STRUCTURE AND ORNAMENT IN

C. P. E. BACH'S

SECHS SONATEN MIT VERÄNDERTEN REPRISEN

by

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I

C. P. E. Bach considered free ornamentation to be an invaluable adjunct to artistic performance at the clavier, and devoted two of his keyboard collections entirely to this art, the Sechs Sonaten mit veränderten Reprisen (1760), known as the "Amalian" sonatas from their dedication to Amalia, Princess of Prussia, and the Kurze und leichte Klavierstücke mit veränderten Reprisen (2 vols., 1766 and 1768).¹ In each of these works, sections which under normal circumstances would be marked for repetition by repeat signs are recomposed and written out in full.

C.P.E. Bach's preface to the Amalian sonatas explains the special purpose of these recompositions:

It is indispensable nowadays to alter repeats. One expects it of every performer. A friend of mine goes to endless trouble to play a piece as it is written, flawlessly and in accordance with the rules of good performance; how can one not applaud

¹ H 136-140 and 126, 193-203 and 228-237.
him? Another, often pressed by necessity, makes up by his audacity in alterations for the lack of expression he shows in the written notes; the public nevertheless extols him above the former. Almost every thought is expected to be altered in the repeat, irrespective of whether the arrangement of the piece or the capacity of the performer permit it. But then it is just this altering which makes most hearers cry BRAVO, especially when it is accompanied by a long and at times exaggeratedly ornate cadenza. This leads to much abuse of those two true ornaments of performance! Such players have not even the patience to play the notes as written the first time; the overlong delay of BRAVO is unendurable. These untimely alterations are often quite contrary to the style, contrary to the spirit and contrary to the relation of one thought to another, an annoyance to most composers. Even granting that the performer has all the qualities required for altering a piece as it should be done, will he also at all times be so disposed? Will not unknown pieces present him with new difficulties? Is not the main purpose of alterations to reflect honorably on both the performer and the piece? Should he not therefore produce ideas at least as good the second time? Despite these difficulties and the abuses mentioned, good alterations keep their value always. For the rest, I refer the reader to what I said on this subject at the end of the first part of my Essay.²

By this critical stance Bach implies that the music of these collections will fulfill the following objectives: (1) Demonstrating the true use, rather than the abuse of variations, the altered repeats will maintain the style and spirit of the originals. (2) The altered repeats will be at least as good as the original, (3) they will enhance the relations between musical thoughts and elucidate compositional ideas, and (4) they will have lasting value. In William Newman's paraphrase, "the real object is to elaborate on the composer's intentions, which is why he [Bach]³

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has supplied these sample solutions of his own intentions as a guide to inexperienced performers."

This essay illustrates and substantiates these points by investigating the technical nature of Bach's art of varied repetition, and in particular by showing how the ornaments enhance the formal structure. Although any extended movement in the collections cited above would provide ample display of Bach's art of free ornamentation, I will limit my remarks to the opening Allegretto of the Amalian Sonata No. 1 in F, a movement of modest proportions and transparent form.

The binary forms of Bach's fast movements (such as this one) contain important elements of repetition and variation within themselves, even if the varied reprises are not considered. The second part of a binary form is by and large a reworking of the first part, including extensive transposed repetitions and recompositions, and only a small amount of new material (see Figure 1). Thus even discounting any varied reprises, a considerable amount of formal repetition and recomposition already exists within the structure.

Figure 1: C.P.E. Bach's binary form structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part A</th>
<th>Part B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>: Section 1</td>
<td>: Section 1(al.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>: Section 2</td>
<td>: Section 2(al.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples 1 through 4 present the four principal sections of the music delineated above in such a way as to facilitate comparison of the originals with the varied reprises. In each example the first system (A), the original form of a section, is aligned vertically with the second system (B), the varied reprise. The third system (C) provides a voice-leading reduction of the music of the first two systems, the significance of which will become apparent in the following discussion.

In the examples, measures of the original statements are referred to as 1a, 2a, etc., and the corresponding measures of the varied repetitions are designated as 1b, 2b, etc. Measure numbers with no letter attached refer to both the original and the varied forms together. Thus, Example 1, mm. 1-5 (original and varied forms) represents Part A, Section 1, comprising an opening phrase (mm. 1-3) and a modulating phrase ending with a half cadence in the dominant (mm. 4-5). Example 2, mm. 6-11, Part A, Section 2, presents a contrasting section in the dominant key, closing with a perfect authentic cadence. Mm. 6-11 are subdivided into a main phrase and a closing phrase, articulated by the perfect cadence at m. 9. Example 3, mm. 12-17, shows Part B, Section 1. As in many binary movements of the period, Part B begins with a transposition of the opening of Part A, but what follows is a developmental section concluded by a half cadence on V in mm. 15-17. Mm. 18-23 complete the movement with Part B, Section 2, in the tonic key, and conclude with a perfect cadence.

Thus, Bach's only divergence from the plan given in Figure 1 is that Section 1 of Part B is somewhat developmental in nature and is one measure longer than Section 1 of Part A. As modest as it is, this developmental characteristic intensifies the middle portion of the music and
provides the half cadence that prepares for the return to the tonic at m. 18. This transparent formal structure provides a basis for considering the structural role of Bach's varied ornaments, but first we shall turn to a consideration of Bach's technique of ornamentation in more general terms.

II

In the *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* Bach provides a useful classification of ornaments:

> Embellishments may be divided into two groups: in the first are those which are indicated by conventional signs or a few small notes; in the second are those which lack signs and consist of many short notes.  

We normally associate the first group with the word ornamentation today: trills, mordents and appoggiaturas, for example. As Bach proceeds to explain, the second group contains two types: *fermata*, or cadenzas; and diminutions, divisions, or variations. *Fermate* are normally free elaborations of important motives and/or virtuosic passagework, while diminution involves breaking up given long notes into passages of shorter, quicker notes. In the *Essay*, however, Bach limits his discussion of embellishments to the first group (ornamentation by conventional signs) and the first type of the second group (*fermata*), and explains his reasons for omitting a discussion of diminutions: "For one thing, their use is governed chiefly by taste; as a result they are too variable to classify. Further, in keyboard music they are usually written out. In any event, there is no real need for them, thanks to the adequacy of the others."^{5} While the second

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^{4} P. 80.

^{5} Ibid.
assertion seems to contravert his attitude in the preface to the Amalian Sonatas, it should be remembered that Bach’s meaning of diminution is not limited to the compositional techniques of variations or altered reprises, but includes as well the written out diminutions that enliven virtually every melody of this era. Daniel Gottlob Turk helps to clarify the nature of ornamentation by variation:

Variations are possible in a number of ways. Namely, one adds still more notes to those given . . . or one changes the given figures into others which have the same number of tones. Further, the number of notes is at times reduced . . . . It is also possible to vary by displacing the notes, as when some are lengthened and others shortened. There are additional ways of varying, for example, by alternating loud and soft, by slurring, by detaching the notes, by sustaining them, and the like.6

Nevertheless, Bach attempted to fill this lacuna in the Essay by including examples of free ornamentation in the Lessons [Probe-Stücke] which accompanied the Essay, but perhaps it was the omission of a systematic demonstration of this technique within the Essay that led to the obviously didactic display of the Amalian Sonatas seven years later.7

A further reason that Bach may not have covered the subject of diminutions in the Essay is that his colleague at the court of Frederick the Great, Johann Joachim Quantz, had already covered the topic in detail and with precision just one year earlier—in Chapter XIII, titled "Of

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7 Telemann’s *Sonates Methodiques* (1728-32) and *Trietti metodichi* (1731), with which Bach was doubtless familiar, provide earlier examples of the technique of varied reprises and probably served as models for Bach’s sonatas. The embellished versions of Corelli’s Op. V illustrate the same technique applied to string instruments at an earlier period.
Extempore Variations on Simple Intervals", in his treatise *On Playing the Flute*. There is no question that Bach was familiar with the Quantz treatise, which William Mitchell referred to as "a spur to Bach."

Examples 5 and 6 provide two samples of Quantz’s technique. Each example begins with unadorned quarter notes such as might appear in the melody of a simple composition. Next follows a *schema* of the implied harmonies of the passages, which, Quantz reminds us, must be taken into account if correct ornaments are to be selected. Then follows a selection of the variations one might utilize, including such basic devices as anticipations and trills (a), "reaching over" (b, c and d), appoggiaturas (e, n, s, u, and z), turns (f and g), and scales (m, v and y), as well as more complex combinations. By this means a skilled performer could develop complex ornamentations for simple underlying melodies. Important aspects of Quantz’ technique are his respect for harmonic structure in developing his melodic ornaments and his view of ornaments in relation not just to isolated harmonies, but to complete harmonic progressions. Thus the ornaments successfully project the underlying tonal meaning of a passage. This technique is indeed different from that of earlier generations. Perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of diminutions prior to Quantz, and certainly typical of earlier thought, *The Musical Guide* by Friederich Erhardt Niedt, concerns itself with intervals but not with harmonies or

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9 Introduction to the Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments, 7.

10 This technique is virtually the same as that used by jazz performers, where familiar "licks" embellish a given melody in the context of an underlying harmonic framework.
progression.\textsuperscript{11} It was Rameau's theory of harmony that brought these issues into sharp focus for Quantz's generation.

If Quantz's work represents the basic theory of ornamentation for C.P.E. Bach's generation, then Bach provided the supreme examples of the practice of ornamentation. The following discussion demonstrates the hypothetical possibility of connecting Quantz's theory to Bach's practice. This is not to propose any direct connection between the two, but merely to illustrate the close association that can be drawn between the thought of Quantz and the music of Bach, an association that provides for us today a means for understanding the art of variation as it was conceived in the mid-eighteenth century.

Quantz's method, as an example of contemporaneous musical thought, is especially important since it makes clear the connection between the ornamental surface of the music and the underlying background structure that lies at the heart of Bach's technique. Comparing the original and varied forms in Examples 1-4, the relationship between the original and varied forms is not immediately apparent. A quick comparison of measures 1a and 1b in Example 1 shows that while some notes are added others are removed, so that in general a consistency of activity and character is common to both the original and the variation. But it is not immediately evident just which notes are the essential notes and which are the embellishments. In the opening phrase, mm. 1-3, the original melody has 33 notes, while the altered version contains 35 notes, just two more than the original, and both share 19 identical notes.

Examples 7 and 8, then, illustrate how original and variant forms of two passages from C.P.E. Bach's sonata can be understood in terms of Quantz's theory. By a series of transformational levels the simple stepwise line given by Quantz in Example 5 develops down the left side of Example 7a into the music of m. 2a, and down the right side into the music of m. 2b. Level a) shows the placement of the simple scale-wise passage within the opening phrase of the piece. Level b) adds a simple diminution, Quantz' variation c, which animates the quarter notes. But over-use of this figure leads to modifications at level c): on the left an alternation of simple and ornamented forms provides variety, while on the right a progression from simple to complex provides a different kind of variety. Level d) applies ornamental figures to those of level c). On the left, statements of Quantz' motive q give complexity to the framework, while on the right statements of b at the beginning, switching to q later on, provide both contrast and unity with the melody on the left. The final level, e), is the music itself. On the left, a foreshortening of the first two notes provides continuity with the music which immediately precedes this passage, and a corresponding shortening of the appoggiatura to a sixteenth, animate the final form. On the right, an octave transfer of the first note (which is important for structural reasons discussed later) and a rewriting of the appoggiaturas into their true values complete the passage. This systematic application of transformations through diminution leads to highly differentiated forms that bear little outward resemblance but have an identical underlying basis.

Example 8 shows the transformational levels of the beginning of Part A, Section 2 (mm. 6-7) in its original and variant forms, beginning with the simple stepwise progression given by Quantz in Example 6. Since m. 7 repeats m. 6 as an echo in both versions, four variants
develop here. Level a) shows a simple harmonic basis in two inversions which provides the essential distinguishing factor between mm. 6 and 7. In level b) a chordal skip enlivens the lengthy first sonority, in each case resulting in a different pattern. C is taken from the underlying harmony for mm. 6a and 6b, but in mm. 7a and 7b, where C occurs in the bass, G is used instead. The octave leap of m. 7a prompts the octave transfers in mm. 6b and 7b, resulting in four different but interrelated forms. Level c) introduces an initial rhythmic idea based on arpeggiation. In measure 6a of level d), complementation of the G-E-C arpeggio leads to B-D-F within the span of a single beat, introducing sixteenth notes. Reinforcement of the new rhythmic pattern leads to the anticipatory C in the first beat of m. 6a (level d), while mm. 7a, 6b and 7b receive corresponding rhythmic activity. The stilted rhythm of level d) is replaced by a more flowing one at level e), introducing further variety in each measure. At this stage the upward arpeggio of m. 6b provides contrast with mm. 6a and 7b; and 7b, while contrasting the upward motion of m. 6b also shows greater similarity with mm. 6a and 7a. The appoggiaturas with ornamented resolutions in level f) provide a similar terminus to each statement, ensuring the unity of the whole. Thus Quantz’s theory of diminution allows us to see that the connection between the original and the variation in Bach’s music is through the underlying voice-leading progression in simple notes. Without this connection to the underlying structure the relationship between the original and the variation cannot be clearly understood. Bach himself comes fairly close to spelling this out when he says: "Above all, to understand many things more clearly, the performer must possess a knowledge of thorough bass."\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Essay, 82.
I would like to hypothesize at this point that an underlying voice-leading such as that abstracted in System C of Examples 1 through 4, represents the essential notes, while the music itself, in both its original and altered forms, represents two variations through diminution. System C, which strips away the ornaments, is characterized by simple motives and rhythms, unambiguous counterpoint, and simple lines punctuated by cadences in three parts. Thus the A and B forms are related to one another not as theme and variation, but as variation one and variation two of an underlying theme that never appears in its naked state, only in its ornamental garb. This underlying music is not far removed from a simple continuo texture—or from a Schenkerian foreground reduction—and herein lies the connection to C. P. E. Bach’s conception of thoroughbass as the structural basis of the music of his time.¹³

III

Before considering how the varied ornaments relate to the underlying structure, it is important to establish the extent to which the voice-leading framework of System C provides a coherent and convincing harmonic and melodic, even motivic, basis for the elaborate texture of the music. The initial interval, C-A, provides the basis for important connections throughout the composition. It also begins the modulating phrase (pickup to m. 4) which is itself an expansion of the full opening motive, C-A-G-F. The descending third A-G-F of this passage,

through transposition, becomes G-F-E, the basis of the main part of the secondary area, mm. 6c and 7c (Example 2). The rising third, A-B-C in m. 8c, followed in m. 9a by an incidental C-A, is re-used in the closing phrase, mm. 9-11. Finally in m. 11, a leap from C to A in the original register ends the first part.

As noted before, the developmental section begins with a direct repetition of the opening in the dominant, see Example 3, system C, giving a symmetrical binary character to the whole. The C-A motive then provides the basis for a sequence of descending thirds and rising sixths that characterizes this area as a development. In the music itself this underlying pattern is overlaid with numerous appoggiaturas. Although a rising third C-E provides the structural basis for mm. 16c-17c, Bach is able to utilize the original rising sixth C-A in an expanded form as the working out of the altered reprise, mm. 16b-17b, uniting this divergent part of the composition with the beginning. A descending third, C-B-flat-A, in the bass at m. 17, returns the music to the tonic and also foreshadows the music that follows, for in mm. 18c-23c, C-B-flat-A (G-F-E transposed to the tonic key) is revealed as the true basis of the secondary section (Example 4). At this point the initial ideas of C-A, filled in as a third C-B-flat-A, and A-B-C, and the thirds A-G-F, and G-F-E, have all been shown as variants of the unifying idea of a melodic third, the underlying motivic basis of the entire composition.

Neither the process of ornamentation of m. 2 and mm. 6-7 described above nor the development of the underlying motivic plan outlined here should be construed as Bach's working method. Rather, they show the nature of Bach's variation technique and its relationship to contemporaneous theories of ornamentation in general terms. While we cannot know the precise
paths by which Bach reached his goal of the complete work of art, we can explore the types of paths he may have traversed.

It is useful at this point to consider how the simple structure of System C relates to deeper levels of structure. Example 9, the middleground and background levels, illustrates that the C established in Section A acts as the *Kopf ton* for the entire movement, while the A represents an inner voice that moves to G at the point of modulation.\(^{14}\) It is noteworthy that the upper neighbor motion to D in the cadence of Section A is reflected in similar motions to A at the end of Section 2 and again to the high D in the obligatory register at the end of Section 4. The Kopf ton C is further reinforced by its restatement over the first inversion tonic at the beginning of Section 4.

IV

We are now in a position to consider how the arrangement of the embellishments between the original and the varied forms enhances the relations between musical thoughts and logically develops compositional ideas, strengthening the form of the work as a whole. Particular attention is paid to the interdependence of the original and varied forms, a crucial point that has not been stressed in previous discussions of Bach’s music.

Essential to Bach’s technique, as will be seen, is the continual balancing of new ideas with old ones—the consistent reintegration of ideas in such a way that nothing remains unresolved or unaccounted for at the conclusion of the composition. It will first be observed that the notes

\(^{14}\) This configuration is similar to that discussed by Ernst Oster in his important footnote to Schenker’s discussion of Sonata form in *Free Composition* (New York: Schirmer, 1979), 139-40.
of the original and varied forms are sometimes quite contrasting and at other points quite similar, or indeed identical. In Example 1, mm. 2a and 2b, for instance, are quite different, while mm. 3a and 3b are comparatively similar. It would be simplistic to think that Bach had no new ideas for the passages that are not altered. Rather, the identity of these passages is important in clarifying formal relationships. Mm. 3a and 3b are similar because they contain the formal close of the opening tonic statement, and are to be recognized as filling the same function. Likewise the ends of mm. 6 and 7, including the turn figures, are consistent: they provide the point of continuity, the foil against which the various elaborations are contrasted. And mm. 11 and 23 contain very little variation because they provide the formal conclusion to each section and to the entire movement. The greatest degree of variation, by contrast, generally occurs during the opening and middle portions of a given phrase. The last six measures of this piece round out the movement and complete its thematic process by restating the structural content of mm. 18a-23a with the ornamental texture of 6b-11b.

The first new idea of the varied reprise is the octave displacement of the first note, C, which is now linked to the following A by an appoggiatura, giving the C-B-flat-A motive and highlighting C as Kopfion. The new idea of octave displacement is confirmed by repetition—in the F at the end of m. 1b, the low C at the end of m. 3b, and later the high A in m. 8b. The sudden descent of a seventh between mm. 1b and 2b, which results from the octave shift, substitutes for the ascending second, and the need to confirm this new interval leads to the otherwise unnecessary alteration of F to G in beat four of m. 9b and beat two of m. 10b. The descending seventh is also confirmed by the change from C to D at the beginning of m. 9b; and
later, at mm. 20b-21b, the transposition of the passage to the tonic gives the original seventh
F-G with its original harmony, audibly linking these distant and otherwise contrasting passages.

The B-flat-A appoggiatura figure of m. 1a is also confirmed through repetition, immediately in m. 1b where the original triplet figure is converted to continuous sixteenths, and several more times in m. 4b, by which means the underlying thematic connection of the two phrases of Section 1 is enhanced. Now in the dominant key, the flatted seventh, B flat, in the half cadence at m. 5a establishes a correlation with the cadence at m. 3 by mimicking the E flat in m. 3.\textsuperscript{15} The flatted-seventh then provides a foil for the passage at m. 5b, which includes a raised note, G sharp, and a "correction" of the B flat to B natural, whereby Bach establishes a new idea of opposition between raised and lowered tones.

Comparing mm. 9a-11a with 9b-11b (Example 2), we note a rhythmic displacement by the long appoggiatura at the cadence point in m. 9. This important unifying feature provides a rhythmic echo of the half cadence at m. 5, but it is also an expansion of the appoggiatura figure that begins m. 10a, as is made clear by the elongation of the eighths to quarters at the beginning of m. 10b.

Following the reference to the opening motive in m. 12a, the developmental section is no longer based on the voice-leading of the primary section. Nevertheless, Bach relates the half cadence at m. 15a directly to the cadence in m. 3 by the E flat neighbor tone, while echoing the descending motion from the high B flat of the half cadence at m. 5a. It should also be noted

\textsuperscript{15} This gesture is based on the practice of flating the leading tone when it is the apex of a passage. This ancient technique that antedates polyphony is known by the saying \textit{una nota super la semper est canendum fa}. It is common enough in Bach’s music to be considered a mannerism, and is also seen with some frequency in Haydn’s sonatas.
that the rising figure of mm. 16a-17a is not dissimilar to that in m. 2a. The music from m. 18a to 23a then is simply a transposition of mm. 6a to 11a, but Bach utilizes the echo fragments at contrasting octaves, taking full advantage of the possibilities of this inner repetition.

Of course the varied repetition of the developmental passage (System 2 of Example 3) begins as a transposition of m. 1b to the dominant key. And the full importance of the original octave transfer in the altered form of the opening can now be appreciated. By beginning the final reprise on the high G Bach provides a convincing stepwise connection with the previous F at the end of m. 23a, whereas the low G of the original (pickup to m. 12a) would have caused a disjunct downward leap. That is, the variant adds to the registral coherence of the whole. Mm. 12b-17b are also Bach’s last chance to make reference to the opposition of sharps and flats, the one idea that has not had any reinforcement since its first appearance in m. 5b. In m. 15b he recomposes the flatted passage of m. 15a so as to incorporate the sharpened idea of m. 5b, emphasizing the dramatic conflict and fulfilling simultaneously the obligations of variation and repetition. Conveniently for the analogy, both sharpened passages, 5b and 15b, function similarly as preparations to half cadences, at comparable locations in each half of the piece.

One might expect that the music of mm. 18b-23b would simply repeat mm. 18a-23a with the ornamentation of mm. 6b-11b, but two interesting divergences occur. First, in order to integrate the rising broken figure of m. 18b as a continuation of the figure in the left hand, this music is transposed down an octave, and as compensation m. 19b is placed in the higher octave (the obligatory register). Second, while C would be expected as the high note of the final figure in m. 21b, giving the descending seventh in analogy with m. 9b, this variation is not
upheld. Two considerations help to explain why Bach reverts to the original (B flat not C) for the last restatement. Firstly, the more direct repetition of this passage becomes a confirmation of the original, resolving the movement more completely, and secondly this descending sixth motive prepares for the short transition section to the second movement, illustrated by the the brackets in Example 10.

V

Bach warns in the Essay:

Above all things, a prodigal use of embellishments must be avoided. Regard them as spices which may ruin the best dish or gewgaws which may deface the most perfect building. Notes of no great moment and those sufficiently brilliant by themselves should remain free of them, for embellishments serve only to increase the weight and import of notes and to differentiate them from others. Otherwise, I would commit the same error as orators who try to place an impressive accent on every word; everything would be alike and consequently unclear.  

Analytical study of Bach’s embellishment and variation techniques in the light of formal and voice-leading structures reveals important relationships that are often veiled by the complex surface of the music. Bach’s variations give not only variety but especially coherence to the whole, integrating the sections as they unfold and develop. Each new figure recombines with the others, giving a continuously evolving and consolidating network of motivic associations. By this means the varied reprises achieve Bach’s stated purpose of enhancing the relations between musical thoughts and providing logical support and fleshing out of compositional ideas.

16 Essay, 81.
And it is these virtues—and the consummate artistry that Bach displays in their realization—that give Bach's varied reprises their lasting value.
Example 4: Part B, Section 2.
Example 6: Quantz, On Playing the Flute, 142.
Example 7: Hypothetical Derivation of m. 2.

a) 2-a

b) 2-b

c) 2-c

d) 2-d

e) 2-e
Example 8: Hypothetical Derivation of mm. 6-7.

a) 6-a

b) 7-a

6-b

7-b

c) 6

f

p

f

p

d) 7

f

p

f

p

e) 6

f

p

f

p

f

p

f

p

f

p

f

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f

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