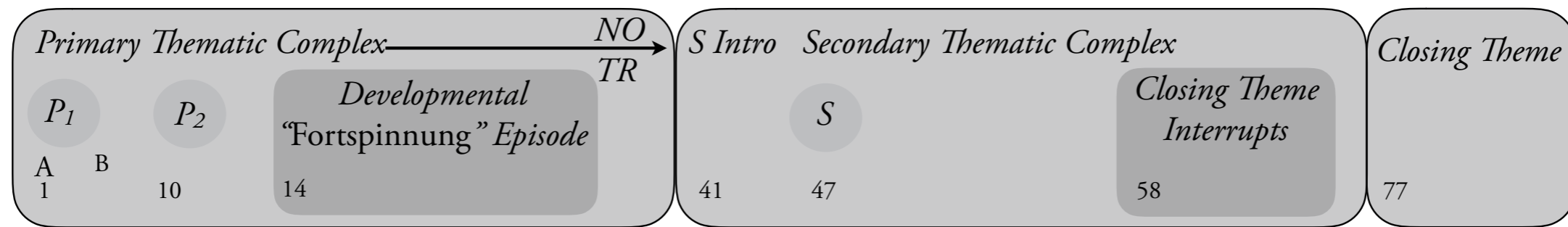


THE TRANSGRESSIVE MODERNISM OF BERG'S
STRING QUARTET
—
AS TOLD BY ADORNO

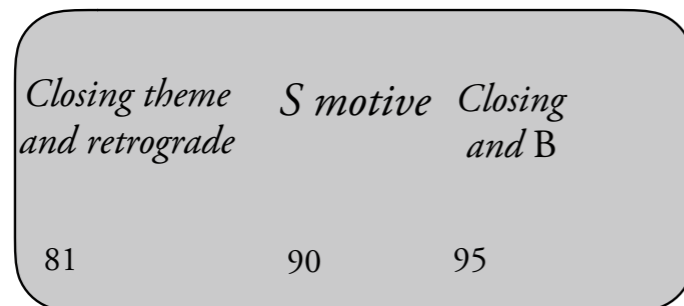
Sam Reenan
Eastman School of Music | University of Rochester

Figure 1. A diagram of Adorno's formal analysis.

EXPOSITION



DEVELOPMENT



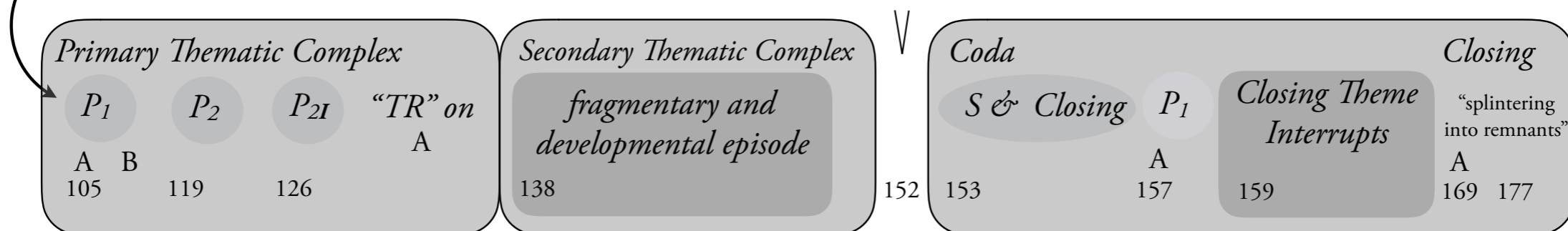
"Completely seamless return to the beginning" (58)

BERG, STREICHQUARTETT, OP. 3, I

cf. Adorno [1968] 1994, 53–9

"No model can be found" (53)

RECAPITULATION



Example 1. Reproductions of the four examples Adorno references in the course of his analysis of the first movement of Berg's *Streichquartett*, op. 3

- P_1
ANTECEDENT
- P_1
CONSEQUENT
- P_2
CONTRASTING
IDEA
- S
SECONDARY
THEME

A: "main motive" (023468)

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

Example 2. A motivic analysis of main motive *A*, with its three constituent trichordal motives *x*, *y*, and *z*

Example 4. The “contrasting idea,” **P2**, of the primary thematic complex. Motives *x* and *z* figure prominently in the upper strings, whereas the cello employs three transposed statements of main motive *A* along with a large-scale *x* motive.

P₂

CONTRASTING
IDEA

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

$m2$

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

$z^2 (0347)$

z

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

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

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

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

x

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

A_{-10}

A_{-9}

A_{-17}

6

6

6

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

Example 5. The secondary theme, mm. 47–57. Motives *x* and *z* occur throughout in permutation. Annotations with an asterisk are “variants” of the original primary-theme motivic cells.



Example 6. An account of the variants of main motive **B** across the exposition.

Diagram on the left:
 Row 1: ↑ ↓ ↓
 Row 2: ↑ ↓ ↓
 Row 3: ↓ ↓ ↑
 Row 4: ↓ ↓ (with a curved arrow pointing to the first ↓ and the text "remove change of direction")

Score annotations:
 Measure 7: **B** (M3 ascent, d5 descent, 3, stepwise descent)
 Measure 47: **B*** (invert)
 Measure 51: **B*** (3, 3)
 Measure 56: **B*** (remove change of direction)

Large bracket on the right labeled **S** encompasses measures 47, 51, and 56.

Example 7. The variant of x that occurs in the secondary theme (mm. 51–57), moving from Cello to Viola and finally to Violin 1.

Score annotations:
 Measure 51: x^*
 Measure 54: x^* (Transformation T_5)
 Measure 56: x^* (Transformation T_{10})

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

$$x^* \in (012) \quad \langle +1, +11, +2 \rangle$$

APPENDIX: Adorno's usage of *Liquidation*

“The Liquidation of the Sonata”

“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.” ([1968] 1994, 54)

Mahler, Symphony No. 9, iv

“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.” ([1971] 1991, 157)

Berg, *Vier Stücke für Klarinette und Piano*, 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.” ([1968] 1994, 68–71)

Berg, *Drei Orchesterstücke*, op. 6

“The formal function of the Orchestral Piece—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.” ([1968] 1994, 74, 82)

Berg, *Lyrische Suite*

“The first movement summarizes the liquidation process once again... Now the development, the dialectical driving force of the sonata form, is absent altogether... 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.” ([1968] 1994, 105–7, 112)

Aesthetic Theory

“What during the heroic years of modern art was perceived as its meaning maintained the ordering elements of traditional art as determinately *negated*; their *liquidation* results in a smoothly functioning but empty identity. Even artworks freed from harmonistic-symmetrical ideas are formally characterized by similarity and contrast, static and dynamic, exposition, transition, development, identity, return.” ([1970] 1997, 159)

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