

THE TRANSGRESSIVE MODERNISM OF BERG'S
STRING QUARTET
—
AS TOLD BY ADORNO

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“analysis is itself a form in its own right, like translation, criticism and commentary, as one of those media through which the very work unfolds. Works need analysis for their ‘truth content’ (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) to be revealed”

Adorno ([1969] 1982, 176)

BERG, STREICHQUARTETT, OP. 3, I

- ▲ Composed in Vienna in 1910, published 1920
- Berg's first mature work, leaving Schoenberg's instruction
- Harmonic language of free atonality
- "High-point of 20th-century radicalism"
- ▼ Adorno was a student of Berg's in 1925

“Berg met not only the authentic requirements of the form, but also those of his own explosive impulses, and to that end maintained the conflict between them.

...

What results from the conflict, however, is nothing less than the *liquidation of the sonata.*”

[*Das Ende des Konflikts jedoch ist nichts anderes als die **Liquidation der Sonata.***]

Adorno ([1968] 1994, 54)

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE SONATA

GUSTAV MAHLER, SYMPHONY NO. 9, *ANDANTE*

“The *omnipresent antithetical quality makes a development*, as a sphere reserved for colliding opposites, *superfluous*; thus the liquidation of sonata form by the New Music is initiated in Mahler's Ninth.”

Adorno ([1970] 1991, 157)

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE SONATA

GUSTAV MAHLER, SYMPHONY NO. 9, *ANDANTE*

ALBAN BERG, *VIER STÜCKE FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLAVIER*, OP. 5

“Berg’s individuality becomes evident precisely through the *tension with the recognizable model...*

The paradoxical stasis of the Clarinet Pieces no longer knows a ‘theme’; they are, to overstate the case, music out of nothing. *If Berg liquidates the sonata by extending the developmental process over the entire musical structure, here the ‘material’ itself falls victim to the liquidation tendency;* if everything is development then any independently defined material loses its meaning.”

Adorno ([1968] 1994, 68–71)

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE SONATA

GUSTAV MAHLER, SYMPHONY NO. 9, *ANDANTE*

ALBAN BERG, *VIER STÜCKE FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLAVIER*, OP. 5

ALBAN BERG, *DREI ORCHESTERSTÜCKE*, OP. 6

“*The formal function of the Orchestral Pieces*—and the central difficulty they pose to understanding—*is to allow the themes to be created by themselves...*”

[In no. 3], the idea—starkly abbreviated in Mahler, radically developed in Berg—of *shifting the ‘exposition’ into the introduction which precedes the developmental treatment of the main section*, is quite obviously bound up with the liquidation of the sonata.”

Adorno ([1968] 1994, 74, 82)

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE SONATA

GUSTAV MAHLER, SYMPHONY NO. 9, *ANDANTE*

ALBAN BERG, *VIER STÜCKE FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLAVIER*, OP. 5

ALBAN BERG, *DREI ORCHESTERSTÜCKE*, OP. 6

ALBAN BERG, *LYRISCHE SUITE*

“The first movement summarizes the liquidation process once again...

The *development technique has become total; there is no longer a single note that is not the result of strict motivic development.*

The old finale problem becomes a paradoxical formal idea as had the sonata problem in the first movement. *If, after Beethoven, no finale was able to close in affirmation, this one simply adopts the principle of infinity as the expression of the finale's negativity.* It thereby pays homage to the liquidation of the sonata.”

Adorno ([1968] 1994, 105–6, 112)

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE SONATA

GUSTAV MAHLER, SYMPHONY NO. 9, *ANDANTE*

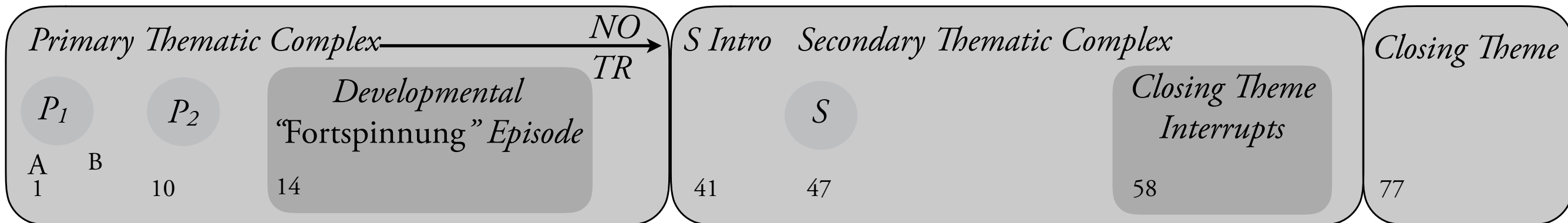
ALBAN BERG, *VIER STÜCKE FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLAVIER*, OP. 5

ALBAN BERG, *DREI ORCHESTERSTÜCKE*, OP. 6

ALBAN BERG, *LYRISCHE SUITE*

- ▲ Development is shrunken or completely removed
- Exposition and Recapitulation depend upon motivic development
- The modern sonata serves as a critique of the sonata paradigm
- Liquidation is a dialectical phenomenon for Adorno
- ▼ Progress is spurred by critical negation of convention

EXPOSITION

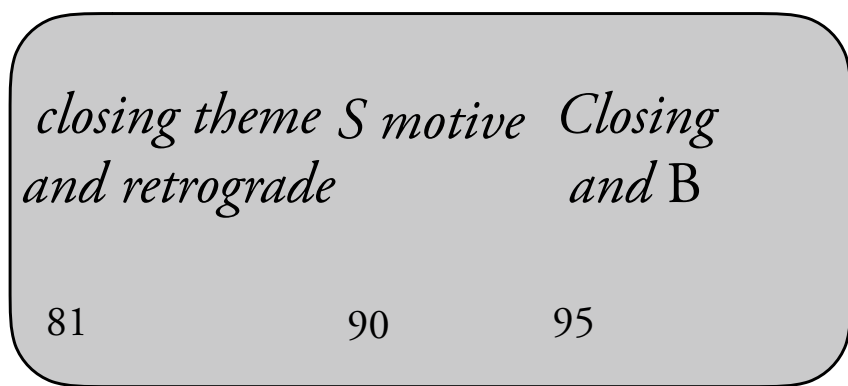


DEVELOPMENT

BERG, *STREICHQUARTETT, OP. 3, I*

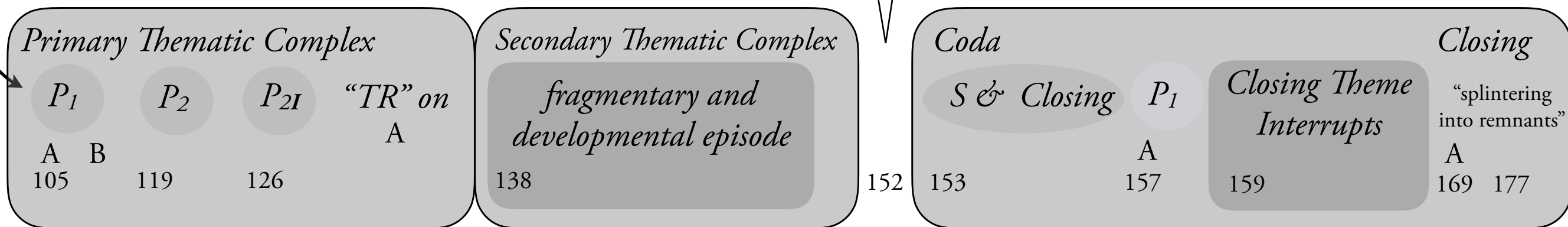
cf. Adorno [1968] 1994, 53–9

"No model can be found" (53)

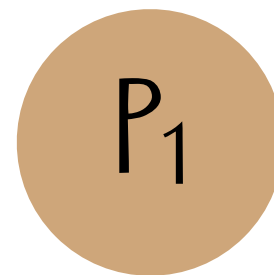


"Completely seamless return to the beginning" (58)

RECAPITULATION

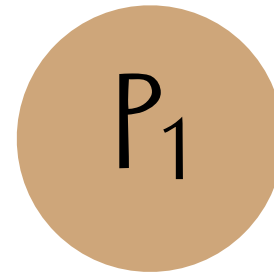


a) *f* *6* *a (m2)* *sfz* *p* *NB pp*



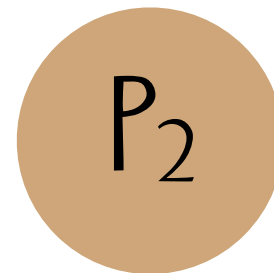
ANTECEDENT

b) *p* *M3* *3* *pp*



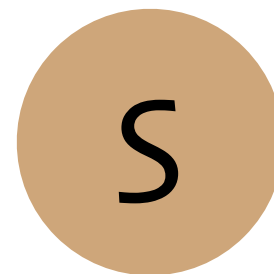
CONSEQUENT

c) *p* *b (014)* *b*



CONTRASTING
IDEA

d) *p* *pp* *3* *3* *p* *c* *d* *e (012)*



SECONDARY
THEME

f

A: "main motive" (023468)

Violin 2
m. 1

$x \in (012) \quad \langle -1, -1 \rangle$
 $y \in (024) \quad \langle -2, -2 \rangle$
 $z \in (014) \quad \langle -4, +3 \rangle$

The image shows a musical staff for Violin 2, measure 1. It features a 32nd-note sextuplet. A bracket labeled 'A: "main motive" (023468)' spans the first six notes. Within this sextuplet, three intervals are highlighted: 'y' (red) between the first and second notes, 'x' (blue) between the second and third notes, and 'z' (green) between the fourth and fifth notes. Arrows indicate the direction of the intervals. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter).

“The piece begins with a supple main motive in 32nd-note sextuplets, whose *remnant*, the half-step, is retained and varied through chromatic interval expansion.” ([1968] 1994, 56)

A

$$x \in (012) \quad \langle -1, -1 \rangle$$

$$y \in (024) \quad \langle -2, -2 \rangle$$

$$z \in (014) \quad \langle -4, +3 \rangle$$

A

NB (z): $\langle -3, -1 \rangle$

$x \langle +1, +1 \rangle$ M3

$x \langle +1, -2 \rangle$ m2

A.9

$x \langle +1, -2 \rangle$

$x/y \text{ exp. } \langle -5, -5 \rangle$

B

$y \langle -2, -2 \rangle$ B.6

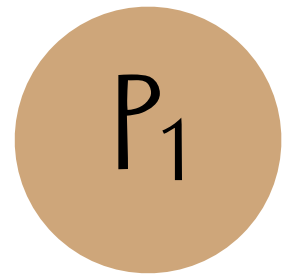
M3

x

x

x

$y \langle +2, +2 \rangle$



ANTECEDENT

$$x \in (012) \quad \langle -1, -1 \rangle$$

$$z \in (014) \quad \langle -4, +3 \rangle$$

A

NB (z): $\langle -3, -1 \rangle$

$x \langle +1, +1 \rangle$

$x/y \text{ exp. } \langle -5, -5 \rangle$

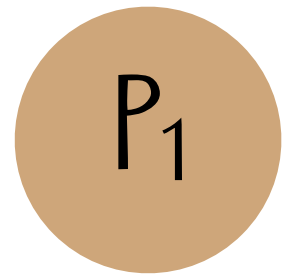
M3

$x \langle +1, -2 \rangle$

A.9

x

$x \langle +1, -2 \rangle$



CONSEQUENT

Violin 1 entrance

$$x \in (012) \quad \langle -1, -1 \rangle$$

$$y \in (024) \quad \langle -2, -2 \rangle$$

B

(skip \uparrow - leap \downarrow - step \downarrow)

B-6

$x \langle +1, +1 \rangle$

$x \langle +1, -2 \rangle$

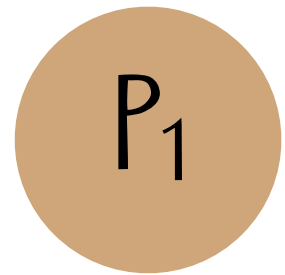
y

$y \langle +2, +2 \rangle$

M3

3

M3



$$x \in (012) \quad \langle -1, -1 \rangle$$

$$y \in (024) \quad \langle -2, -2 \rangle$$

CONSEQUENT

Violin 1 entrance

B

(skip \uparrow - leap \downarrow - step \downarrow)

B-6

..... projected m2

6

M3

y

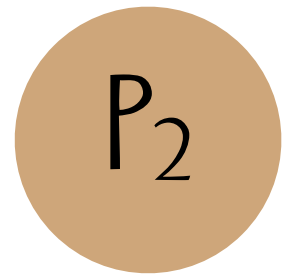
3

M3

x $\langle +1, +1 \rangle$

x $\langle +1, -2 \rangle$

y $\langle +2, +2 \rangle$



CONTRASTING
IDEA

$$x \in (012) \langle -1, -1 \rangle$$

$$z \in (014) \langle -4, +3 \rangle$$

10

$Z \langle T_{+1}, I_5 \rangle [E, F, G^\#]$

$z^2 (0347)$

$z \langle +1, +3 \rangle$

$x \langle -1, -3 \rangle$

$x^2 \langle -1, -1, -1, -1 \rangle$

$z [E, F, A^b]$

A-10

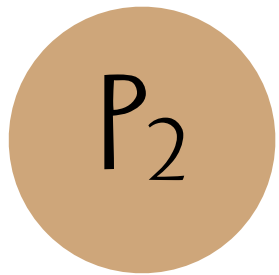
A-9

A-17

6

6

“In the tenth bar the contrasting idea enters...and is immediately combined contrapuntally with the main motive.” (Ibid., 57)



CONTRASTING
IDEA

10

$Z \langle T_{+1}, I_5 \rangle [E, F, G^\#]$

A-10

A-9

A-17

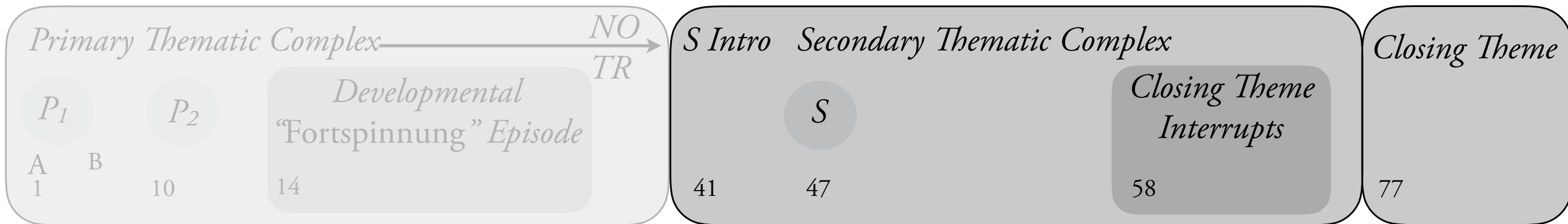
6

6

6

$X \langle -1, -1 \rangle$

EXPOSITION



DEVELOPMENT



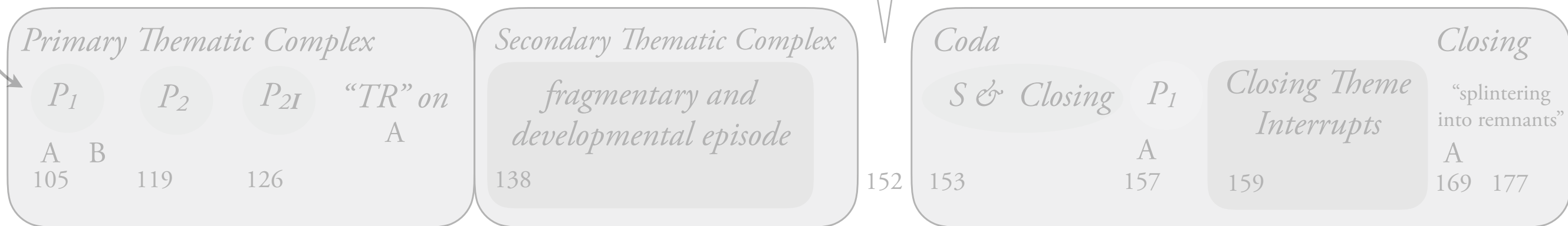
“Completely seamless return to the beginning” (58)

BERG, STREICHQUARTETT, OP. 3, I

cf. Adorno [1968] 1994, 53–9

“No model can be found” (53)

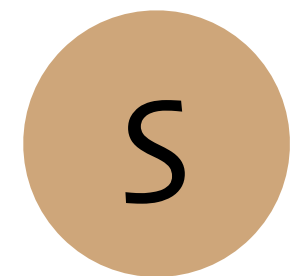
RECAPITULATION



47 H-

The musical score consists of three staves: Treble, Alto, and Bass. Measure 47 is marked with a fermata (H-). Annotations include:

- Red:** A bracket labeled y spans the first two notes of the treble staff in measure 48. A red box encloses the first two measures of the alto staff.
- Blue:** Brackets labeled x are placed under various groups of notes in the treble, alto, and bass staves across measures 48-51.
- Green:** Brackets labeled z are placed over triplets in the treble staff in measures 49 and 50.
- Purple:** A bracket labeled $x/y \text{ exp.}$ is placed over notes in the bass staff in measure 49.
- Black:** A fermata (H-) is placed over notes in the bass staff in measure 49.
- Other:** A bracket labeled x^2 spans the last two measures of the alto staff in measure 51.



SECONDARY THEME
FIRST HALF

B

B

7

M3 ascent *d5 descent* 3 *M3 ascent* *d5 descent* *stepwise descent* *stepwise descent*

P₁

B*

B*

47

↓ ↑ ↑

B*

B*

B*

B*

51

S

B*

B*

B*

56

↑ ↓ ↓

↑ ↓ ↓

↓ ↓ ↑

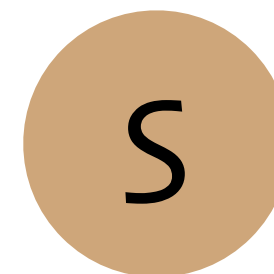
remove change of direction

↓ ↓

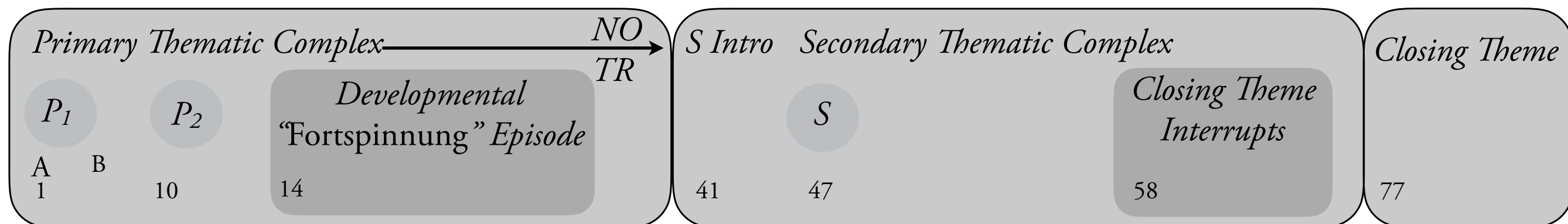
A musical score consisting of three staves: Treble, Alto, and Bass. The score includes measures 51, 54, and 56. Annotations in blue include T_5 and T_{10} with dashed arrows pointing to specific notes, and x^* labels placed near the notes.

$$x \in (012) \quad \langle -1, -1 \rangle$$

$$x^* \in (012) \quad \{+1, +11, +2\}$$



EXPOSITION



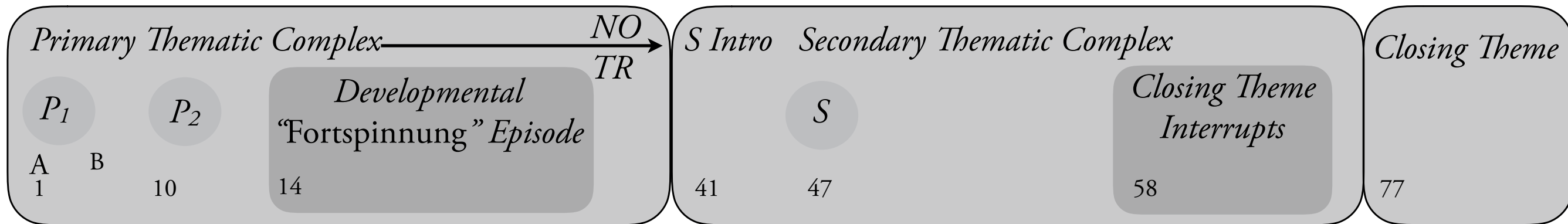
BERG, STREICHQUARTETT, OP. 3, I

cf. Adorno [1968] 1994, 53–9

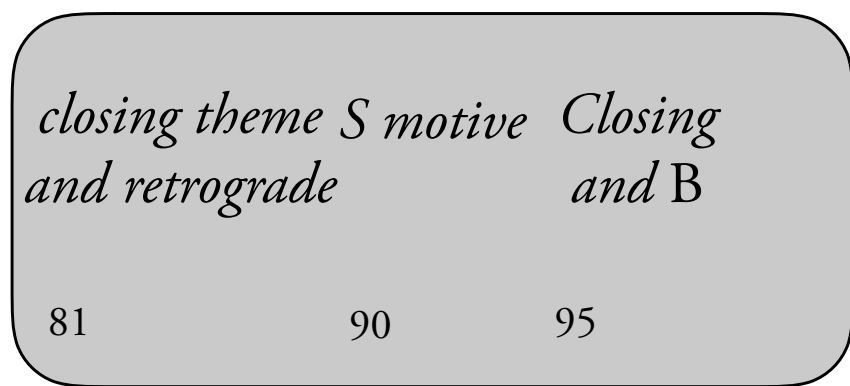
“Instead of providing a TR that leads to a medial caesura and thence to an S, as with the two-part exposition, the continuous exposition, especially in Haydn’s works, usually fills up most of the expositional space with the relentlessly ongoing, expansive spinning-out (*Fortspinnung*) of an initial idea or its immediate consequences.”

(Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 51)

EXPOSITION

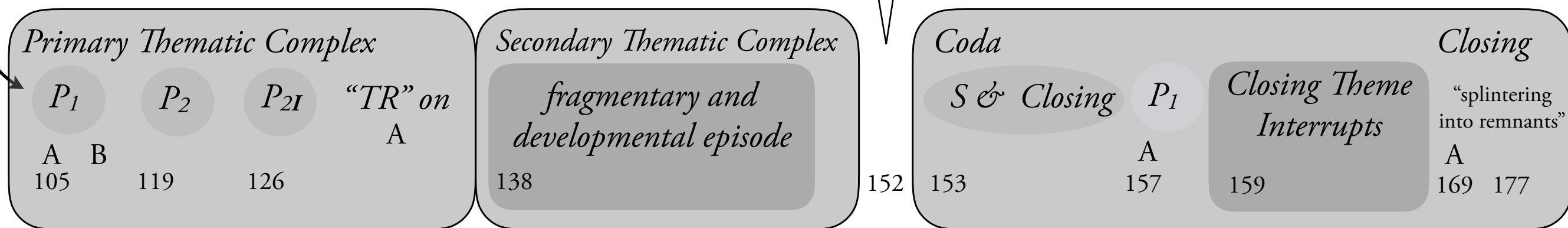


DEVELOPMENT

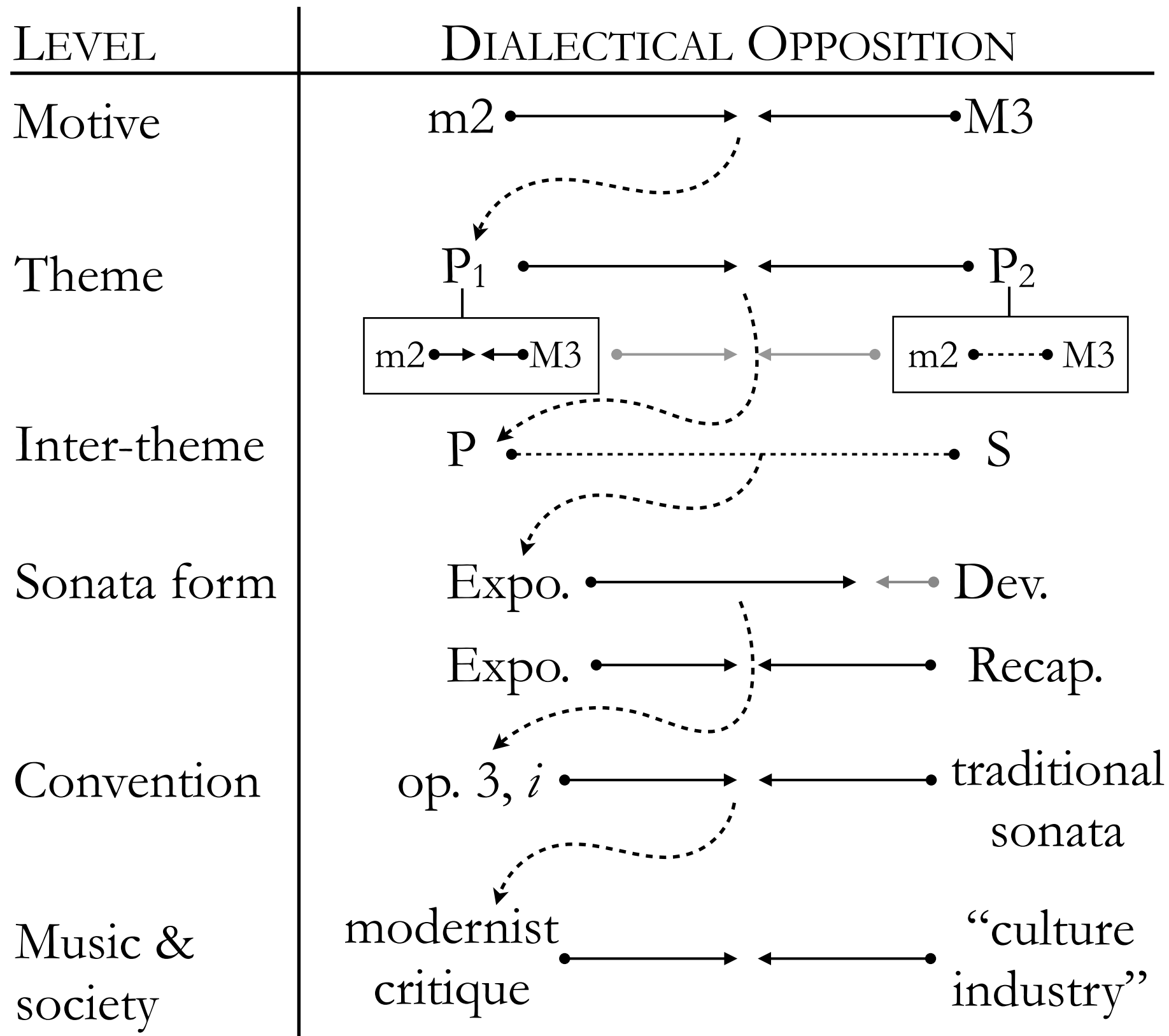


BERG, STREICHQUARTETT, OP. 3, I
cf. Adorno [1968] 1994, 53–9

RECAPITULATION



CONCLUSIONS



“Art revolts against its essential concepts while being inconceivable without them.”

THANK YOU

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