### A. J. Greimas's Narrative Grammar and the Analysis of Sonata Form<sup>1</sup>

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Since the publication of Charles Rosen's *The Classical Style* in 1972, the musicological community has recognized that certain sonata forms of Mozart and Beethoven can be placed in a dramatic and evolving interplay of tension and relaxation.<sup>2</sup> Movements from works of the Classical period that project a cathartic or dramatic aspect are necessarily located within the narrative domain. It is in this sense that I propose to investigate the narrative character of certain sonata forms in the context of Greimas's rules of narrative grammar. First, however, it will be necessary to review the teachings of Greimas as codified in his 1979 *Dictionnaire* and in his article "Eléments d'une grammaire narrative."<sup>3</sup>

For Greimas, fundamental grammar is composed of a constitutional or taxonomic model and its narrativization via operations of syntax, logic, and ordering. This taxonomic model may equally be named "the elementary structure of signification" or "the semiotic square." The achronic or static constitutional model may be defined by as the juxtaposition of pairs of contradictory terms.

<sup>1</sup>First appeared as "Application de certaines règles de la sémantique structurale de Greimas à l'approche analytique de la forme sonate. Analyse du l<sup>o</sup>er mouvement de la sonate Op. 2 No. 3 de Beethoven," in *Analyse musicale et perception, Collection "Conférences et Séminaires" No. 1*, Observatoire Musical Français, Université de Paris IV (1994): 117–137. Translated for *Intégral* by Evan Jones and Scott Murphy. *Intégral* would like to thank Professor Tim Scheie for his assistance in preparing the translation.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972).

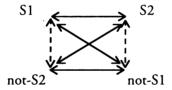
<sup>3</sup>Algirdas Julien Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1979); Algirdas Julien Greimas, "Eléments d'une grammaire narrative," in *Du sens* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), pp. 157–184. (For English trans. see footnote 5).

### Greimas writes:

By semiotic square is meant the visual representation of the logical articulation of any semantic category. The elementary structure of signification, when defined —in a first step—as a relation at least between two terms, rests only on a distinction of opposition which characterizes the paradigmatic axis of language[...]

It is sufficient to start with the opposition S1/S2 [A/not-A], and, while considering that the logical nature of this relation remains undetermined, to call it the *semantic axis*, in order to realize that each of the terms of this axis may separately enter into a new relation of the type S-not-S [that is to say, S1-not-S1 or S2-not-S2].

The representation of this group of relations is then given the form of a square:



It remains for us to identify these various relations one by one. 4

- (a) The first—S1/not-S1—defined by the impossibility for two terms to be present together, is known as the relation of *contradiction*, which is its static definition. From the dynamic point of view, it can be said that this is the operation of *negation*, carried out on the term S1 (or S2), which generates its contradictory not-S1 (or not-S2). Thus, starting with the two primitive terms, it is possible to generate new contradictory terms.
- (b) The second operation is that of assertion: carried out on the contradictory terms (on not-S1 and not-S2), it can be presented as an implication and may cause the two primitive terms to appear as presupposed elements of the terms asserted (not-S1 presupposes S2, not-S2 presupposes S1). If, and only if, the effect of this double assertion is to produce these two parallel implications, we are right in saying that the two presupposed primitive terms are the terms of one and the same category and that the chosen semantic axis is constitutive of a semantic category. [...]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>For this presentation of the square, I cite Greimas and Courtés's *Dictionnaire*, but with a minor terminological modification: instead of S, not-S, S, and not-S, I use S1, not-S1, S2, and not-S2.

(c) The two primitive terms [in our case: S1 and S2] are both presupposed terms: [...] they are said to enter into a relation of *reciprocal supposition* or, which comes to the same thing, a relation of *contrariety*.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than reproducing further excerpts from the *Dictionnaire*, we shall summarize the three basic relations of the semiotic square—first from an achronic or static perspective, then from a dynamic interpretation of the elementary structure of signification (i.e., its narrativization).

- 1. The static definition of the square (refer to the diagram above):
  - the relation of contrariety (S1-S2; not-S1-not-S2);
  - the relation of contradiction (S1-not-S1; S2-not-S2);
  - the relation of complementarity (not-S1-S2; not-S2-S1).
- 2. Dynamic operations applied to the elements of the static structure:
- the operation of *presupposition* (seen between elements related by contrariety)
- the operation of *negation* (seen between elements related by contradiction)
- the operation of *implication* or *assertion* (seen between elements related by complementarity)

The operations of narrative syntax transform the contents of a semiotic square, denying those that are initially posited, so that new concepts can take their place as assertions. The essence of fundamental syntax consists, then, of the transformation of the square's axiomatic terms upon which the syntax operates. <sup>6</sup>

The constitutional model [the square] is semantic to the extent that where there is structure, it is signification. More precisely, this elementary structure of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Algirdas Julien Greimas and J. Courtés, Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary, trans. Larry Crist et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 308–309. I have respectively substituted the terms S1, S2, not-S1, and not-S2, for the labels used in the Dictionary of A, A, nonA, and nonA. <sup>6</sup>Cf. "Eléments d'une grammaire narrative," p. 164.

signification provides an appropriate semantic model, to realize the articulation of the interior sense of a semantic micro-universe. This elementary structure is in a position to make the act of signifying apparent to the senses.

The topological syntax of transfers that parallels the path of the logical operations through the square organizes the narration largely as a process of value creation.<sup>8</sup>

The circulation of values, seen as a succession of transfers of objects or values, can take one of two trajectories [...]. The Russian folktale thus shows a circular transmission of values by using two performing subjects successively and by valorizing one of the conformed spaces (that of the hero) at the expense of the other (that of the traitor) [...]. According to this point of view, the same trajectory for value transfer can receive two different interpretations: the story is at the same time a story of victory and defeat [...]. Of the two conformed spaces, the investigation of one is initially given as being *euphoric* and that of the other as being *dysphoric*. 9

According to Greimas's 1966 Sémantique structurale, there are two large classes of narratives that accomplish the circulation of, or mediation between, certain chosen objects of value situated according to the rules of narrative grammar: narratives that accept or affirm the present order, and narratives that depart from or deny the present order.

In the first case, the point of departure resides in the establishment of a certain existing order and in the need to justify and explain that order. The order that exists can go beyond man because it is a social and natural order (the existence of night and day, of summer and winter, of men and women, of young and old, of farmers and hunters, and so forth) is explained at the level of man: the quest, the test are human behaviors that have established such and such an order. The mediation of the narrative consists in "humanizing" the world, in giving it an individual or "occurrential" dimension. The world is justified by man; man is integrated into the world.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *La grammaire narrative de Greimas*, Documents de recherches semio-linguistiques de l'Institut de la Langue Française, no. 15 (Paris: EHESS-CNRS, 1980), p. 7. The author cites Greimas's article "Elements d'une grammaire narrative," p. 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Algirdas Julien Greimas, On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory, trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 78–79.

In the second case, the existing order is considered as imperfect, man is considered as alienated, the situation is intolerable. The schema of the narrative is projected then as an archetype of mediation, as a promise of salvation: man, the individual, has to take upon himself the fate of the world, which he transforms by a succession of contests and tests. The model presented by the narrative thus accounts for different forms of salvation (that is, the act of salvation that permits redemption) by proposing the solution for any intolerable lack. 10

To return to sonata form, then, the question to be posed is as follows: is sonata form capable of containing and incorporating binary/quaternary articulation of narrative grammar, despite its own ternary structural organization? It has always been considered the form of perfect equilibrium, characterized at every level by tripartite articulations—as much within the individual sections (the internal structure of the exposition, the development, and the recapitulation) as at the larger level of the ABA' macrostructure of the movement (or perhaps AABA' if the repeat of the exposition is taken into consideration). In other words: from the point of view of syntagmatic analysis, sonata form seems contrary to the characteristics of a narrative discourse.

But the whole picture changes if we examine the same sonata form from the point of view of its "pathemic" organization—that is, according to the semantic content of the themes, their development, and the transitions between them. To perceive this distinction, we must analyze in terms of "signification." Pioneered by theorists of the Enlightenment, this method was inspired by the materialistic idea of mimesis. Johann Mattheson and his contemporaries attributed certain melodic-rhythmic formulae to the passions depicted by Descartes. 11 In later times —still in the spirit of mimesis—the idea of the signification of musical formulae was reprised by Boris Asafiev in his theory of intonation, which he applied principally to the analysis of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Danielle McDowell et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 246.

<sup>11</sup> Johann Mattheson, Der vollkommene Kapellmeister (Hamburg, 1739).

19th-century Russian opera. 12 According to Asafiev, intonation (a concept related to contour rather than tuning) constitutes the basis of signification in music. Musical signification is understood through memoranda, which is best described as a collective memory that perpetuates—with some modifications—certain fundamental formulae from the musical past, tied to their initial functions in ancient musical genres (such as dances, laments, lullabies, etc., all originally linked to a vital or social function). In the same spirit, current scholarship speaks frequently of semes, classemes, and topics as musical signifieds. 13

In 1959–61, the Hungarian musicologist József Ujfalussy attempted for the first time to prove the presence of the categories from Descartes's *Traité des passions* in the vocal and instrumental themes of Mozart. <sup>14</sup> His method was very precise, always beginning with arias or *Lieder* by Mozart in which a passion evoked by the text (whether sadness, joy, love, fear, etc.) was linked in many different pieces to the same melodic and metric formulae and, almost always, to the same key. Having

12Boris Asafiev, Muzykal'naya forma kak protsess [Musical Form As a Process] (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1963); James Robert Tull, B.V. Asafev's "Musical Form as a Process:" Translation and Commentary (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1977). See also article "Intonation" by Eero Tarasti in Greimas and Courtés's Dictionnaire.

<sup>13</sup>Eero Tarasti, Myth and Music (The Hague: Mouton, 1979); Leonard Ratner, Classic Music: Form, Expression, Style (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980); Wye Jamison Allenbrook, Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983); Vladimir Grundriss der musikalischen Semantik Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1986); Márta Grabócz, Morphologie des oeuvres pour piano de F. Liszt; influence du programme sur l'évolution des formes instrumentales (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 1987; 2<sup>nd</sup>, completed edition: Paris: Edition KIMÉ, 1996); V. Kofi Agawu, Playing With Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), Robert Hatten, Musical Meaning in Beethoven (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). See also Bence Szabolcsi, History of Melody, trans. Cynthia Jolly and Sára Karig (Budapest: Corvina Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

<sup>14</sup>József Ujfalussy, "Intonation, Charakterbildung und Typengestaltung in Mozarts Werken," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (Budapest), 1961, vol. 1, parts 1–2, pp. 93–145.

observed this invariance among excerpts with the same textual meaning, he enlarged the domain of a given "passion" by furnishing examples taken from purely instrumental works. In this manner, Ujfalussy presented twelve types or sub-classes of "passions." The affects catalogued in the course of this early phase of research—left unpursued, sadly, by later Mozart scholars—are as follows:

- 1. sadness, suffering, renunciation;
- 2. farewell, remembrance;
- 3. despair, extreme grief;
- 4. love, fraternity, emotional ties between two people;
- 5. righteousness, virtue, the heroic ethos, the happy medium, "kalokagatia," a passionless state;
- 6. desire, want, secret aspirations;
- 7. anger, indignation, vengeance;
- 8. fear, anxiety, trembling, shuddering;
- 9. tragic heroism: the hero moved to action driven by despair;
- 10. cries or exclamations of sorrow;
- 11. admiration: majestic power; or its negative counterpart, destructive tyranny;
- 12. the enigma, the secret; hidden essential forces; fate (as captured by that Mozartean device, the motto).

Using this "pathemic" or affective musical vocabulary, the narrative description of sonata forms in terms of signification becomes possible. By its help we can discover, in particularly dramatic movements, the very functioning of the narrative syntax presented above: this, together with the operations of negation, assertion, and presupposition, ensures the continuous creation of new valuable objects all along the path of sonata form.

My purpose is thus a double one: to present the existence of the semiotic square (that is, the characteristics of a drama, the traces of narration) in music, and simultaneously to underline the contribution and the advantage of this genre of analysis, which can place the "interior teleology" of some of Mozart's and Beethoven's sonata-form movements in relief. It is therefore

possible to illuminate the elements of a sonata form, depicted as well by the transformational model of narratives, which are susceptible to becoming the creators of new values in the recapitulation, at the outcome of "conflict" or "plot" of the signifying elements presented in the exposition and in the development.

We observe this teleology of sonata-form construction in certain movements, principally those taken from Mozart's last period and the Sturm und Drang style of Beethoven. In the course of my analysis. I have encountered some movements of a type that affirms (or confirms) the initial order after having traversed a conflicting route (put another way: the states of "contrariety and contradiction"), 15 as well as other movements that represent the other strategy of the creation of new values in passing through the binary oppositions: the strategy of refusing or rejecting the initial order, whether offering a totally new situation in the coda or presenting the attenuation or weakening of certain foundational elements during the recapitulation. 16 In fact, it is the development followed by a recapitulation (with obligatory modification) that most often presents the four elements of narrative articulation, following the rules of the elementary structure of signification, whereas the exposition or the recapitulation offers no more than two or three elements of this quadripolar structure. 17

To be able to identify the operations of negation, assertion, and presupposition in sonata form, I first have to establish the three or four groups of signifieds, based upon the typology of József Ujfalussy and Leonard Ratner.

Regarding the definitions of semes, I do not claim to have a definitive solution for how one should name the character (intonations, themes and topics) of other musical ideas presented in the passages and sections of this movement. Even if my

16The second movement of Beethoven's Sonata op. 2 no. 3 offers a good example of the strategy of the weakening of the opening declarations.

<sup>17</sup>See Appendix.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>See the analysis of the first movement of Mozart's Symphony no. 34 in C major in my article "Introduction à l'analyse narratologique de la forme sonate du 18° siècle (1° mouvement de la symphonie en Ut, K. 338 de Mozart)," in *Musurgia*, vol. III, no. 1, 1996: 73–84.

definitions of musical utterances are only provisional, my proposal is principally aimed at the capacity of distinguishing the different groups of signifieds (as well as their variants) within a movement, by introducing a new terminology that grasps the established "pathemes," commonplaces within a style or time period. My intention is to show that, in this exceptional type of sonata form, the first pair of contrasting topics engenders the creation of a third element on a level of signification or on a level of syntactical (thematic) elements. The negation of this third element triggers in its turn a modification at the end of the movement—most often, that of enrichment or impoverishment—of one of the elements of the exposition. Thus, the goal of the application of this pathematic vocabulary is essentially to discern among the main signifieds, rather than to name or describe them in a rigid manner. <sup>18</sup>

It is with this idea in mind that S1 is presented in the exposition in several forms:

- (a) in the form of the first theme (T1) as the *righteous hero* seme (or as the "happy medium," "equilibrium," or "marching step" semes), mm. 1–12 (Example 1);
- (b) in the form of the first theme's first extension which emphasizes the virtuosic and solemn manner (the "overture" and "toccata" styles), mm. 13–21 (see the continuation of Example 1);
- (c) in the "dolce" and "quasi pastoral" manner of the second theme (T2), using pedal notes and an emphasis on fourths and fifths, mm. 47-61 (not shown);
- (d) in the repetition of the first extension of the first theme and of a new second extension which both follow the second theme and affirm at the same time the toccata and ceremonial overture styles, mm. 62–77 (Example 2);

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup>I realize that one could very well propose other adjectives and descriptions of the themes and intonations in question, according to alternate experiences. But I hope that the point of establishing three or four groups of distinct signifieds remains indisputable in the final results of this analysis.

Example 1. Beethoven, Sonata op. 2 no. 3, I, mm. 1-18.





Example 2: Op. 2 no.3, I, mm. 64-75.

- (e) finally, in the form of the closing theme (T3) and of its extension, which is but a brief reference to the heroic-military (march) theme and its extension, mm. 78–90.
- S2 appears as the seme of *sadness*, as the intonation of *renouncement* (see the examples of the first category in Ujfalussy), or, to appropriate Ratner's terms, as the "singing style" topic in a minor key. It manifests a relation of contrariety

in its juxtaposition with S1. S2 is revealed during the transitional section of the exposition, moving from G minor to G major while passing through C minor, D minor and A minor (mm. 27–39), and concluding with the cadence in measure 46 (Example 3; see also Appendices 1, 2).

After the presentation of the two contrasting poles of the signifying level during the course of the exposition, the development strictly follows the prescriptions of the semiotic square with its operations of negation, presupposition, and

Example 3. Op. 2 no. 3, I, mm. 25-38.



assertion. <sup>19</sup> S1 is introduced anew with the help of the third theme (T3), mm. 91–96 (Example 4). But the negation of the heroic topic appears immediately. Not-S1 comes about through a considerable transformation of the "virtuosic toccata" or "overture" style of the opening cadences. Through this part of the development (mm. 97–108), the varied elements of the T1 sections don the guises of Baroque, pre-Classical, and Romantic

"fantasia"

Example 4. Op. 2 no. 3, I, mm. 91-102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>This is to say, the route of the narrative grammar, that moves from S1 up to the reiterated and/or modified form of S1, passing through not-S1, S2 and not-S2.

"fantasias," while highlighting the absence of the sensations of fixed tonality and temporality. We are "out of time," out of the precise world of the hero, removed from certainty and the "happy medium." Instead, we are drawn into the world of daydreaming and wandering, mystery and secrecy.

This not-S1 implies the stage entrance of S2, with which we are already slightly acquainted. Here, the relation of contrariety manifests itself, by relating to S1's balanced, heroic affirmation, in the variation of the first theme, recalling the seme of despair and tragedy, the intonation of renunciation. The accenting turn motive of the first theme fleshes out the skeleton of an inverted rocket motive (consistently presenting the vii<sup>o</sup> of different minor tonalities: from G minor to C and F minor). This inverted rocket motive is complemented by bits of contrapuntal activity (mm. 113-129), which carry the connotation of the "learned style," "serious" or "profound" in classical music (as Ratner argues). This complementary component is derived from the idea of the second section of the second theme. Not-S2, the negation of S2, appeases the semes of despair and tragic heroism. Its arrival evokes the pedals of the second "pastoral, dolce" theme underneath the same motives from the first theme, concluding with a pedal on a dominant seventh chord of G (mm. 129-138; see Appendix 1, 2 for the development).

After this path, which obeys the rules between pairs of contradictory terms on the signifying level, the recapitulation brings about some very significant modifications as the values of this creative "narrative" process. The first modification of great importance—from the semantic as well as the syntactic point of view—is brought about by a new version of the first theme. In its initial appearances, T1 always had a "provisional" or "open" form, and was indeed quite structurally unstable and unbalanced: for example, at the beginning of the exposition, a phrase of eight measures is followed by a complementary statement of five measures. Its version in the development is composed of a statement of four measures followed by a brief contrapuntal development of eleven plus six measures (mm. 109–129).

In the recapitulation, on the other hand, T1 finally takes on a balanced squareness, practically closed from the point of view of syntax and content. The opening phrase of eight measures founded on the well-known accenting turn motive (which suggests "the departure," "the march," or "the preparation") is finally answered by a second phrase of ten measures. As shown in Example 5, this second phrase is composed of a hymn-like melody which takes off and outlines a closed arch, a curve ascending then descending (mm. 139–156). The rushing syncopation of this melody also reflects—by its relation to the march rhythm manifested in the accompaniment—the evocation of a musical genre typical of a celebration by the masses.

Example 5. Op. 2 no. 3, I, mm. 138-157.



It is in this manner that the celebratory sections ("grandioso") of the exposition's first theme and the two virtuosic and euphoric extensions of the second theme are justified a posteriori. It is a matter of more than the hesitant initiatives and the provisional "first steps" of a presupposed hero: the narrative path, which has made use of pairs of contradictory terms up to this point (the "ordeal" of the "out-of-time" experiences, the contrapuntal "struggle" in minor tonalities, etc.), makes visible the missing object, which is none other than the seme of joy and contentment of all the human community (evoked here by the hymn-like melody and the rhythms of the march and popular dance). This "signified" appears thus as the result of the heroic action, as the conclusion of the presupposed hero's "march." In this manner the function of the liquidation is realized, as is appropriate for the last syntagms of the narrative.

Following this modification, the recapitulation continues according to the rules of strict repetition in the tonic key (mm. 156–215). But after the beginning of the third theme, the not-S1 idea—the fantasy that is "out of time" and "out of space"—is reiterated in the coda, to staidly prepare and reaffirm for a second time a new complete version of the first theme (mm. 233–253; Example 6). The second hymn-like phrase receives a new "orchestration" and new rhythmic accents, anticipating—in the year 1796—the jubilant character of the Davidsbündler-Tänze from the revolutionary years of Schumann's youth. It is in this tonic key and with ever more virtuosic, triumphant cadences that this Allegro con brio movement closes (see Appendices 1, 2).

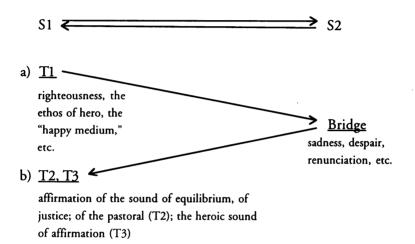
Example 6. Op. 2 no.3, I, mm. 234-249.



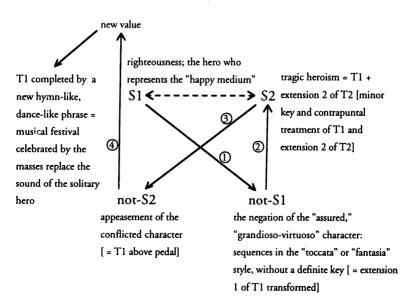
This analysis offers an example of the first class of narratives described by A.J. Greimas: that in which the transformational model creates new values along the axis of "amelioration," along the line of achieving euphoric values. The second movement of the same sonata presents, on the other hand, an opposite strategy: the attenuation and weakening of the values of the equilibrium present at the beginning, which will be brought to the end of the movement, this time in the so-called Andante form. All these teleological changes to the interior of a movement are explained by in the Beethovian Sturm und Drang, in the emerging Romanticism. It is in this sense that the abstract model articulation of signifieds within a semantic micro-universe can shed light on the causes and modalities of a "prolonged development," of a "teleology" of the construction within classical structural frameworks renowned for their symmetry and balance. Thus, this examination of the "signifieds" of structural semantics can bring a new dimension and a new method to the analysis of the evolution of musical style through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## Appendix 1

### Exposition

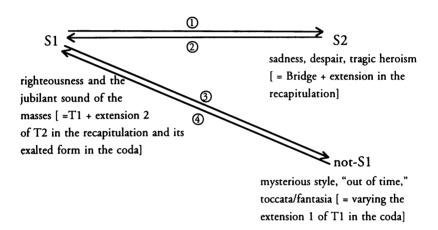


# Development



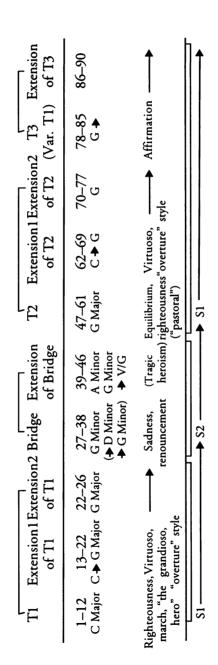
# Appendix 1(continued)

# Recapitulation and Coda



Appendix 2: Narrative Map of Beethoven's Op. 2 No. 3, I.

Exposition



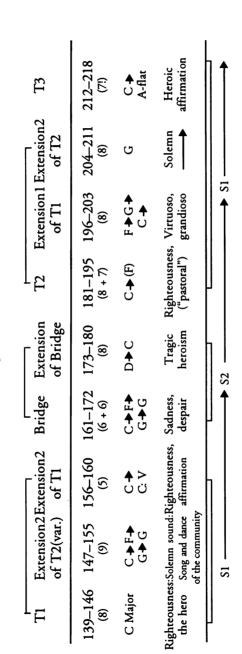
Appendix 2 (continued)

Development

T1 (var.)	129–138	G major	Appeasement (T1 over a pedal)	not-S2
Extension 2 of T2	123–128	Modul.: Minor	<b>†</b>	
T1 (+ Extension 2 of T2)	109–122	D Major ► Modul. ► Minor	Tragic heroism, desperation	<b>S</b> 22
Extension 1 of T1	86–26	Series of unusual modulations	"Suspended in time," ("secret," mysterious, "fantasia")	Pnor-S1
Т3	91–96	Modul.	Heroic affirmation	S1

Appendix 2 (continued)

Recapitulation



Appendix 2 (continued)

Coda	Extension of T3	250–258	U	"Triumphant," solemn
	T1 + variation of extension 2 of T2	233–248 (8 + 7)	[definitive form of T1 !!] C → extension on VI	Hymn-like, dance-like festivities; joyful celebration of the community
	Extension 1 of T1 (var.)	219–232 (14)	A-flat → 7ths - without a definite key - and virtuosic extension in C	"Fantasia, toccata" styles, mysterious, peregrination ce