesture consisting primarily of directed melodic intervals, harmonic intervals, interval sequences and temporal relationships, expressed within a distinctive sonic envelope distinguished by dynamics, register, texture and timbre. The annotations of Example 2 clarify:

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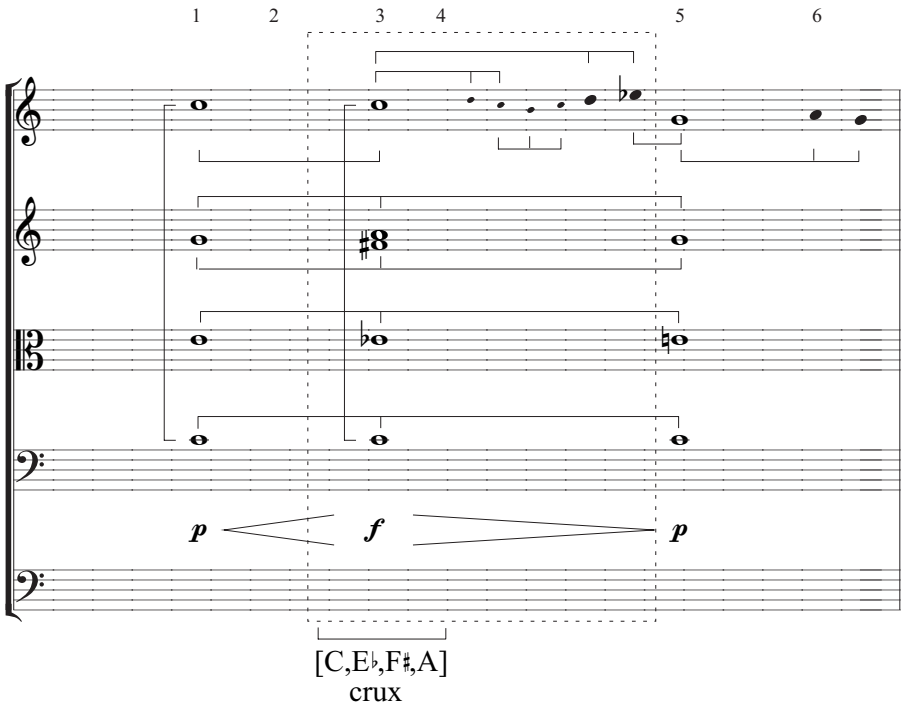
[24] David Epstein drew attention to the essential chromaticism that characterizes the Quintet's first phrase: 'Chromaticism in both melody and harmony is a prominent shaping element of the opening idea. It is asserted as early as the second chord in measure 3, which recurs at the cadence several measures later. It is this chromaticism of ascending or descending half steps to neighbour tones that influences all movements of the work.' See David Epstein, *Beyond Orpheus* (Cambridge, 1979), 45. However, Epstein refrains from identifying a *Grundgestalt* at the start of the Quintet in this discussion. David Beach also remarks on the generative nature of this chromaticism; see Beach, 'Schubert's Experiments with Sonata Form', 13, and Beach, 'Harmony and Linear Progression in Schubert's Music', 2.

[25] Schoenberg often described diminished sevenths as 'vagrant' harmonies since they simultaneously belonged to multiple keys. See Arnold Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, 44–50. Thus, in Schoenberg's view, the diminished seventh sonority of bars 3–4 [C,E♭,F♯,A] could belong to, or at least allude to, D♭ major/minor, E major/minor, G major/minor, and B♭ major/minor.

[26] Susan Wollenberg presents a persuasive argument for an intertextual relationship between Schubert's String Quintet and Mozart's 'Dissonant Quartet' in C Major, K 465, in 'The C Major String Quintet D956: Schubert's "Dissonance" Quintet'. While the dissonant diminished seventh sonority represents an obvious connection, she identifies numerous other harmonic and voice-leading details common to the two works. I thank Susan Wollenberg for sharing a copy of her article before its publication, and for her close reading of an earlier version of the present essay.

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Ex. 2 Components of the Quintet's basic shape and its 'problem'



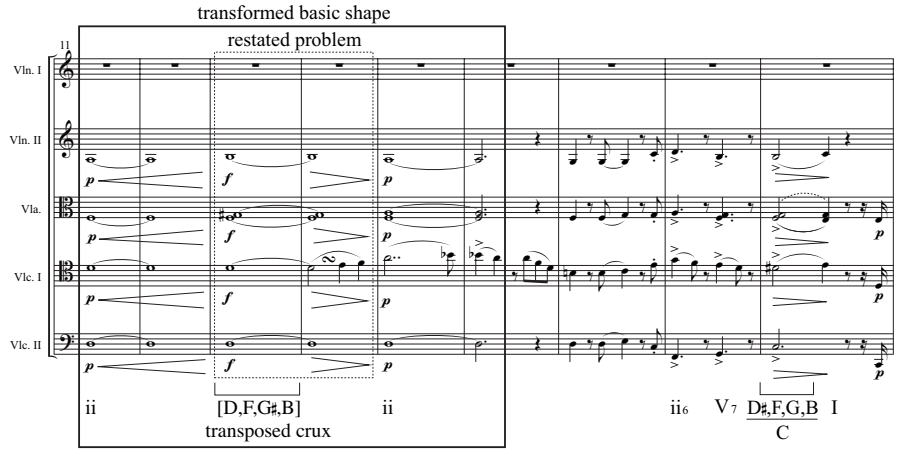
The basic shape features three upper and three lower neighbour figures, each of which represents an oscillation. In addition, there are harmonic octaves and a repeated tone, each of which project C. Further, the basic shape includes an ascending melodic third, a descending leap of a sixth, as well as its framing triads and its signature diminished seventh. Of course, many of these elements, especially the semitonal neighbour figure, the octave, and the repeated note, are ubiquitous in tonal music. However, their presence and prominence within the first thematic gesture of the piece marks them for special attention. As we will see, all serve as generative resources within the Quintet, and all play roles in its drama. Even so, the essential, intrinsic problem of the basic shape is inseparable from its envelope. This is because the problem is defined by and dependent on the context created by the sum of these components.[27]

[27] Nicholas Rast describes the turn figure of the opening musical gesture as "the single most important element, providing the *Grundgestalt* that connects all parts and hierarchic levels of the Quintet', see Rast, 'Schubert's C Major String Quintet D 956', 116. However, Rast never cites Schoenberg's own discussions of his notion of *Grundgestalt* and never refers to Schoenberg's concept of 'musical problem'. The various instances of the 'Turn *Grundgestalt*' Rast identifies represent compositional development of a component of the Quintet's basic shape, and correspond to motivic parallels in the Schenkerian sense; see Rast, 'Schubert's C Major String Quintet D 956', 115 and Ex. 4. Patrick McCreless has identified a similar motivic network in another late chamber work of Schubert; see 'A Candidate for the Canon? A New Look at Schubert's Fantasie in C Major for Violin and Piano', *19th Century Music*, 20/3 (1997), 205–30. Such motivic networks may create

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The consequent of the *Allegro*'s first theme features a striking transformation of the basic shape, one that clearly illustrates Schoenberg's concept of *developing variation*:[28]

Ex. 3 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 11–19



Pitched in a lower register than its predecessor, this new version of the basic shape would seem to restate the Quintet's problem in graver terms. A comparison of Example 3 with Example 1 reveals that certain aspects of the original idea reappear in the new form, others change, while still others disappear, replaced by new elements soon to serve new developmental purposes. For instance, the characteristic oscillation of the basic shape still dominates, though its new pitch level (D) and mode (minor) represent striking changes. Further, the linear components of the basic shape now appear in different instrumental voices, distinguished by different timbres. More specifically, the first violin's tune now sounds in the upper register of the first cello, bearing a more plaintive and intense tone. In addition, the ascending wholetone neighbour figure, originally presented by the second violin, now sounds in the second violin, expressed by the pitch sequence A–B–A in bars 11-16. Finally, a new chromatic pitch, G♯ (♯4 in D, ♯5 in C), hints of more distant tonal excursions potentially in the offing. Through these changes in the basic shape, Schubert establishes vital constructive precedents for future musical events.

Indeed, the beginning of the consequent phrase shown in Example 3 exhibits what may be called *progressive development* – an allusive, purposeful type of developing variation. For instance, its supertonic start is traceable to the passing tone D of the basic shape, the first real hint of melody in the piece.[29] That is,

vast webs of associative relations, yet lack the dynamism and exigency of contextual processes.

28 For more on developing variation, see Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, 8–15 and 58–9. See also Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea, and the Logic, Art, and Technique of its Presentation*, 227–41.

29 In a personal communication, Susan Wollenberg suggested that the C–d relation of the first two statements of the basic shape recalls older harmonic practice, for exam-

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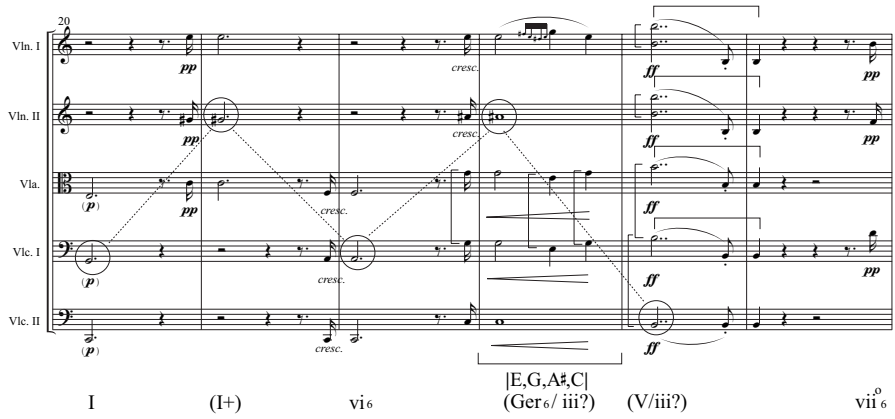
this transformation of the basic shape seems to build on a tiny feature present in its predecessor, proceeding not randomly, but economically. While the supertonic eventually gives way to tonic at the end of the phrase, its cadence conveys the impression that only a little headway toward a satisfactory solution to the problem of the basic shape has occurred. The dissonant sonority in bar 18 returns us to C, but slightly differently from the way the crux did. Thus, the composition's object and course are set: an enigma has arisen, and it demands resolution.

'Play' with Problem Components: The *Allegro ma non troppo*

As the *Allegro* unfolds, components of the basic shape often appear to have been singled out for development. This simulates 'play', an imaginative investigation of the basic shape's structure and nature. Play often characterizes human problem-solving behaviour and represents a pragmatic strategy for clarifying a problem and gathering information before inferring a solution. Its simulation here energizes the Quintet's contextual process, effectively acquainting listeners with the basic shape's individual components and enlisting them in an apparent effort to solve the composition's problem. Of course, Schubert has predetermined every event within this process, and nothing ever happens by chance in the Quintet. So, if we are engaged, we vicariously experience discoveries Schubert has designed for us.

As Example 4 suggests, play already begins in the third phrase of the Quintet:

Ex. 4 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 20–25



For instance, the surprising sonority in bar 23, an applied German augmented sixth of iii in C major, represents a significant functional development of the basic shape's problem. While the sound of this harmony, |C,E,G,A♯|, a domi-

ple the Baroque sequences of Corelli. She noted that frequently there are passages in Schubert's chamber music that bear a similar 'antique' harmonic flavour, citing in the *Quartettsatz* the chordal sequence over the descending-fourth bass progression toward the end of the exposition.

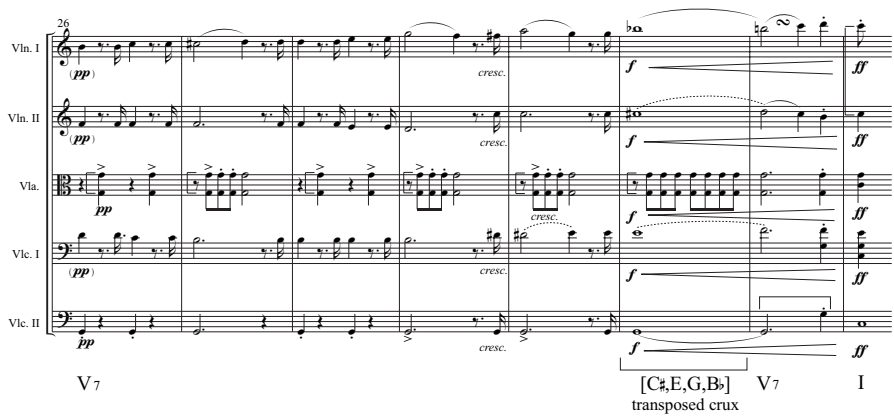
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nant-seventh homonym, obviously differs from that of the basic shape's crux, [C,E♭,F♯,A], the semitonal voice-leading it initiates (C–B and A♯–B) immediately recalls the contrapuntal motion that produced the crux chord. In that regard, the German augmented sixth of bar 23 may be understood as the result of simulated experimentation with the basic shape's semitonal components. In particular, the downward progression of its bass from C to B recalls the E♭ of the basic shape, whose descent to D was 'frustrated' by a change of direction within the basic shape. Moreover, the augmented sixth in bar 23 represents a form of teasing: the E minor harmony it hints of never arrives.

The interval of the octave, one of the components of the basic shape, serves as the basis for repetitive play within the passage, as the brackets in Example 4 suggest. Octave play seems most obvious at the cadence, where the applied German augmented sixth focuses attention onto the following octaves on the downbeat of bar 24.[30] The subsequent melodic leaps in that bar also project the octave, as do the inner voice doublings in bars 22–3. Octave play even seems explicit in bars 20–4, where a rising chromatic line unfolds over two registers. As the circles and dotted lines of Example 4 indicate, this ascent consists of the sequence G2–G♯4–A2–A♯4–B2. Its displacement thus demonstrates the principle of octave equivalency. Both the interval of the octave and the principle of octave equivalency emerge as fundamental constructive premises in the Quintet.

Octave play continues into the next phrase of the Quintet, though less overtly. As Example 5 shows, it now takes the form of repeated octave Gs in the viola:

Ex. 5 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 26–33



While these octaves are a subordinate, accompanimental feature, they provide continuity while directing attention forward by their insistence.

Near the end of Example 5, a diminished seventh sonority [C♯,E,G,B♭] appears in bar 31, before the cadence, as a sharp reminder of the problem of the

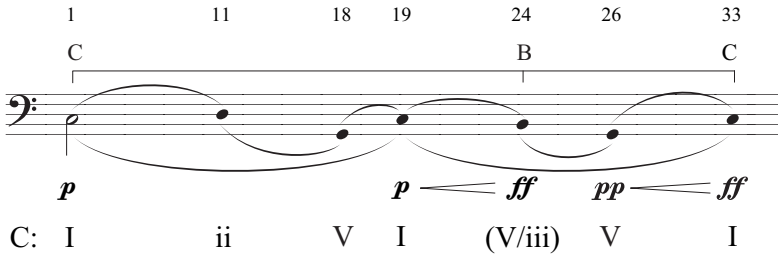
30 David Epstein noted that the octave Bs in bar 24 suggest the dominant in E minor, not the key of B major itself, adding: 'The passage at measure 20 is particularly important vis-à-vis key relations; having begun in C major and concluded on the octave B, the passage implies this early in the piece the possibility of juxtaposed key centers a half step apart.' Epstein, *Beyond Orpheus*, 45.

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basic shape. Similar instances of the crux of the basic shape's problem occur frequently throughout the Quintet, and their many instances distinguish the Quintet's surface as a characteristic colour. They may be regarded as *associative harmonies*: harmonic events with motivic significance.[31]

Play with other components of the basic shape also occurs on a grander scale. For example, the first section of the *Allegro* expresses a semitonal lower neighbour figure within the middleground of bars 1–33, as Example 6 shows:

Ex. 6 ***Allegro ma non troppo*: expanded neighbour figure in bars 1–33**



This sketch shows that the sequence C–B–C, privileged by agogic and dynamic stress and elaborated by tonal prolongation, sounds in the bass register of bars 1 to 33.[32] While B does serve within a larger motion to the dominant, its contextual emphasis, combined with the subsequent dominant's de-emphasis and tonic's emphasis, projects the widely separated tones C–B–C. A glance at Example 2 reminds us that C–B–C appeared in a different register within the basic shape, briefly sounded by the first violin's turn. Thus, the expanded neighbour figure in bars 1–33 is an enlargement of a component of the Quintet's basic shape. In addition, it represents a broad echo of the semitonal motions E–E♭–E and G–F♯–G that produced the Quintet's musical problem.

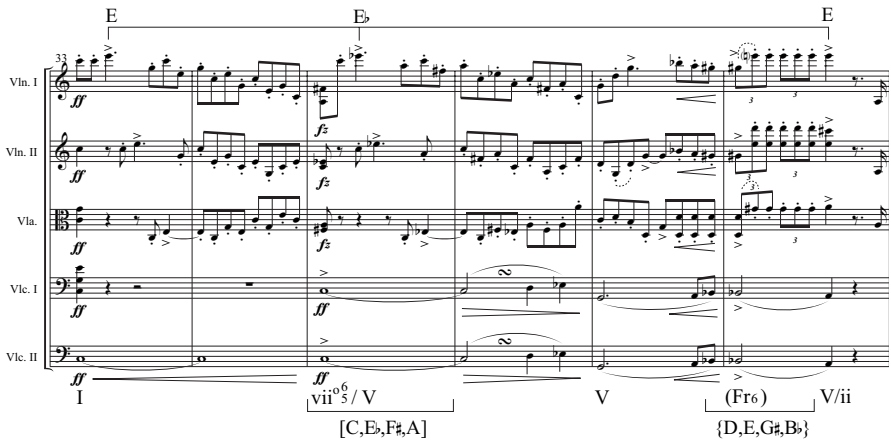
A more readily perceptible expansion of the lower neighbour figure sounds in the following phrase, as Example 7 clarifies:

[31] For more on the concept of *associative harmony*, see James William Sobaskie, 'Associative Harmony: The Reciprocity of Ideas in Musical Space', *In Theory Only*, 10/1–2 (1987), 31–64.

[32] While it is well known that Heinrich Schenker and Arnold Schoenberg – certainly the most influential music theorists of the twentieth century – rarely saw eye-to-eye, there are certain instances in which their theories and methods may be compatible and complementary. Here, the expanded neighbour figure, which forms part of the *Allegro*'s broad voice-leading structure, and corresponds to a component of the Quintet's musical problem, is readily revealed via Schenkerian graphic techniques. Of course, the best-known precedent for such reconciliation is David Epstein's *Beyond Orpheus*.

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Ex. 7 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 33–8



Here, a melodic component from the interior of the basic shape, E–E♭–E, appears two octaves higher in the first violin part. Elaborated via arpeggiation, passing motion, and repetition, it is supported in bars 35–6 by the crux sonority itself.

The end of the phrase in Example 7 features a particularly striking harmonic event, a French augmented sixth.[33] While its ultimate significance may not be immediately clear, the French sixth in bar 38 [D,E,G♯,B♭] recalls the effect of the German sixth of bar 23 |C,E, G,A♯|. Indeed, it represents an intensification of that sonority, given the striking dissonance D/E, in addition to the contextually unstable augmented-sixth interval. Like the earlier German sixth, the French sixth represents a simulated 'experiment' within the Quintet's 'search' for a solution to its musical problem. In addition, the French sixth sonority, whose interval content includes two tritones (D–G♯ and E–B♭), may remind of the crux of the basic shape [C,E♭,F♯,A], which also includes two tritones (C–F♯ and E♭–A). A brief harmonic event, the French sixth sonority represents a distinctive sound that will emerge again.

Play with neighbour figures continues throughout the exposition section of the *Allegro ma non troppo*. For instance, the lyrical second theme of the movement is set in E♭ major.[34] Thus, it directly reflects an element of the Quintet's
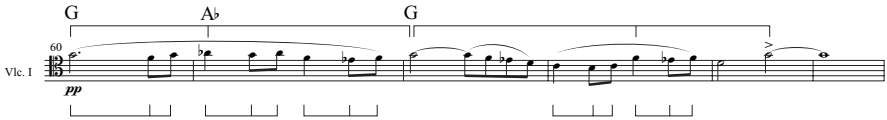
[33] Like the diminished seventh, the French augmented sixth is a harmony of limited transposition, possessing only six truly distinct forms, which include {C,D,F♯,A♭}, {C♯,D♯,G,A}, {D,E,G♯,A♯}, {E♭,F,A,B}, {E,F♯,A♯,B♯}, and {F,G,B,C♯}.

[34] Several observers have remarked on the tenuous quality of this second key area. For instance, see: Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York, 1980), 244–6; James Webster, 'Schubert's Sonata Form and Brahms's First Maturity', 20 and 22; David Beach, 'Schubert's Experiments with Sonata Form', 13–16; and David Beach, 'Harmony and Linear Progression in Schubert's Music', 2-6. As Beach explains, 'The second theme from the initial movement of the C-Major Quintet … illustrates clearly what might be called "multiple harmonic function" … E♭ is not the middle member of a large-scale arpeggiation to the dominant, but rather it prolongs the tonic before the modulation to the dominant is achieved. It is precisely because of the instability of this E♭ area that we hear its harmonies as having more than one function or meaning.' Beach, 'Harmony and Linear Progression in Schubert's Music', 2.

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musical problem E♭, which arose from the semitonal lower neighbour figure in the viola (E–E♭–E).[35] In addition, the second theme boasts numerous neighbour motions, as Example 8 depicts:
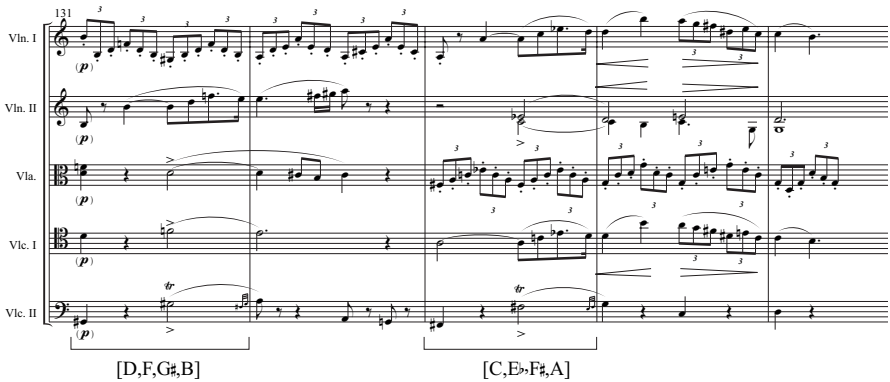
Ex. 8 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 60–65



Perhaps the most prominent of these neighbour components is the expanded sequence G–A♭–G, which compresses the basic shape's neighbour figure G–A–G into a slightly smaller span. Repeated in an upper register in bars 81–6, and developed in the intervening bars, the second theme of the *Allegro* draws special attention to the two forms of the upper neighbour figure.

As the *Allegro* progresses, the semitonal upper neighbour gradually seems to win pre-eminence over the original wholetone form of the figure. This is particularly evident near the end of the exposition, where a conspicuous and apparently new element emerges in the second cello part:

Ex. 9 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 131–5



As Example 9 shows, the second cello features a semitonal upper trill with *nachschlag* in bars 131–2 and 133–4. Directly associated with diminished seventh sonorities – reminders of the crux from the basic shape's problem – the

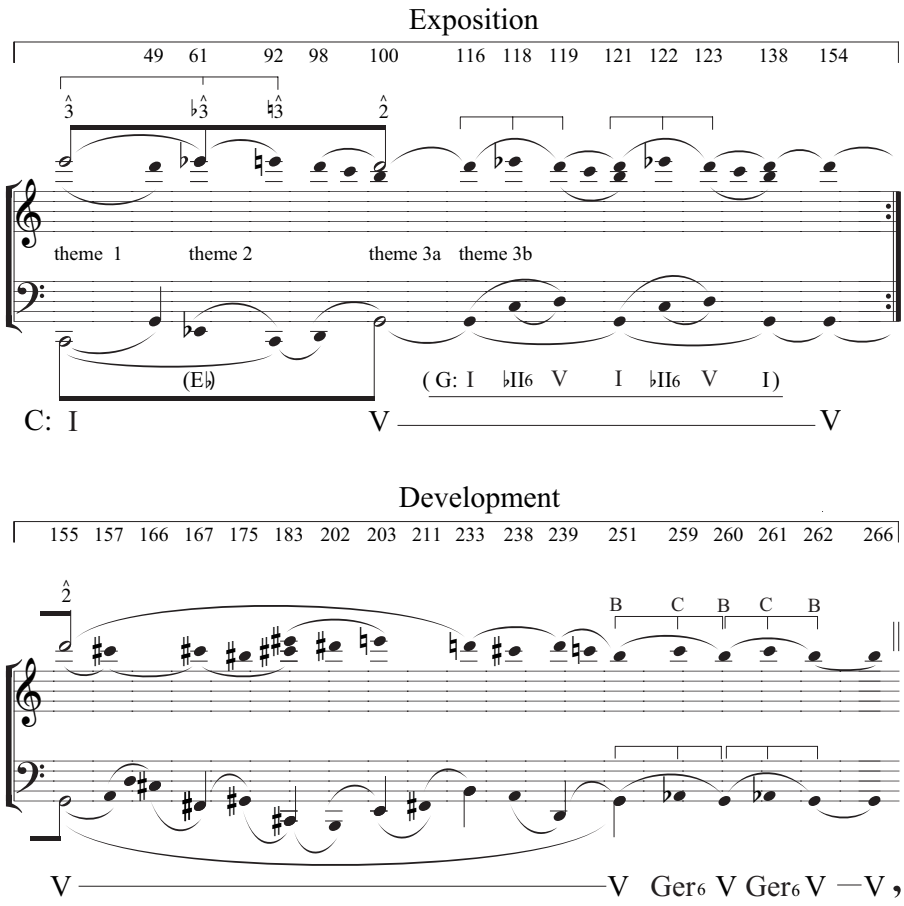
35 Beach considers this component of the Quintet's basic shape to be particularly determinative in the *Allegro ma non troppo*: 'As I have suggested elsewhere [Beach 1993], the motion E♮–E♭–E♮ may be considered as a basic motive – a generating source, if you will – of this movement. The statements of this idea in measures 1–6 and 33–39 are surface representations of a much larger statement that encompasses the first and second theme areas. At this level, E♭ Major offers support for the middle member of the motive, which is corrected to E♮ before the modulation to the dominant is accomplished. Seen in this light, the unstable passage in E♭ major is truly a coloration of the tonic key area, just as the pitch E♭ is a coloration of the E♮ in the motive.' Beach, 'Harmony and Linear Progression in Schubert's Music', 5–6.

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ornament's origin becomes obvious: these trills represent transformations of the basic shape's turn figure which have been expanded from within by semitonal alternation.

It may come as no surprise, then, that the semitonal upper neighbour figure assumes a prominent role in the rest of the *Allegro*. Indeed, it seems like something of a fixation. Thematic material, cadential gestures and tonicized scale degrees all serve to project it. For instance, the third theme of the movement – whose key of G was adumbrated by the F♯ of the Quintet's problem – features prolonged semitonal upper neighbour E♭s in bars 118 and 122. These chromatic tones, which function as ♭6 in the present context, recall the E♭s of the musical problem and pursue its implications. As the sketch in Example 10 summarizes, these neighbours in the second half of the theme are harmonized by Neapolitan sixths:

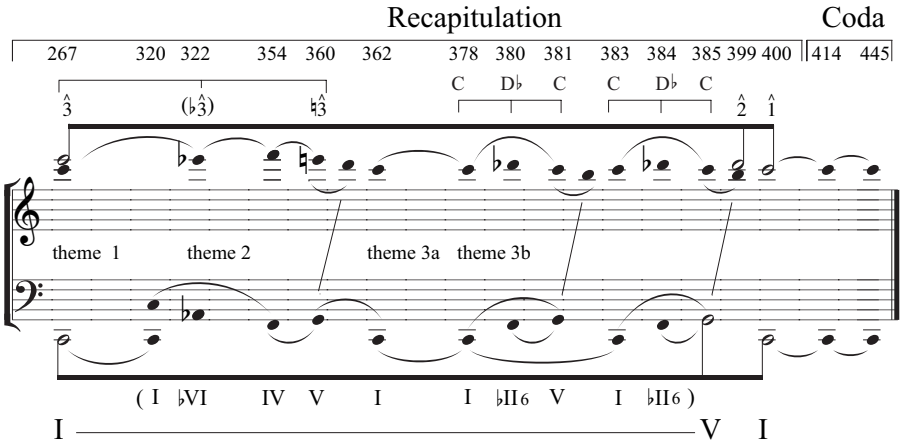
Ex. 10 ***Allegro ma non troppo*: comprehensive voice-leading sketch**



continued overleaf

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Ex. 10 *concluded*



Thus associated with the Quintet's musical problem, these harmonies simultaneously emphasize a new chromatic function, ♭II/♭2, whose significance ultimately will overshadow those of ♭3 and ♯4. Indeed, it plays a crucial role at the end of the Quintet.

Example 10 also portrays the interplay of local tonal regions within the *Allegro*. For instance, it reveals that after C major assumes priority during the presentation of the first theme, the following challenge posed by the flat mediant major, E♭ major, through the agency of the second theme, is relatively brief. As one might expect, the subsequent assertion of the dominant, G major, is more pressing and persistent. Within the development section, F♯ minor, C♯ major, E major, B minor and D major all step forward, temporarily tonicized by authentic cadences. However, G major regains sway by bar 251.
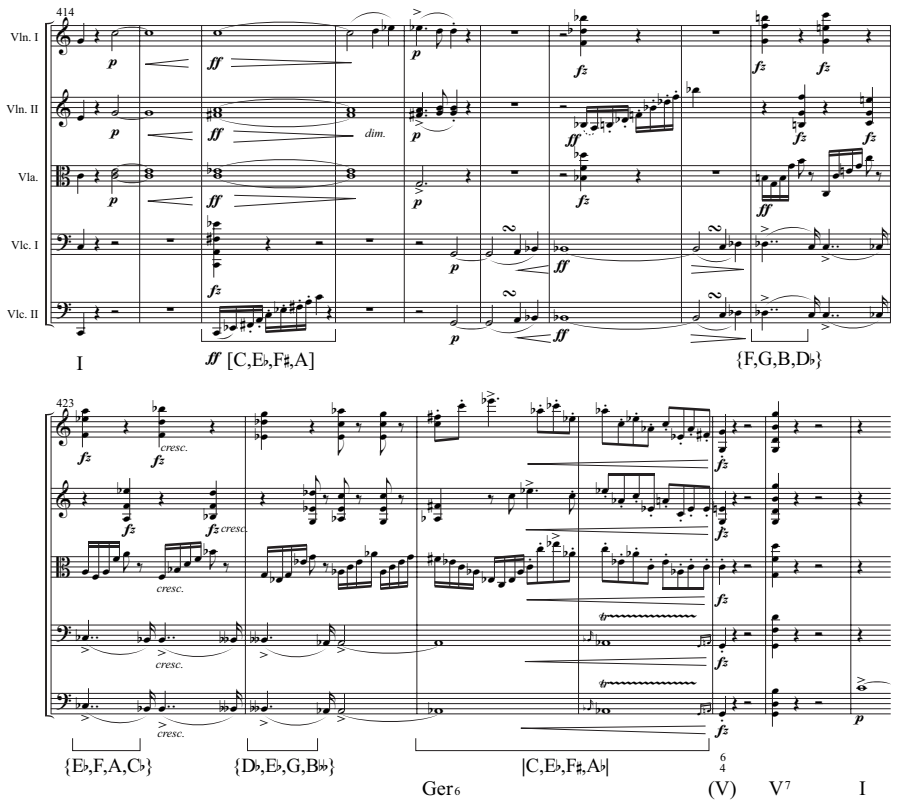
Semitonal upper neighbour figures (B–C–B) signal the approaching end of the development in bars 251–62, where they are supported by German sixths |C,E♭,F♯,A♭|. In turn, these cadential harmonies demote G from a locally tonicized degree to the dominant of C major. Despite all of the preceding tonal concessions, the primacy of C major still seems surprisingly tentative during the recapitulation. A♭ major (♭VI) temporarily emerges via the transposed second theme, but that region stands aside in favour of C. Finally, at the end of the recapitulation, in bars 380 and 384, semitonal upper neighbour figures (C–D♭–C), supported by ♭II6, announce the descent of the fundamental line.

Even the tonic's reconfirmation at the end of the section, following the descent of the fundamental line, impresses as qualified, questionable. Thus, its apparent 'triumph' over its 'challengers' actually fails to satisfy expectations initially raised by the basic shape. Anticipation endures. But why?

In one of the most violent passages in all of Schubert's music, the beginning of the *Allegro*'s coda simulates mounting frustration, followed by a shocking eruption of rage:

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Ex. 11 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 414–29



As Example 11 reveals, the return of the problem's emblematic sonority in bars 416–18 [C,E♭,F♯,A] elicits a striking sequence of three French sixth harmonies in bars 422–4: {F,G,B,D♭], {E♭,F,A,C♭}, and {D♭,E♭,G,B♭♭}. In turn, these are followed by an elongated German sixth, |C,E♭,F♯,A♭|, in bars 425–6. Gripping chromaticism, fluctuant dynamics and sharp accents, as well as slashing triple and quadruple stops, combine in a furious, yet thoroughly musical outburst to suggest that the *Allegro*'s problem has no easy solution. Indeed, only after the passage has run its course does the movement's pent-up energy seem spent.[36]

While the French sixths of bars 422–4 certainly impress, the content of the German sixth of bars 425–6, |C,E♭,F♯,A♭|, particularly recalls the original crux sonority, sharing three of its tones (C,E♭,F♯). Equally remarkable, its arpeggiated

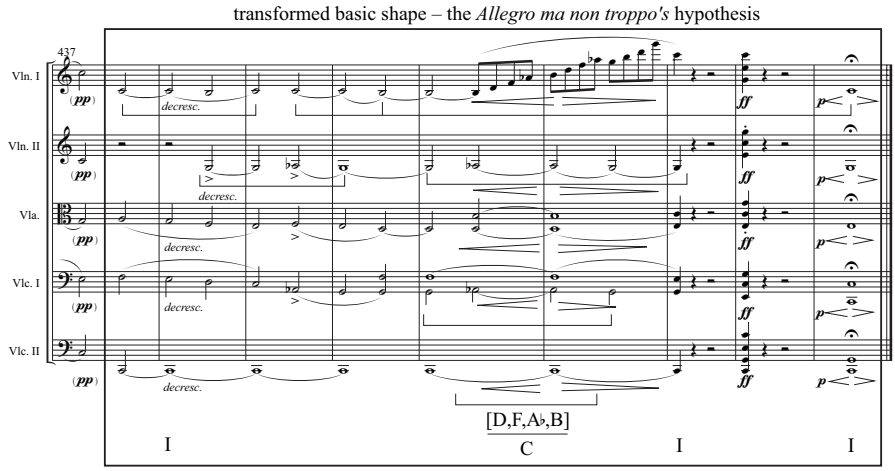
36 This passage, perhaps more so than any yet in the Quintet, reveals how audacious Schubert could be within the domain of harmony. Such innovation cannot have escaped the notice of Arnold Schoenberg, who wrote: 'The richness of Schubert's harmony perhaps marks the actual transition to Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian procedures.' See Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, 156. In his essay 'National Music', Schoenberg indicated what he learned from Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner, and acknowledged that he 'also learned much from Schubert and Mahler, Strauss and Reger too.' See Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 174.

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texture reminds of the similar statement of the crux in bars 35–6. While a casual listener may not be fully aware of their implications, these departures from the crux sonority represent a significant advance towards the solution of the Quintet's problem.

Resignation rises as the coda ends. Surprisingly, the final phrase of the movement seems to offer some hope in the form of a musical hypothesis, an attempt at solving the problem of the basic shape through recombination. As Example 12 shows, the end of the *Allegro* presents a transformation of the basic shape, an expanded oscillation within a C major harmony that turns on a transposition of the problem's crux chord:

Ex. 12 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bars 437–45



As this illustrates, upper and lower semitonal neighbour figures distinguish the transformed basic shape. In particular, the C–B–C figure in the first violin, which was not part of the original problem, emerges as a prominent and memorable melodic gesture. Yet, an inverted version of the gesture, G–A♭–G, heard in the second violin and later in the cello, also attracts attention. The original chromatic elements of the Quintet's basic shape, E♭ (♭3) and F♯ (♯4), are not present, though A♭ (♭6) remains as a colourful detail. Finally, the interval of the tritone, B/F, which is heard in bars 441–2, recalls the dissonance of the crux chord, and its semitonal resolution is more satisfying than its predecessor's. While this 'hypothesis' does not represent the ultimate solution to the Quintet's problem, the closure it provides certainly signals some advance towards that goal.

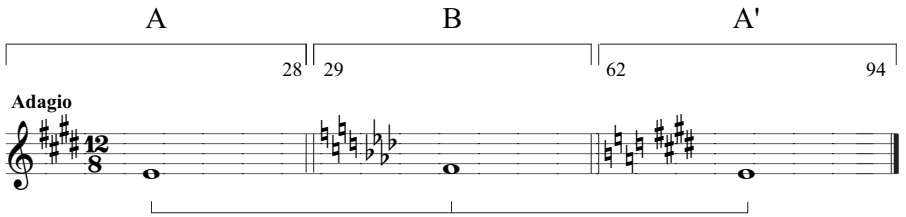
Transformation and Contrast: The *Adagio*

Progressive development – apparently purposeful play with the components of the basic shape – continues in the *Adagio* of Schubert's Quintet. This simulates the search, assembly and refinement of a solution for its musical problem. In particular, the semitonal upper neighbour figure of the Quintet's basic shape assumes a central role. Whether we consider the motif to be a compression of

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the original basic shape's upper neighbour figure (for example, G–A–G or C–D–C), or an inversion of its lower neighbour figure (for example, E–E♭–E, G–F♯–G, or C–B–C), is of little consequence. However, the incorporation of a transformation of this component within the grand structural design of the *Adagio* indicates imaginative 'play' at its highest level. As the diagram of Example 13 shows, the broad key structure of the movement's tripartite form projects the semitonal upper neighbour figure E–F–E:

Ex. 13 ***Adagio*: formal/tonal design**



While this specific pitch sequence does not appear within the original form of the basic shape, it is not hard to imagine that now-familiar gesture as its source.[37] Thus, the *Adagio* projects the minor Neapolitan key, ♭ii, in a most powerful way.

Schoenberg's theory of tonal regions assists in grasping the significance of the *Adagio*'s most unusual key scheme.[38] While F major serves as the Neapolitan region of E major, a relationship Schoenberg would call 'indirect and remote', F minor is regarded as 'distant', a region even further from E.[39] The two keys share no diatonic scale degrees, though three are enharmonic equivalent, and the only close common element is the raised seventh step of F minor, E♮. Thus, the surprising juxtaposition of F minor represents an extraordinary, almost impertinent challenge to E.

Indeed, contrast characterizes the *Adagio* at the broadest level, where the placid and lyrical framing sections stand apart from the turbulent and impassioned central section. Yet contrast also functions more locally. For instance, in the first three bars of Example 14, the alternation of *pizzicato* and *arco* in the first violin projects the interval of the ascending octave:

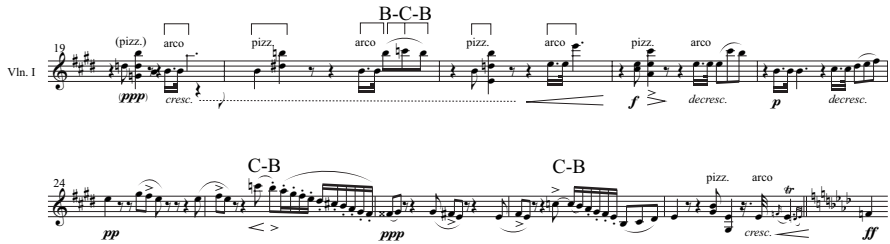
[37] Lauri Surpää demonstrates how stepwise ascending bass motion organizes the sections of Schubert's *Adagio*; see his article, 'The Path from Tonic to Dominant in the Second Movement of Schubert's String Quintet and in Chopin's Fourth Ballade', 455–65. Xavier Hascher also offers several detailed voice-leading sketches of the *Adagio*; for these, see his essay, 'Eine "traumhafte" *barcarola funebre*: Fragmente zu einer Deutung des langsamen Satzes des Streichquintetts D 956', 130, 132, 134 and 135.

[38] See Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, 15–29 and 68–75.

[39] Schoenberg would consider F minor to be the 'subdominant minor's submediant minor' (sdsm), and enharmonically equivalent to the 'mediant major's submediant minor' (Msm).

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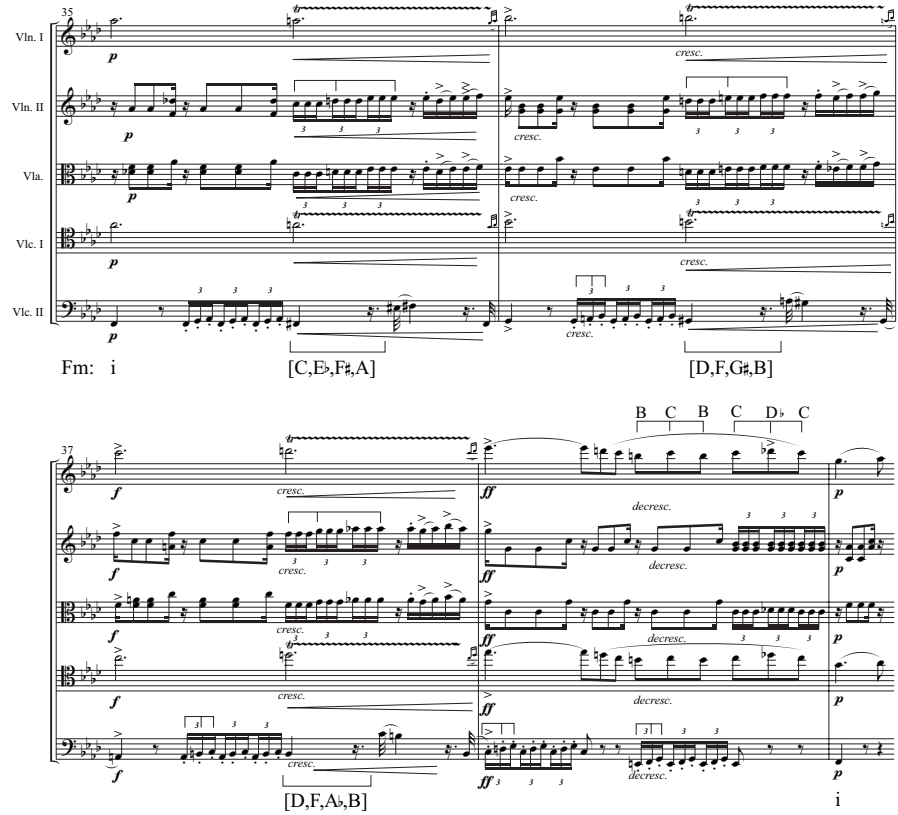
Ex. 14 Schubert, String Quintet, *Adagio*, bars 19–29



These five octave leaps, plus the semitonal neighbour figure in bar 20 (B–C–B) prepare for two of the most poignant moments in the piece, which occur within bars 25 and 27. As Example 14 shows, the melodic 'sighs' in the first violin express the semitone sequence C♮–B.

Linking the A and B sections of the *Adagio* is a dramatic semitonal trill, as bar 28 of the preceding example suggests. To reinforce the structural seam, prominent trills dominate the B section of the movement, as Example 15 shows:

Ex. 15 Schubert, String Quintet, *Adagio*, bars 35–9

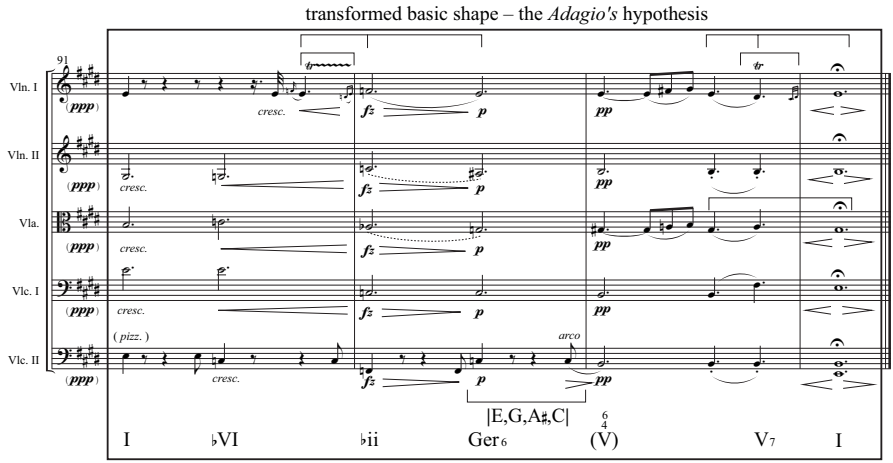


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Here, as in the *Allegro*, the trill is associated with the diminished seventh sonority, the crux of the Quintet's musical problem. In this way, Schubert offers listeners a subtle hint at how the Quintet's contextual process will play out.

Like the *Allegro*, the closing bars of the *Adagio* present a hypothesis, another simulated attempt at solving the problem of the basic shape through recombination. Example 16 discloses that this transformation incorporates several elements made prominent earlier in the Quintet. These include the semitonal upper neighbour figure E–F–E (an echo of the *Adagio*'s primary keys), the trill (a transformation of the basic shape's turn figure), and a German sixth (the harmonic 'discovery' from bar 23 of the *Allegro*):

Ex. 16 Schubert, String Quintet, *Adagio*, bars 91–4



In addition, the hypothesis offers a brief allusion to the original version of the problem in the form of the melodic motif E–D♯–E, which appears in bars 93–4 of the first violin, identified by brackets on the score. Enharmonically equivalent to the E–E♭–E component of the opening bars of the *Allegro*, this gesture recalls the presentation of the Quintet's basic shape and reminds one of the process that has unfolded so far. Of course, the primary key of the *Adagio*, E major, stands in opposition to the key of the preceding movement, C major. So while this latest incarnation of the basic shape certainly offers impressions of consolidation and closure, it leaves lingering anticipation – and the Quintet's 'problem' still unresolved.[40]
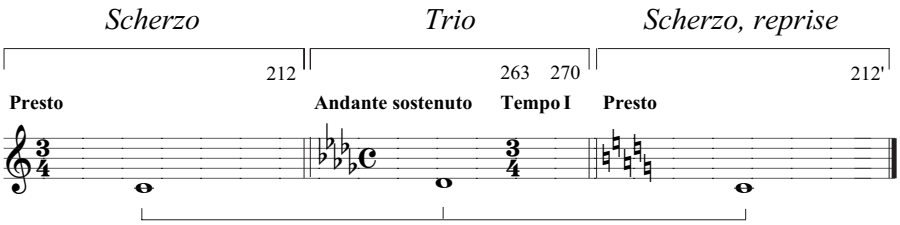
40 The yearning quality of the *Adagio* never fails to move its listeners. John Gingerich suggests that the composer sought to create contemplative and existential states in the Quintet, most notably in the *Adagio*, in which obsession with loss appears to prevail. See Gingerich, 'Remembrance and Consciousness in Schubert's C-Major String Quintet', 619–34.

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Challenging Convention: The *Scherzo* and *Trio*

Progressive development also characterizes the third movement of Schubert's String Quintet. The diagram in Example 17 summarizes the broad design of the *Scherzo* and *Trio*:
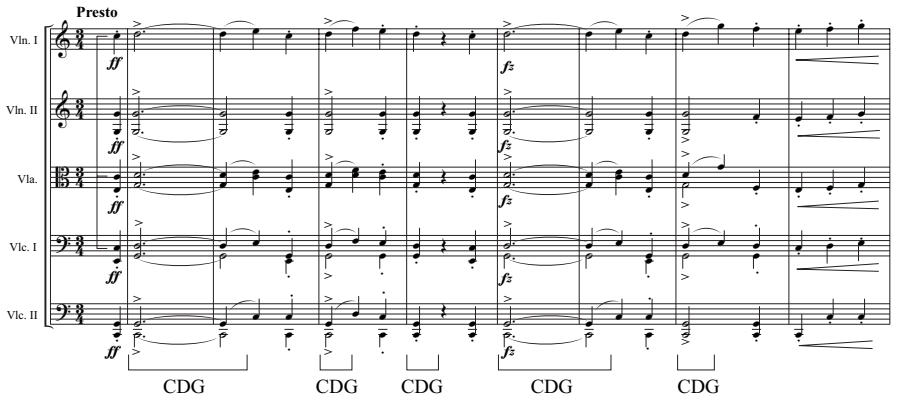
Ex. 17 ***Scherzo*** **and** ***Trio*****: formal/tonal design**



The movement's sequence of primary keys, C–D♭–C, expresses the semitonal upper neighbour figure, this time at the Quintet's fundamental tonic level. As in the preceding movement, the major Neapolitan (♭II) region and relation appears in high relief. This broad tonal relation represents real progress towards the solution of the Quintet's problem, though listeners are hardly aware of its implications as the *Scherzo* unfolds.

From the very start, the *Scherzo* seems determined to challenge convention. As Example 18, reveals, a non-triadic sonority formed by stacking perfect fifths (C,D,G), becomes a characteristic sound:

Ex. 18 Schubert, String Quintet, ***Scherzo, Presto*****, bars 0–8**
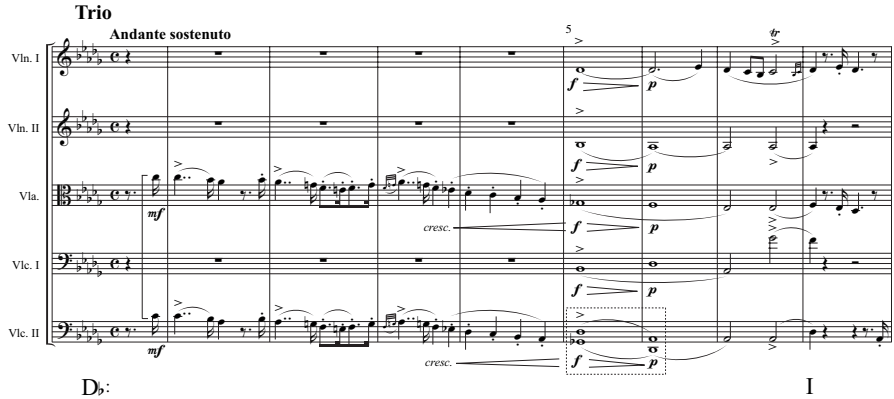


Without doubt, the clashing dissonance CD must be the most distinguishing feature of the chord. Later in the movement, two of the chord's constituents, D and G, gain special prominence when augmented 6ths draw attention to those degrees. For instance, a German sixth, |G,B♭,C♯,E♭|, heard in bars 42–4, resolves to the dominant of G in the following bar. In bars 121 and 129, French sixths ({C,D,F♯,A♭}) introduce the dominant of C, the degree of G. Finally, in bars 172–4, a German sixth, |C,E♭,F♯,A♭|, reaffirms the dominant, G. Like the diminished

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seventh chord of the basic shape, the CDG sonority represents a fundamental structural premise of the *Scherzo*, an associative harmony. Its emphasis, along with the augmented sixth sonorities, effectively steals attention from the crux of the Quintet's musical problem, the diminished seventh.

Other challenges to convention occur within the movement. For instance, creative 'play' with octaves dominates the *Trio* section.[41] Indeed, the central section of the movement gives the impression of being an exercise in blending timbres at various registers, an exploration of colour and dimension. Example 19 portrays just a little of this:

Ex. 19 Schubert, String Quintet, *Scherzo*, *Trio*, Andante sostenuto, bars 0–8



Here, a single line sounds in octaves by viola and cello II. While such octave doubling may occur in chamber music, nevertheless it is relatively rare, given the 'democratic' nature of the genre.[42] Remarkably, there are sixteen such instances involving three or more bars within the short span of the *Trio*.[43]

Schubert even incorporated parallel fifths within the composition, as Example 19 suggests. In addition to those of bars 5–6, seven other instances appear during the *Trio*.[44] While they seem justified here by thematic, harmonic and

41 Example 18 reveals that octave doubling distinguished the opening phrase of the *Scherzo*, where the melody initially appears in three registers, played by Vln. I, Vla and Vlc. I.

42 John Gingerich notes that the preceding movement of Schubert's Quintet also emphasizes octave doubling: 'Schubert avails himself the luxury of five instruments to write doubled-octave passages of unprecedented length (as here [the *Adagio*]) and to an unprecedented extent [in the Quintet]. Other doubled-octave passages in the Quintet: I, mm. 40–56, 168–173, 204–210, 259–261; the naked doubled-octave passages in the Trio; IV, mm. 83–97, 268–286, 370–382.' Gingerich, *Schubert's Beethoven Project: The Chamber Music, 1824–1828*, 392, n.30.

43 Instances of octave doubling in the *Trio* may be heard in bars 0–5 (vla, vlcII), bars 10–12 (vlnI/vlcI), bars 12–16 (vla/vlcII), and bars 21–3 (vlnI/vlcI). Those in bars 23–7 (vlnI/vlcII), bars 27–31 (vla/vlcI – cello above), bars 31–5 (vlnI/vlcII), bars 35–7 (vla/vlcII), and 35–40 (vlnI/vlcII) are all repeated. Finally, bars 42–8 (vla/vlcII) and bars 42–50 (vlnI/vlcI) make for a total of sixteen.
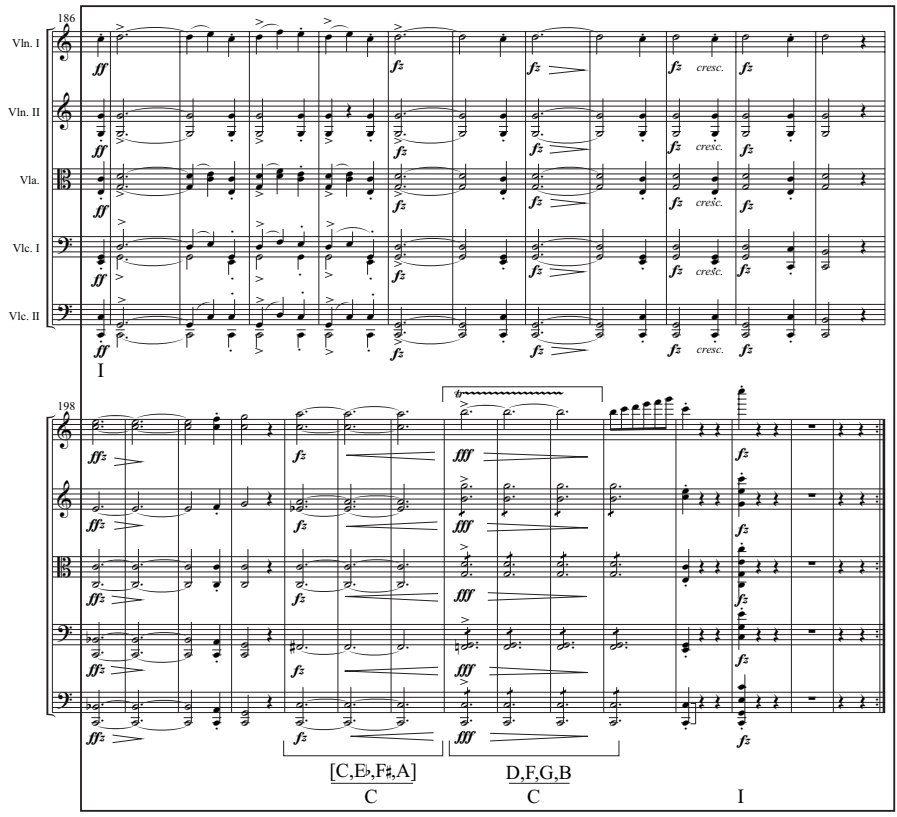
44 See bars 9–10, 11–12, 16–17, 20–1, 22–3 and 41–2 (repeated).

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textural factors, perhaps Schubert also uses them to offer a covert challenge to voice-leading convention. In any event, they may be understood to represent yet another form of purposeful 'play' within the Quintet's contextual process, the pursuit of implications within the 'stacked fifths' sonority (C,D,G) of the movement's opening bars.

Again, an expanded transformation of the Quintet's basic shape appears in the coda of the *Scherzo*, as the next illustration suggests:

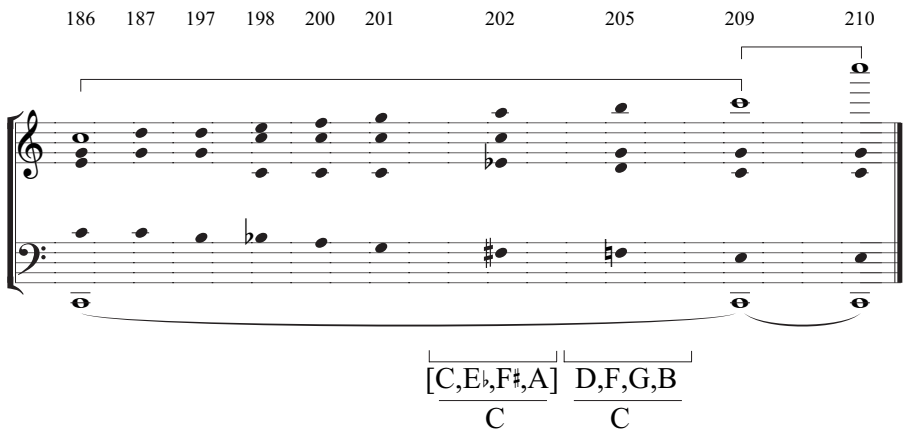
Ex. 20 Schubert, String Quintet, *Scherzo*, bars 186–212



Its essential voice-leading appears in Example 21:

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Ex. 21 ***Scherzo*: analysis of bars 186–212**



Distinctive features of the original basic shape reappear within this version, such as the framing C major triads and the original crux sonority [C,E♭,F♯,A]. Surprisingly, the crux's centrifugal character seems attenuated by the subsequent voice-leading in bars 204–9, which features the diatonic rise A–B–C in the first violin, supported by the dominant seventh (D,F,G,B) over a tonic pedal. Signalling a degree of optimism, the dramatic ascending octave leap of the violin in bars 209–10 is reinforced by the final chord, whose fifteen sounding notes represent the greatest registral expanse of the entire Quintet.
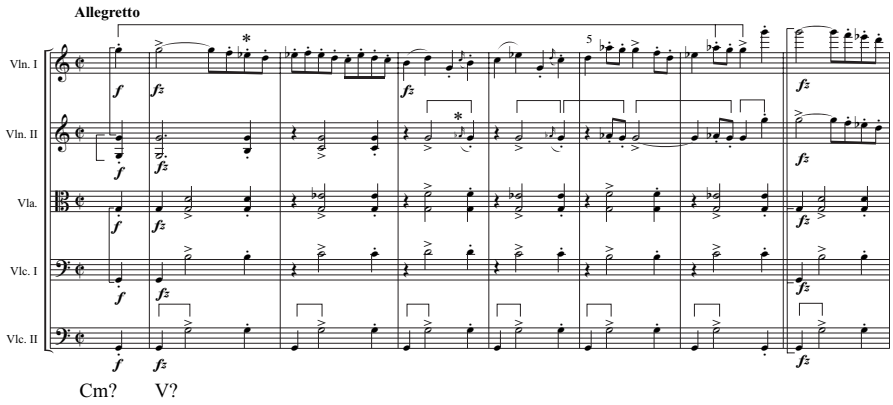
Like the 'hypotheses' at the ends of the first two movements, this transformation of the basic shape offers local closure, as well as a sense of progress towards a solution, most notably through the sonority of bars 205–8. The semitonal motion associated with the resolution of its tritone (B–C and F–E), anchored by the sustained note G, surely represents the core of this gesture's effect. However, the sustained pedal note C of the cello in bars 202–9 and the diatonic neighbour figure C–D–C of the viola in the same bars diminish the dynamism of the passage. Thus, something still seems to be missing here, an elusive combination of factors whose constituency and arrangement is not yet clear.

Progressive Development and Gradual Refinement: The *Allegretto*

The finale of Schubert's String Quintet opens on a note of urgency, even anxiety. Familiar thematic elements, such as the octave and semitonal upper neighbour, do little to dispel the undercurrent of anticipation. As Example 22 intimates, modal mixture sows doubt as to whether the *Allegretto* is in the major or minor:

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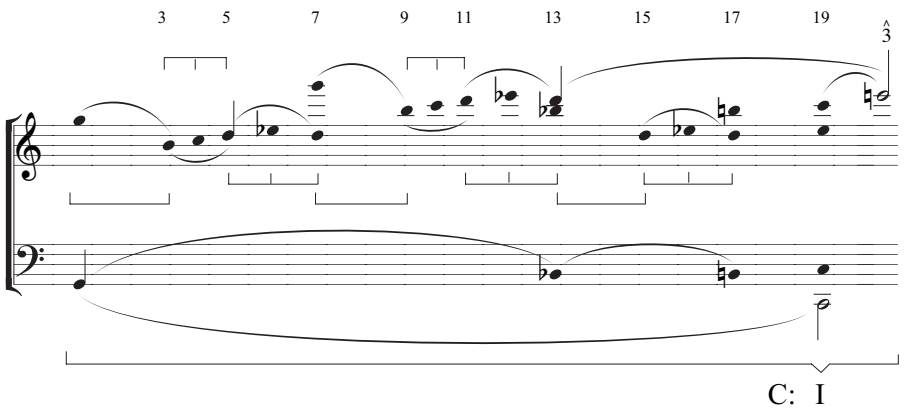
Ex. 22 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegretto*, bars 0–7



Obviously, the cross relation of the original basic shape, E–E♭, must be perceived as the source of the opening theme's modal equivocation.

In addition, the tonic, C, is implied for nearly twenty bars before its confirmation. More specifically, the opening of the *Allegretto* features what I have called a *precursive prolongation*: a tonal prefix that defers to another, composing out and prolonging a higher-level tonal element before a surface-level articulation of that element actually arrives.[45] In this instance, a dwelling on the dominant of C draws attention forward towards the tonic before that structural harmony is cadentially confirmed. Example 23 offers a sketch that conveys the contextual dependency of the opening theme's elements, many of which come from the basic shape, on the anchoring articulation of the tonic in bar 19:

Ex. 23 *Allegretto*: precursive prolongation in bars 0–19
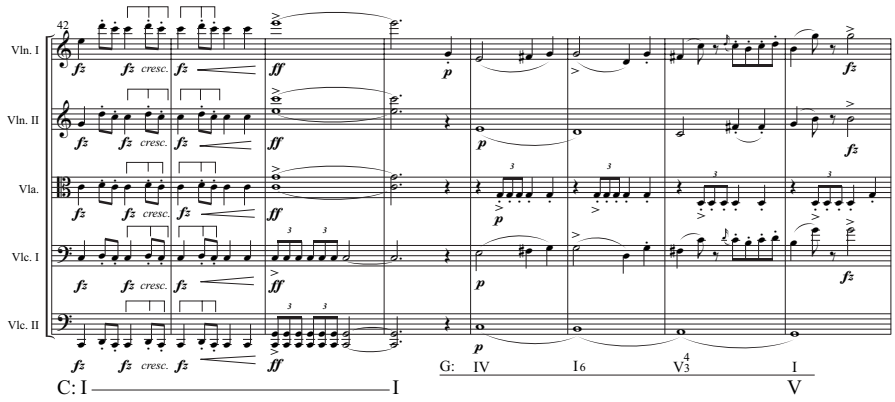


45 For more on precursive prolongation in the music of Schubert, see Sobaskie, 'Tonal Implication and the Gestural Dialectic in Schubert's A Minor Quartet', 53–79. See also: James William Sobaskie, 'The Emergence of Gabriel Fauré's Late Musical Style and Technique', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 22, 228–33. A precursive prolon-

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Remarkably, the character of the second theme of the movement is similar to the first, as the following excerpt suggests:

Ex. 24 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegretto*, bars 42–9

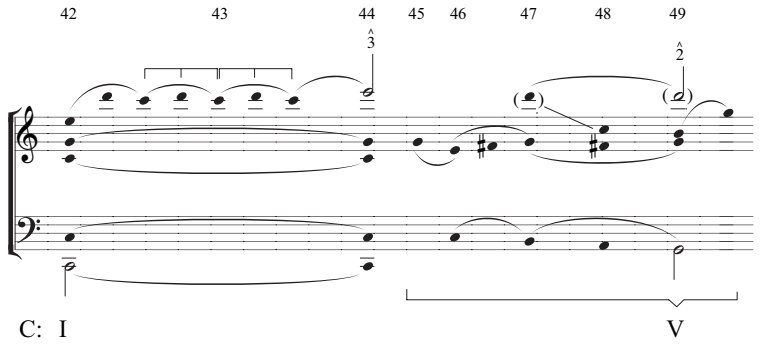


Example 25 reveals that it also represents a precursive prolongation, an extended prefix of the dominant:

gation consists of one or more contextually dependent tonal elements associated with and preceding a contextually distinguished pre-eminent element, the latter of which is promotable to the next higher level of tonal structure as the unit's representative. Familiar examples include anticipations, appoggiaturas, secondary dominants, and initial ascents. Precursive prolongations may appear at all structural levels and in upper or lower voices. In addition, they may be contrapuntally combined with other precursive prolongations and elaborated by subordinate prolongations. The allusive effect of these structures arises from the contextual dependency of the prefixial elements, whose significance derives from their object and, more specifically, from the corresponding expectations the prefixial elements elicit for their object. Heinrich Schenker described passages like the opening of Schubert's *Allegretto* as *auxiliary cadences*. For more on Schenker's concept, see Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York, 1979), 88–9. Closely examined, Schenker's idea reveals theoretical weakness, most notably in its premise that instances like the opening of Schubert's *Allegretto* were founded on forms of the fundamental structure that had been abbreviated and transferred to lower levels of tonal structure. This assumption renders Schenker's notion of auxiliary cadence a transformational construct, a deductive and prescriptive idea that is more theoretical speculation than analytical tool, a means for explaining the generation of music like that in bars 1–19 of Schubert's *Allegretto*, and *not* an objective representation of its nature, content and structure. In contrast, the concept of precursive prolongation, which draws on Schenker's concepts of structural levels and composing-out, recognizes the prefixial nature of certain tonal structures, focuses on contextual dependency, and enables direct representation instead of transformational speculation.

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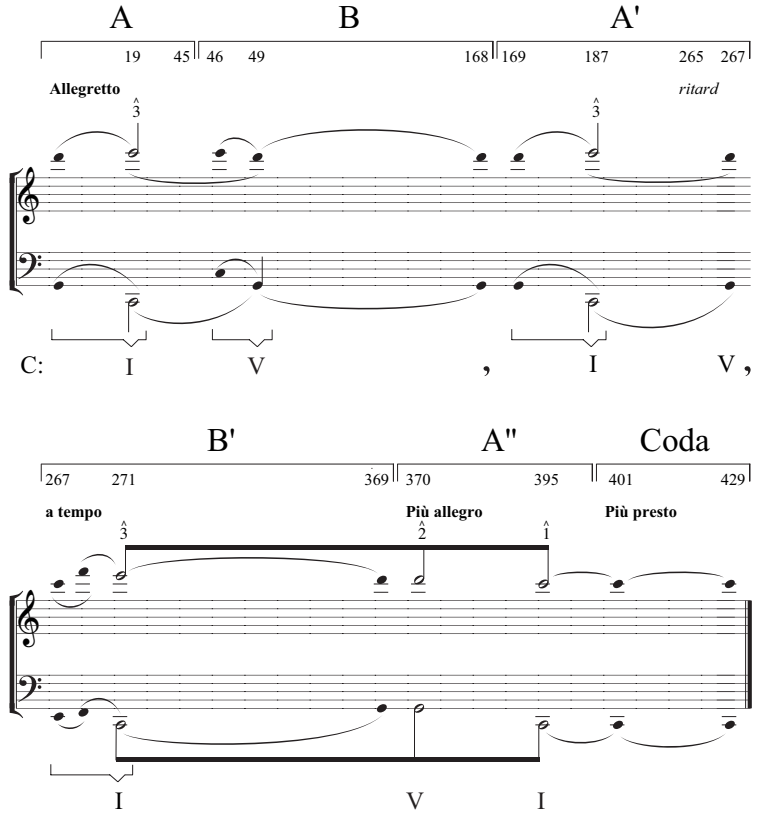
Ex. 25 *Allegretto*: **precursive prolongation in bars 42–9**



Both themes draw us forward in a powerful, seemingly preordained manner. Is there a higher purpose, some plan behind all of this?

Yes. The two precursive prolongations initiate and invigorate a grand harmonic oscillation that spans most of the *Allegretto*. As Example 26 suggests, the movement's five-part rondo design unfolds within a repetitive fluctuation between dominant and tonic:

Ex. 26 *Allegretto*: **sketch; broad harmonic oscillation of V and I**



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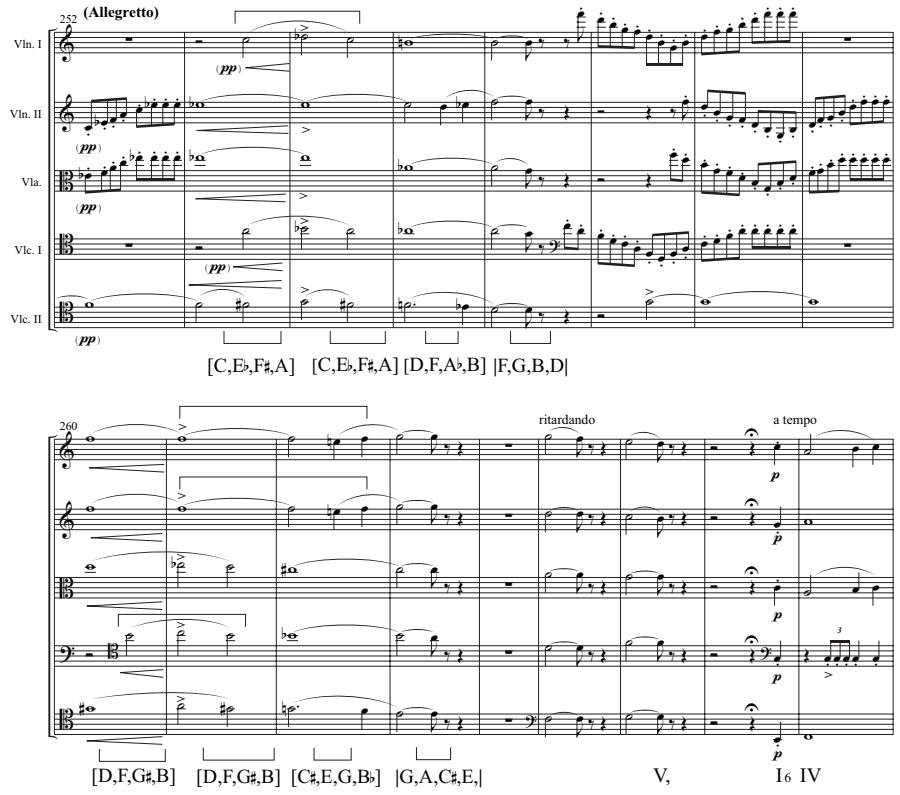
While this broad harmonic undulation (I–V–I–V–I–V–I) seems self-perpetuating, it does have an unexpected consequence. Because of this broad harmonic alternation, the descent of the fundamental line at the end of the recapitulation is not as dynamic as one might expect. Tonic C regains sway in bar 395, though its power seems provisional. Clearly, a substantial coda would seem to be in order, as well as further development of the *Allegretto*'s thematic material, for convincing closure.

However, there may be another reason for the attenuation of this normally dramatic structural event. Perhaps the *Allegretto*'s tonal structure defers to the Quintet's contextual process. But why?

Insight, Incubation and Illumination: Emergence of a 'Solution'

Let us step back a bit. A little more than midway through the *Allegretto*, near the end of its third section, a musical 'flash of insight' seems to occur in bars 265–7. As Example 27 indicates, the music becomes surprisingly quiet, yet strangely agitated:

Ex. 27 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegretto*, bars 252–68



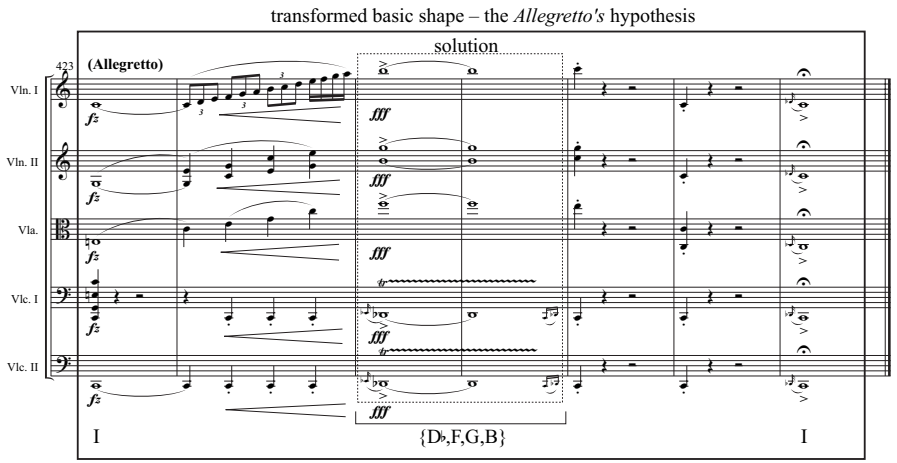
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In bars 253–4, the semitonal neighbour figure C–D♭–C is associated with the original 'crux' [C,E♭,F♯,A] of the Quintet's problem. At the start of the next system, the figure B–C–B, played by the first cello, appears with another transposition [D,F,G♯,B] of the now-familiar 'problem' sonority. Shortly thereafter, the violins' semitonal neighbour figure F–E–F is briefly associated with the remaining transposition [C♯,E,G,B♭] of the crux chord. Finally, after a brief silence, a halting reminiscence in bars 265–6 recalls the opening phrase of the Quintet (see bars 7–8 of Example 1), before the music stops altogether. The impression of quiet, atemporal reflection conveyed here is arresting, yet its import seems far from clear. However, as we will discover, the three semitonal neighbour figures heard in bars 253–62 will play decisive roles at the close of the Quintet.

After the pause, pursuit resumes and tempo increases, but the descent of the fundamental line lacks the dynamism one would expect. The tonality of C obtains priority, yet it remains unconvincing, and an odd sense of anticipation prevails. Of course, maintaining suspense to the very end is part of Schubert's dramatic plan within the Quintet.

In the closing passage of the *Allegretto*, the ultimate transformation of the Quintet's basic shape finally materializes. Example 28 captures the action:

Ex. 28 Schubert, String Quintet, *Allegretto*, bars 423–9



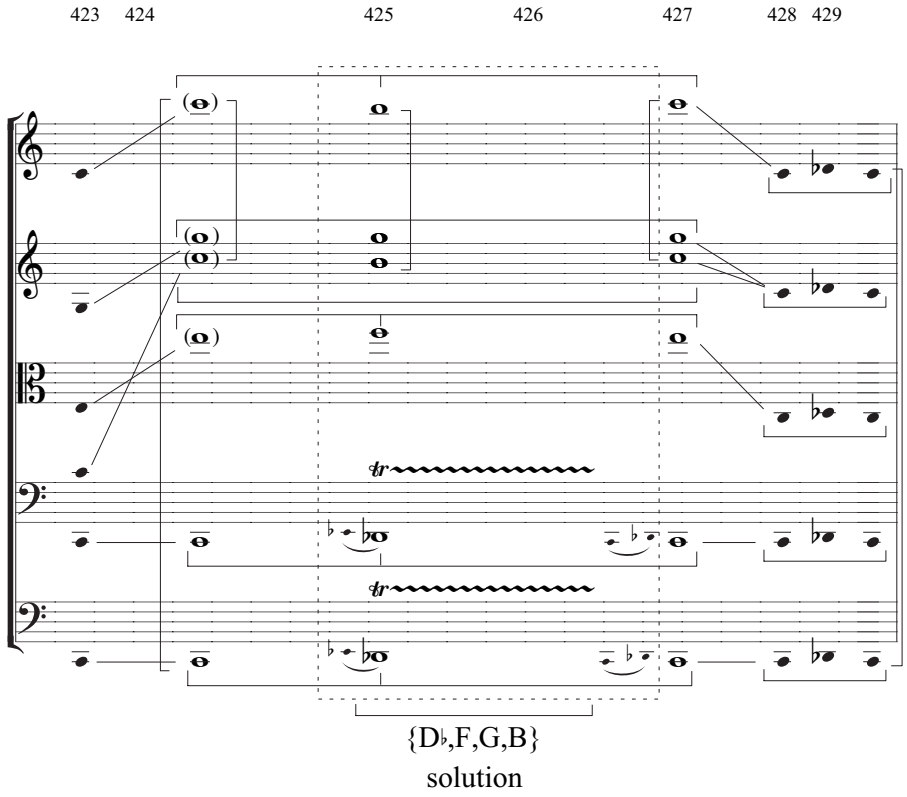
At last, a satisfying 'solution' to the Quintet's problem, one which takes the form of a *centripetal* oscillation within a C major harmony.[46] Surprisingly, the dissonant altered dominant at the centre of the 'solution' [D♭,F,G,B], represents the long-sought key to the Quintet's elusive repose. Harmonically equivalent to the French augmented sixth, this sonority-type gained striking prominence early in the first movement of the Quintet, although its ultimate significance was by no means clear. The 'key' within the solution is a fundamentally different object from the crux of original problem, yet arises from it.

46 Schoenberg referred to harmonic motion that tended towards the tonic as 'centripetal'. See Schoenberg, *Structural Functions of Harmony*, 2.

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Of course, the 'rightness' of this solution to the Quintet's problem involves much more than just that one chord. More specifically, the ultimate transformation of the Quintet's basic shape assembles essential elements and developments – 'discoveries' – that arose during the course of the Quintet. Example 29 offers clarification:

Ex. 29 Components of the transformed basic shape and its 'solution'



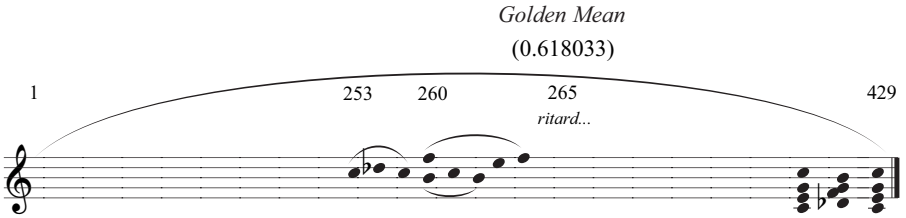
As this schematic shows, the semitonal lower neighbour figure C–B–C, expressed here by the violins, emerged early in the first movement (see Example 6), and its transpositions have played prominent motivic roles ever since. The semitonal upper neighbour figure E–F–E, expressed by the viola, clearly recalls the broad key structure of the *Adagio*. Similarly, the semitonal upper neighbour figure C–D♭–C, sounded by the cellos, corresponds to the key scheme of the Quintet's *Scherzo*. Parallel octaves, articulated by the violins, and the principle of octave equivalence, represented by the grand ascending gesture at the start, also contribute to this long-anticipated event. Finally, the climactic trill on the central sonority, the 'key' of the satisfactory solution, completes the transformed basic shape. The 'problematic' E♭ (♭3) stubbornly persists within the trill, relinquishing only in bar 427. All of these elements, thus arranged, combine to resolve the problem of the Quintet.

A remarkable structural relation shapes the span of the *Allegretto*. The 'Golden Mean' of the movement, if calculated according to the number of bars in the

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movement (429), occurs precisely within the 'flash of insight' in bar 265, just after the semitonal neighbour figures C–D♭–C, B–C–B, and F–E–F are heard, and just as the *ritardando* begins.[47] Example 30 offers a simple graphic representation of the classic proportion and those crucial elements:

Ex. 30 ***Allegretto*: 'Golden Mean'**



While bar 265 does not represent the dynamic climax of the *Allegretto*, it is the turning point in its drama. Surely the placement of this crucial event also reinforces the 'rightness' of the solution to the Quintet's problem.[48]

To leave little doubt regarding the sovereignty of C, as well as an echo of the Quintet's basic shape, the final bars offer convincing closure and well-earned release in the form of an end-accented oscillation about the tonic, C–D♭–C.[49] With this last semitonal gesture, the Quintet's contextual process is complete.[50] What seems so astounding about the Quintet is that its fundamental musical problem involves an extensive array of voice-leading components that Schubert systematically adjusts, transforms, and recombines by the composition's end.[51]

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47 The Golden Mean corresponds to approximately 0.618033, so the precise location of the delineation would be 265.136586. For more on this phenomenon, see Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (Cambridge, 1983).

48 Roy Howat analysed the exposition of the first movement of Schubert's Piano Sonata in A, D 959. See Howat, *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis*, 187–9.

49 David Epstein characterizes the conclusion thus: 'The final cadence of the fourth movement consists of a heavily textured chord of the augmented sixth closing into C major in such a way that both outer parts emphasize the half-step relationship (measure 425). The D♭–C descending half step of the last measure gives a final confirmation of the relationship.' Epstein, *Beyond Orpheus*, 45.

50 Donald Francis Tovey clearly seems to have perceived the Quintet's contextual process: 'The C major string quintet is one of the greatest of all essays in tonality and especially in the Neapolitan relations … The finale is half minor and half major and does not, except in the wanderings of a short development, go further than the dominant major and minor. But the very last bars emphasize the flat supertonic in the boldest way conceivable. If this stood by itself we should certainly take it for the dominant of F; but so grand is the tonal poise of the whole movement that in its full context it is more forcible an assertion of C major than any normal cadence. It may truly be said to have been prepared for by the whole course of the movement.' Donald Francis Tovey, 'Tonality', *Music and Letters*, 9 (1928), 354–5.

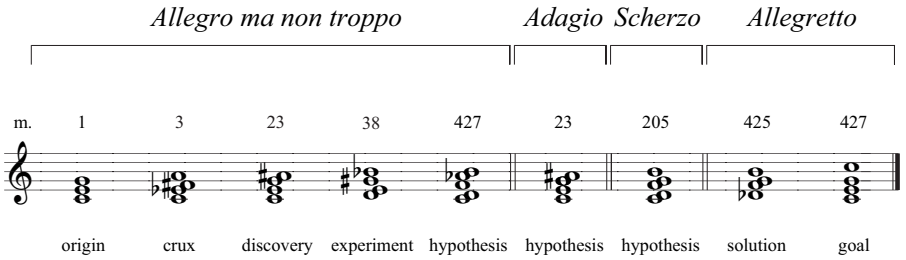
51 Thus, I am in only partial agreement with John Gingerich, who wrote: 'In the finale of the Quintet the cyclicism is at once more extensive and more cryptic: extensive, in the sense that Schubert refers, however obliquely, to all of the movements that have preceded; cryptic, because these references are not quotations. And the Quintet marks an important innovation in Schubert's cyclic procedures in another important way: as I

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Undeniably dramatic, the Quintet's comprehensive contextual process nevertheless is thoroughly musical in nature.

The following schematic summarizes the essential harmonic events within the Quintet's contextual process:

Ex. 31 Summary of the Quintet's contextual process



The opening of the Quintet represents a point of repose, of 'origin', whose consonant tonic triad is challenged by the dissonance of the crux of the composition's problem. A development later in the *Allegro*, the German augmented sixth of bar 23, leads to another, the French augmented sixth of bar 38. Exploration of the problem's components eventually leads to a formal 'hypothesis' at the end of the *Allegro*, whose content reflects some advance, yet no satisfying success. Further explorations in the *Adagio* and *Scherzo* lead to similar hypotheses, each different, each seemingly closer to solving the 'problem', yet neither impressing as completely satisfactory. Finally, in the *Allegretto*, following a 'flash of insight', a satisfactory solution arises in the final bars, formed from a variety of elements that emerged in the course of the Quintet. As this suggests, Schubert simulates a recursive strategy of study, discovery, hypothesis and

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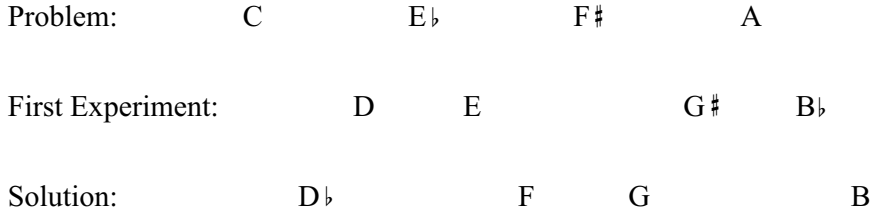
have indicated, the final emphatic D♭–C cadence is not prepared, and makes no sense within the isolated context of the finale. Its meaning is precisely in its reference to the key relationships within the middle movements, and in its lack of organic assimilation. In these works [the Quartet in A minor and the Quintet in C major] the movements are not knit together by thematic derivations from a common melodic motive or rhythmic cell. Instead of the quintessentially Beethovenian unification of a work through "motivische Arbeit," Schubert recombines themes previously presented in a different context, establishes new ties among them, and probes the relationship between identity and context. Instead of a unifying device that is capable of establishing continuity and coherence on a subliminal level, Schubert's cyclicism demands from his listeners a conscious play of memory.' Gingerich, *Schubert's Beethoven Project: The Chamber Music, 1824–1828*, 439–40. Actually, the final gesture, C–D♭–C, *has* been prepared for since the very first phrase of the Quintet, implied by the ubiquitous semitonal neighbour figures originally introduced within the basic shape and developed over the course of the work, and it makes perfect sense in the context of the finale. And while the four movements of the Quintet 'are not knit together by thematic derivations from a common melodic motive or rhythmic cell', all proceed from the complex of components that make up its basic shape. Schubert's innovation, then, consists of the creation of a profoundly pregnant musical gesture – the basic shape – whose potential is systematically explored and exploited as the Quintet's contextual process unfolds from the first to the last bar. Retrospection plays an important part in its perception, yet simultaneous relation and projection also contribute to the listener's experience.

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evaluation in his composition. The Quintet's problem is solved in stages by a process that requires the entire course and content of the piece.

The 'solution' sonority that appears at the very end of the *Allegretto* participates in a extraordinary connection that extends over the Quintet. Taken together, the original crux chord of the basic shape, [C,E♭,F♯,A], that of the French augmented sixth in bar 38 of the *Allegro* {D,E,G♯,B♭}, an early harmonic 'experiment', and the solution's key sonority {D♭,F,G,B} complete the chromatic gamut. Example 32 summarizes this instance of chromatic complementation:

Ex. 32 Chromatic complementation across the Quintet



In essence, the pitch-class structure of the Quintet's 'problem' appears to have suggested two potential 'solutions'. Both play roles within the Quintet's contextual process, but by design only one ultimately succeeds.

Schubert's Evolving Image

Since the 1970s, our image of Franz Schubert has changed considerably. Enriched by musicians able to approach his music without prejudice, willing to allow it to reveal its own secrets, and possessed of fresh perspectives as well as insightful analytical techniques, the composer's creative persona now appears much more vital and innovative than ever imagined. In this regard, the present study offers a small, yet perhaps valuable, refinement. If its findings regarding the Quintet in C major are at all trustworthy, Schubert's artistic presence, long dominated by the qualities of naivety and spontaneity, also must project sophistication and circumspection. Further, the common view of Schubert's compositional style, traditionally distinguished by the elements of lyricism and improvisation, also must incorporate the motivicism and design evident in his final chamber work. Paradoxically, then, what seems most exciting now is that our portrait of Franz Schubert is still incomplete, and there is still much more to reveal.

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