Fluidities of Phrase and Form in the "Intermezzo" of Brahms's First Symphony

Frank Samarotto

None of the four movements that play the part of the traditional Scherzo and Trio in Brahms's symphonies seem quite to fit that role. Indeed, each of the four seems to be unique unto itself, in ways both superficial and subtle. On the face of it, the third movement of the First Symphony resembles neither a Scherzo nor a Minuet. As a duple-meter lyric pastoral in an apparent ternary form, it might be more appropriately characterized as an Intermezzo—an elastic genre, to be sure.[1] Taxonomy aside, a deeper originality—one with a thoroughly organic thrust—is concealed beneath the movement's relaxed lyricism. In the following analysis, I argue that Brahms has infused a traditionally segmented form with a fluidity and developmental impetus more generally associated with sonata movements. This by itself is not an extraordinary claim, but the extent to which it is realized may well indeed be extraordinary: in this work, Brahms has so greatly reshaped the symphonic Scherzo that the entire movement seems almost to fall within a single breath. Moreover, this remaking occurs not from without, by simply smoothing over formal divisions, but rather from within, by means of a breathtakingly fluent realization of the metaphor of organic growth.[2]

---

[1] Charles Burney may have been the first to transfer the term Intermezzo from comic opera to instrumental music, and particularly so to describe Haydn's contrasting movements within larger cycles. See Burney 1935/R, ii, 959–60. Mendelssohn's second Piano Quartet of 1823 uses the label "Intermezzo" in place of the expected third-movement Scherzo.

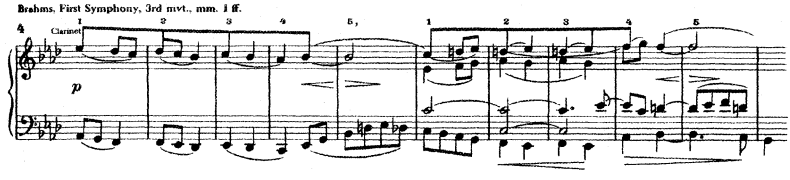
Initial accounts of Brahms's First Symphony frequently identify the third movement as an Intermezzo. Early adopters of the term include Otto Desoff, the conductor of the premiere, and the critic Richard Pohl; both are cited in Brodbeck 1997, 24 and 58, respectively.

[2] The qualifier "metaphor" is used pointedly. To my mind, "organicism" is a rich and complex concept; though grounded in simple principles, it can manifest in a

It is no easy matter to identify the seed from which this growth flowers. Its opening theme is both lyrical and rich with motives, especially thirds, which flow with an easy coherence. However, the most significant and special characteristic of the opening is concealed by its rhythmic subtleties. Initial entrée into this aspect of the piece might be provided by an intriguing but enigmatic analysis of the opening bars found in Schenker's *Free Composition.* Located within his chapter on rhythm and meter, and specifically within a discussion of five-measure metrical groups, Figure 138, 4 —reproduced as my Example 1—attempts to show how the unusual five-measure units originate in the underlying voice leading. Schenker's commentary merits quotation in full:

> The third-progressions which in measures 1 and 2 descend from e♭^{2} and d♭^{2} are followed by the third third-progression from c^2 in measures 3–4; it occupies three quarter-beats and by means of this expansion prepares the three beats of the extended b♭^{1} in measures 4–5. Hence c^2 and b♭^{1} divide the beats of measures 3–5 between themselves. This is the origin of the first 5-measure group. The second 5-measure group, showing two third-progressions inverted, is brought about by the augmentation of the third d^2—f^2. The two 5-measure groups are then followed by 4-measure groups.[3]

Example 1. Schenker, Free Composition, *Fig. 138, 4, Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, mm. 1–10.*



Schenker's concern is to show that the odd number of measures stems from an organic rapport with the tonal structure.[4]

---

variety of ways, not all of which require a simplistic unity. For a useful discussion, see Neff 1993.

[3] Schenker 1979, *Free Composition* (hereafter *FC*) §287, 120.

[4] He begins this section, "Measure orderings in odd numbers (such as 3 or 5) have their roots in a duple ordering in the background and middleground." *FC* §287, 119.

Thus, in the first five measures, the first two third-progressions occupy one measure each, but the third one is expanded to a measure and a half. (The division of three measures by two units could accurately be described as a hemiolic relationship, even within the duple meter context.) Schenker understands the expanded duration of measures 3-4 as paralleled by the equal duration allocated to the V chord; clearly, that dominant could have lasted just one beat, thereby resulting in a more normative phrase length of four measures. It is worth recalling here the paramount importance that Schenker places on parallelism as a constructive principle in creating coherence; one might go so far as to say that it is the parallel between durational units that justifies the tonal structure, rather than the reverse.[5] Of special interest here is Schenker's implicit suggestion of a sense of elongation in these five measures, from half notes to dotted halves—a process that he traces further as it develops in the following five measures. This discursive elongation is the Intermezzo's seed; we shall presently see that it is taken a step further each time the opening material returns, eventually informing the whole movement.[6]

This is not the enigmatic part of Schenker's analysis, however. The reader is invited to compare Schenker's example with the score, which is also provided in simplified form in Example 2. While the second and third measures of Schenker's quasi-score show different tonal content and imply different harmonies, Brahms's second and third measures are *absolutely identical* in every detail. Those familiar with Schenker's work will be accustomed to encountering this sort of conundrum and will know that considerable inference and judgment must sometimes be brought to bear in decoding it. Example 2 is an attempt to explicate Schenker's reading. Clearly, he hears the figuration of measures 2 and 3 differently, as the two third-progressions in his schematic example show. The discrepancy with the score also suggests that

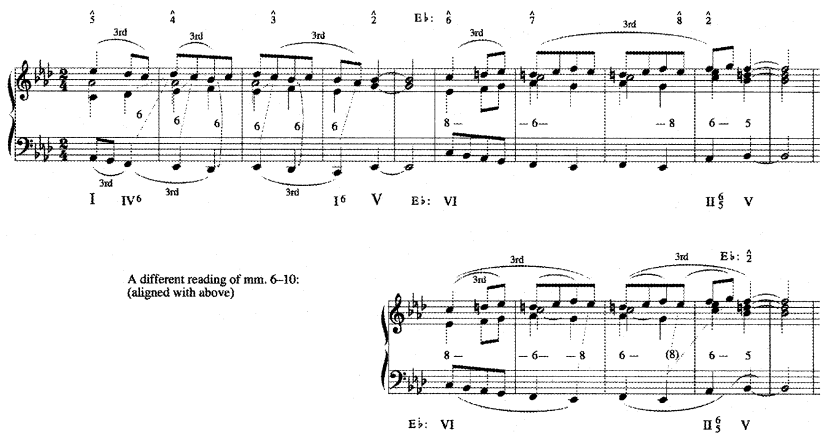
---

[5] Further examples of the parallels between durational units can be found elsewhere in this chapter; see, for example, *FC*, Figs. 138, 2b and 138, 5.

[6] This returns us to an original sense of motive as the impulse behind a dramatic action, an impulse that can ultimately shape the entire course of a narrative. See, for instance, Wallace Berry's description of motive as a "motivating idea in music," in Berry 1966, 3.

the parallel sixths that accompany these two third-progressions are actually displaced—initially quite substantially—as if the walking bass sets off on its jaunt too quickly, arriving at F ahead of the upper-voice D♭ of measure two. (Schenker interprets the D♭ in the first measure as a passing tone, notwithstanding its simultaneity with the bass F.) Now, this may seem an improbable hearing, but I find it a delightful one; not only does the pacing of the top voice decelerate, but the more impetuous bass does so as well, and ahead of its companion. There is a fluid freedom to the counterpoint that belies its rhythmic uniformity.

Example 2. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, tonal rhythm in mm. 1–10, after Schenker.

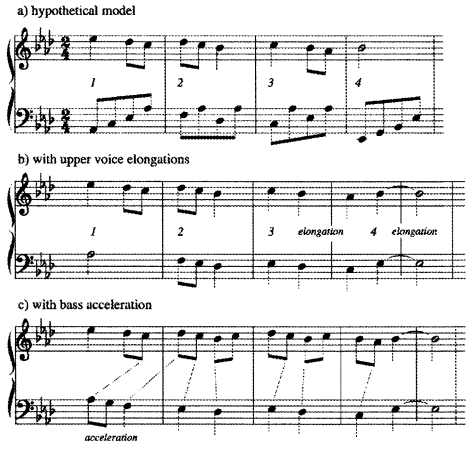


Another way of modeling that fluidity is proposed in Example 3; this is the sort of derivation that I describe as plasticity analysis.[7] Example 3a presents a hypothetical model showing how the tonal content could be contained within four measures (and with a simple but still stylistic bass). Example 3b includes Schenker's elongations, retaining the simultaneous parallel sixths; the bass is given schematically, since it is less obvious here how it will counterpoint the elongated upper part. Example 3c adds the bass's response, showing an acceleration that displaces the underlying

[7] See Samarotto 1999a.

parallel sixths; the figuration in the upper part further disguises the relationships. Example 3 proceeds generatively, setting out from Schenker's schema to reconstruct the opening of the movement—the beginning of what I will call the Intermezzo theme. In this order of presentation, I directly invite the reader to rehear some familiar music in Schenker's way, a way that I myself have come to find enriching and suggestive.

Example 3. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, plasticity in mm. 1–5.



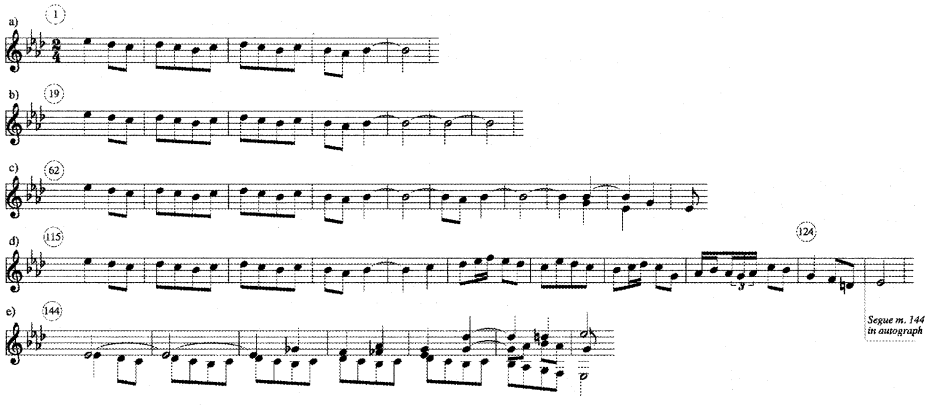
I recognize that the invitation to embrace Schenker's recondite reading is not immediately easy to accept. My Examples 2 and 3 set in relief an apparent contradiction that is deftly disguised in the *Free Composition* example, despite its apparent transcription of the score. In Example 2, the first two third-progressions in the upper voice and bass seem to overlap and, therefore, contradict. Schenker's sleight-of-hand, the addition of a bass F in the second measure, visually presents a normalized layout of *Stufen* in measures 1–2, followed by the expanded durations already discussed in measures 3–5.[8] To accord with Schenker's reading, the more literal rendering in Example 2 requires that the cello's F and even the horn's inner

[8] One must understand the first two of these *Stufen* to be prolonged through implicit 5–6 exchanges, resulting in the surface harmonies of A♭–F minor (through 5–6 motion) and D♭–B♭ minor (through 5-6 motion).

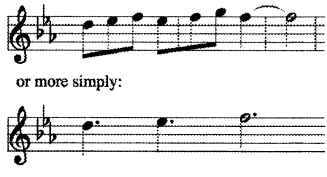
voice D♭ be heard as displaced with reference to their normative placement; Example 3 labels this as an acceleration. (Imagine the passing tone G occurring at the very end of the measure, with F in the next measure.) The arcane quality of this reading is, for me, buttressed by an intuition—namely, that there *is* an acceleration in the first measure, and then a relaxed expansion.

I return now to my original suggestion that the first five measures of the Intermezzo theme—or rather, the first five measures as Schenker hears them—infuse the piece with a discursive impulse, namely an impulse to decelerate and expand. Example 4 offers a conspectus of these expansions across the whole movement; every appearance of the Intermezzo theme is shown, and each is somehow elongated with respect to the previous ones. (The last one, at letter (e), can be understood as parenthetical within the final cadence, and is not directly comparable to the other statements.) It is equally significant that the expansions emerge from the cadence tone B♭, which was itself subject to a purely durational expansion in the original five-measure segment. It is as if this B♭ is itself invested with an impulse toward growth, manifested first through duration and later through melodic diminution. (One thinks of Schenker's frequent animistic language.) Thus, the process of durational expansion is rendered organic on the scale of the entire movement, the process of the part informing that of the whole.

Example 4. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, a conspectus of expansions of the Intermezzo theme.



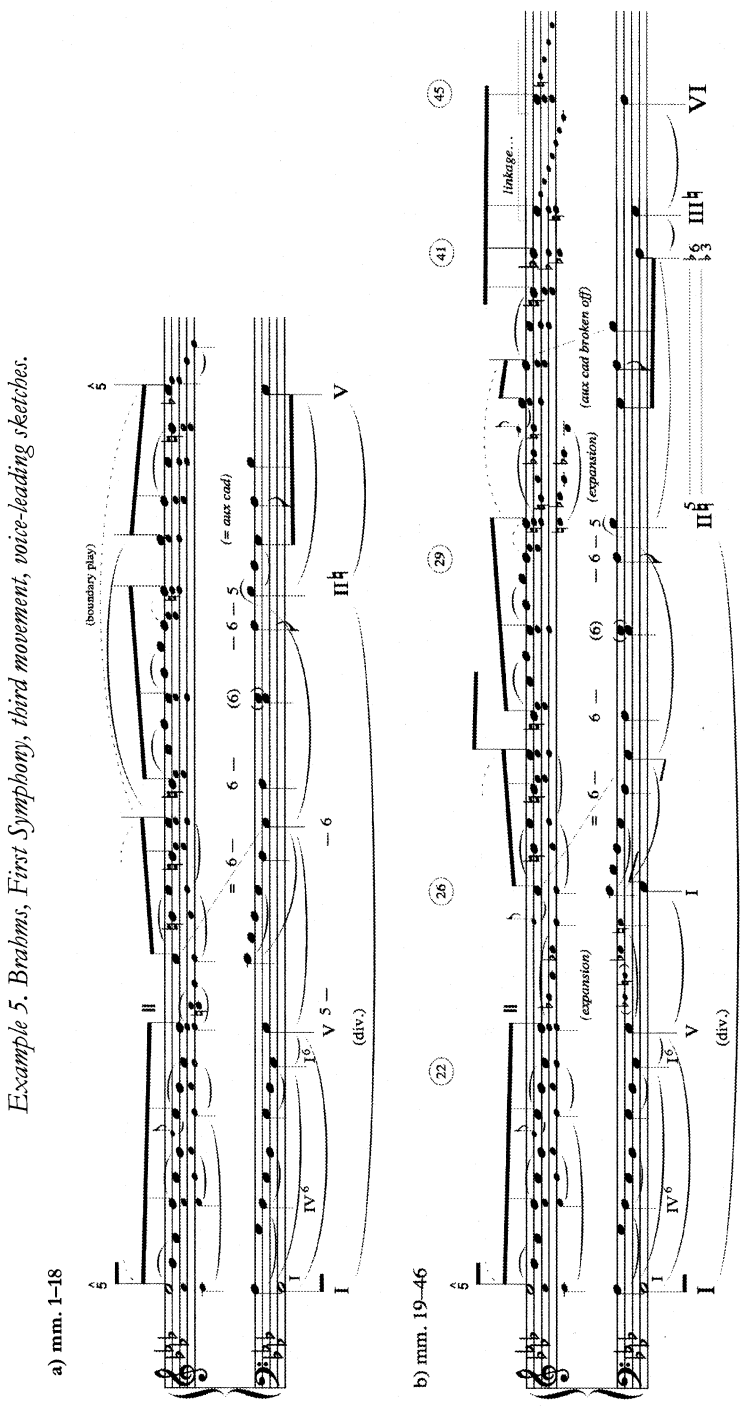
There is more to say about the phrase structure of the opening. To be sure, the first five measures could stand alone, and could even be answered by a plausible, if disappointing, five-measure consequent. They are not, of course; the exact melodic inversion that follows is a logical development—almost too logical. Its five-measure length balances that of the opening as a symmetrical complement, and thereby argues for it as an organic unit, as Schenker posits. However, I find his reading of these measures as seen in Example 1 less convincing than that of the previous five; the arrival on F ($\hat{2}$ of E♭) would seem more convincing with the B♭ major chord. Under my explication in Example 2, I suggest an alternative that preserves more of the rhythmic configuration of the first five measures. The ascending third <C D E♭> occupies the first two measures, with the same third nested within the first measure. The next third, <D E♭ F>, fills the remaining three measures; lower-level thirds delay the F (even though it should belong with the II$^6_5$ harmony). Thus, the last three measures would assume this rhythmic configuration:

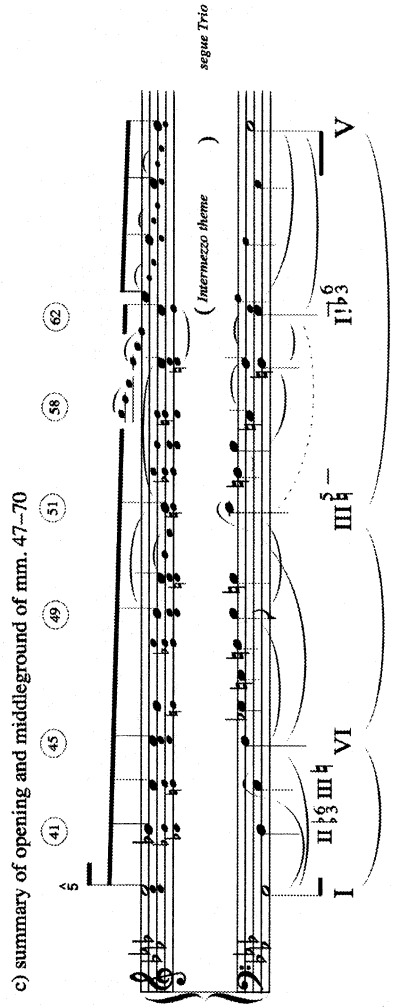


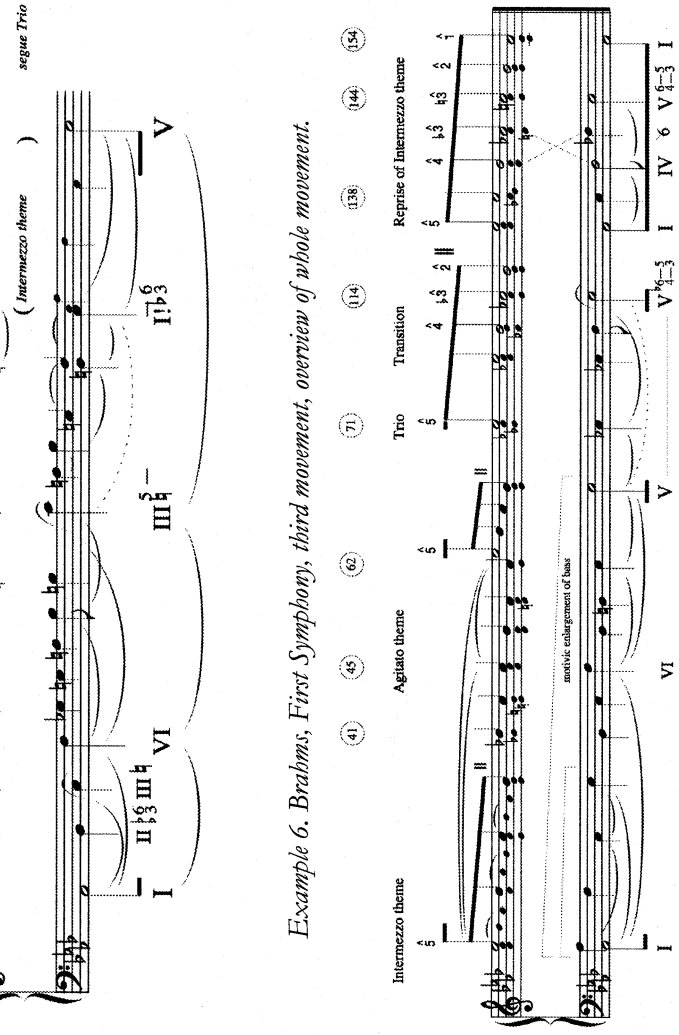
so that the tonal rhythm implied here could be described as a hemiola within a hemiola.[9] Example 5 clarifies and expands this voice-leading analysis. Example 5a completes the first 18 measures; the ascending thirds lead to a much more leisurely descending third that restores E♭ as the *Kopfton* $\hat{5}$. This boundary play around $\hat{5}$ is a recurring phenomenon; the theme of the Trio section derives from it. (This is made explicit later on, as will be shown.)

[9] For the distinction between tonal and durational rhythm, see Schachter, 1976.

Example 5. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, voice-leading sketches.







Example 6. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, overview of whole movement.

I hear these first eighteen measures as single phrase; though, as noted, the opening five measures could stand alone, the melodic inversion suggests the assembly of a larger entity. The first ten measures are half of a somewhat unorthodox Schoenbergian sentence, followed by a continuation of just eight measures. Indeed, the expectation of a balanced proportion of 4+4+8 measures argues for hearing the two units of five measures as elastic manipulations of four-measure models. The repeat of this phrase that follows in m. 19 confirms this elasticity by placing expanded dominants at the ends of the five-measure groups, increasing their length to seven measures each. (See Example 5b and the annotations indicating expansions.)

Moreover, this latter phrase at measure 19 will itself also undergo expansion, and to a considerable extent. As Example 5b shows, its B♭ chord does not resolve as a local dominant of E♭ as it had done before. Instead, it reappears in m. 41, inflected with a chromaticized 5–6 exchange, with a flattened sixth and third; taking on the darker color of a Neapolitan sixth, it proceeds to usher in a modulation to F minor. A new theme follows, of a markedly different *agitato* character, an agitation in apparent conflict with its *dolce* and *espressivo* markings. It is introduced through linkage technique—see the descending scales toward the end of the sketch—but this music is nonetheless a strange intruder upon the established landscape and reappears in exactly this form nowhere else in the movement. The F minor theme is not closed either; Example 5c summarizes the voice leading so far, adding more detail at m. 46 and continuing past the F-minor area. It shows that the *agitato* theme drives toward the dominant of F minor—III of the global tonic—through an applied diminished seventh chord, first heard in m. 50. However, in an amazing stroke, the repeat of this B diminished-seventh sonority (in m. 60) is now reinterpreted as a common-tone diminished seventh resolving into an A♭ 6/3 harmony, and, while *agitato* sixteenths rustle on in the background, the Intermezzo theme reappears, its original orchestration surrounding it like a halo. Though the theme re-emerges through motivic linkage with the descending thirds heard in the prior diminished-seventh chords, its appearance is more serendipitous than logical, a fortuitous reminiscence that causes us to take stock of just how far astray we have wandered.

The special circumstances of its approach argue that the return of the Intermezzo theme in m. 62 does not begin a new phrase, or even a clear articulation of tonic harmony, but is rather a parenthetical recall caught within a larger trajectory. The trajectory is marked in the bass by a departure from the tonic A♭, then by middleground emphases on F and then C, and finally by an arrival on the dominant E♭. This path is, remarkably, a motivic enlargement of the bass of the opening five measures; see the brackets between staves in the first half of Example 6, an overview of the whole movement that includes more detail of the opening in order to show this relationship.[10] Thus, this entire section, though nearly through-composed, is a discursive expansion of the opening into two phrases, the latter of which is enormously expanded, enclosing both a contrasting *agitato* theme and a parenthetical recall of its own opening.

There is more to this extravagant expansion. Recall that, at the point in the form where the first section would typically close, it instead remains poised on the dominant of A♭. As if from a distance, *da lontano*, a full-fledged Trio appears in B major, a notational enharmonic for C♭ major, or ♭III. However, the extraordinary context in which this tonality emerges fuses it not with the overall tonic but more immediately with the preceding dominant harmony, prolonging it in the manner of a ♭VI in the key of E♭.[11] Note especially how the new key emerges only gradually out of the E♭ harmony, and indeed through clear motivic linkage; the descending triad that trails off of the half cadence suddenly springs to life as the Trio's main idea. Further, as can be seen in Example 6, the Trio is to be followed by a transition that reinstates the dominant of A♭ with an even more emphatic half cadence. In

---

[10] It is not uncommon for a bass motion between I and I^6 to take the form of a descending sixth subdivided at $\hat{6}$, harmonized by either IV^6 or VI. For a lucid explanation that also underscores the importance of this progression, see Aldwell and Schachter 2003, 195–6 and 200–1.

Note, however, that in my reading of the middleground statement of this motive, the subdividing harmony VI takes on more weight and connects more directly with the V that eventually follows. Because of the close affinity of I and VI, this possibility does not conflict with the more typical usage of this progression.

[11] That is to say, the logic of the retention of the prolonged dominant stems from an inner voice neighbor B♭–C♭–B♭.

its special harmonic context, the Trio is not a truly independent section, but is rather enclosed within a dividing dominant, an appendage to the Intermezzo's ever-expanding discourse. While the Trio is far too substantial to be solely consigned to the parenthetical, its tonal enclosure places it outside of the main landscape; it is a place that we visit but do not inhabit, and is all the more vivid for that. Given its bracketed formal status, it is ironic that the Trio has the most traditional formal structure in this movement.

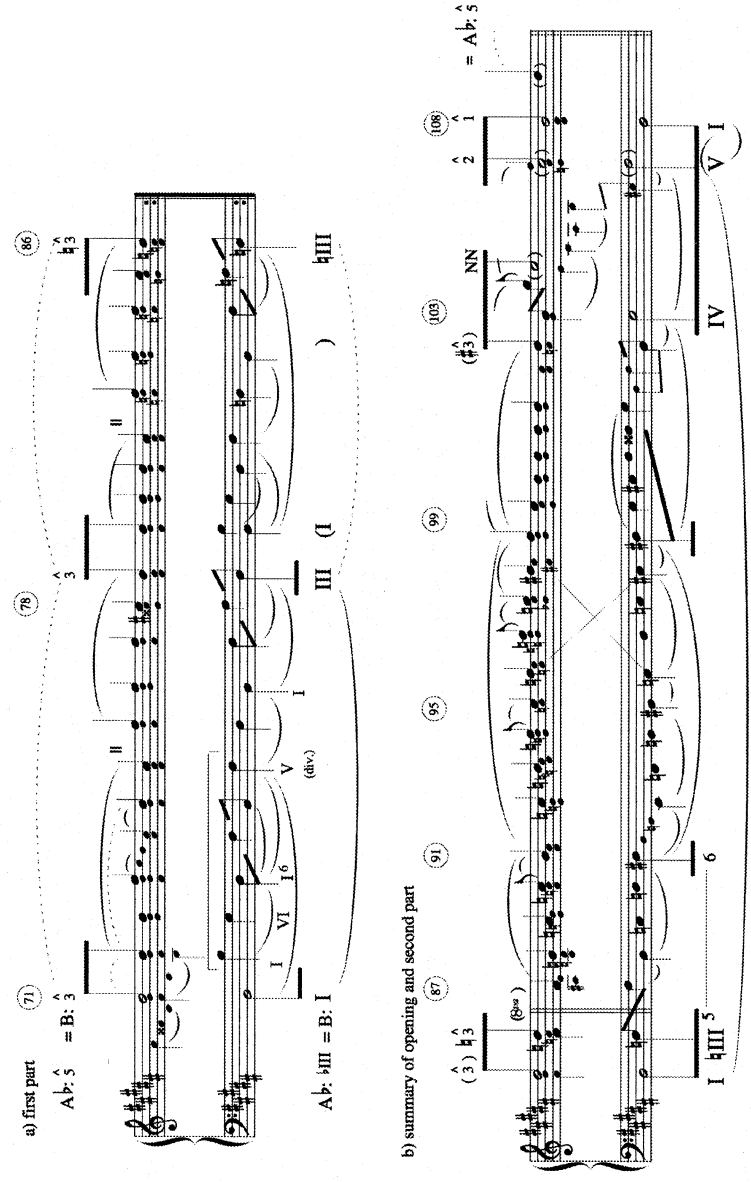
Let us turn to that formal structure. My reading of the voice leading is given in a sketch in Example 7; for convenience of comparison with the score, it retains the notation in B major. The aforementioned linkage is evident at the opening. Less obvious, though, is the subtle recomposition of the bass parallelism that has been so central to the piece so far; compare the bracketed bass motion at the opening of Example 7 with those in Example 6. With those two linkages as points of departure, the Trio sets off to find its own space, mixing a diatonic third divider with one borrowed from minor (at the end of the first reprise). The overall rising bass is quite typical of minor, but the step from ♭III to IV is composed out in an exceptionally elaborate way: as the lowered mediant is altered through 5–6 exchange, the bass shifts back up to D♯, setting off a mostly chromatic drive back to that same D♯ that is capped by an arpeggiation of the B 6/3 now serving as an applied dominant to IV.[12] The effect is of an extraordinary effort somehow needed to bridge this single step and to reach the subdominant. Indeed, the goal of this progression, atypically *not* a dividing dominant, is instead the final cadence itself, and the attainment of the cadential subdominant comes as a triumphant breakthrough—the strings have their most affirmative exclamation thus far.[13]

---

[12] Note the repetition, not shown in the sketch, of the bass motion C♮ to C♯—harmonizing dominant sevenths a tritone apart!—in measures 96–98, as if the line is hesitating before taking the decisive step to return to D♯; this return is confirmed by the more continuous participation, *fortissimo*, of the woodwind choir and most of the brass.

[13] One might profitably compare this Trio to the first of the Op. 39 waltzes.

Example 7. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, Trio, voice-leading sketch.

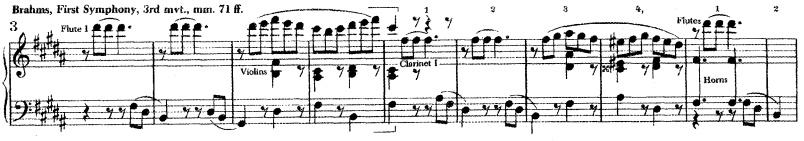


That the exclamation takes the form of a reprise of the opening is all the more climactic as the reprise dissolves into final cadence. Its binary form notwithstanding, this trio has a continuous arc driving toward its ending—note the carefully gauged dynamic increase that only relaxes on the final tonic—from *da lontano* to *molto vicino* in a single continuous gesture.

The trio's driven quality is seeded right at the opening: the acceleration of linkage motive gives the effect of a double-timing of the prevailing pacing. As in the Intermezzo, the details of the rhythm play a key role in shaping this arc of motion. As it happens, Schenker also comments on the rhythm of this passage, specifically on the Trio's opening, as seen in Example 8. This is found in a section on what he calls "antimetric rhythmic situations." He writes that,

> ...we find here a real conflict between rhythm and meter. There is no doubt that the first diminutional entity goes on to $c\sharp^3$ in measure 5 of the example, but the modified repetition, which ends in its fourth measure, does not follow the same metrical grouping. Thus the 5-measure group extends into the first measure of the next four measures. This, however, in no way involves a reinterpretation of the fifth measure as a first measure.[14]

Example 8. Schenker, Free Composition, *Fig. 147, 3, Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, mm. 71ff.*



This is one of several examples in which Schenker points to a conflict between melody and accompaniment.[15] Schenker views the first melodic idea (the "diminutional entity," which is a small-scale sentence in this case) as closing on scale degree two in the manner of a half cadence; the varied repetition that follows cadences more quickly, and so fits within four measures. From the context of this

---

[14] *FC*, §296, 124.

[15] Further examples are discussed in Kamien 1993, 311-348.

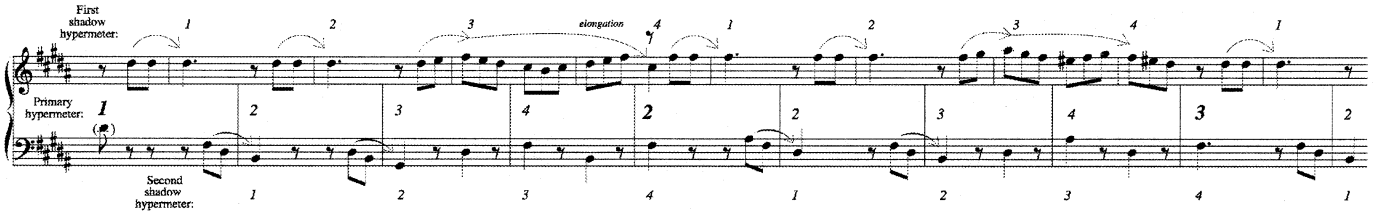
example, it is clear that he regards the melodic idea as out of phase with its setting; the total picture, however, is not as explicit as one might wish.

I think that picture could be clarified by paying even more painstaking attention to the metrical conflicts latent in the Trio. In Example 9, I have more fully annotated the passage Schenker reproduces; my attempt is to recover the full panoply of cross-accents that give this Trio its kaleidoscopic sparkle. First, as a normative default, the entire Trio can be scanned in what I am labeling as the primary hypermeter, which begins straightforwardly in the first measure. The mostly symmetrical repetition of material makes this hypermeter robust enough to be grouped into higher levels; I indicate these with larger numerals setting off four-measure units. (This will be discussed further below.) Closer to the surface, I have identified metrical dissonances in the opening phrase that form secondary, "shadow" meters; these are designated by partial bar lines and conflicting hypermetrical numbering.[16] The first of these is indicated above the top staff and is based upon the impression that the three-note motive is an upbeat figure leading to a durational accent on the dotted quarter; arrows are shown pointing to the apparent metrical accents, and analytical bar lines are added in accordance with the shadow meter.[17] (The notated bar lines are those that cross the system.) While the melody places its accents on the half measure, the bass seems to begin its harmonic progression a measure late. Indeed, the first measure of the Trio is triadically undefined, and the tonic can be ascertained only retrospectively. Beginning in the second measure, the bass line scans as a simple four-measure group, with accents on the downbeat. Those downbeats, however, follow a measure behind the primary hypermeter and cast another shadow. Only in the fifth measure of this example do melody and bass coalesce (because of the phenomenon noted by Schenker), but the upper part immediately reasserts its mid-measure accent each time and neither

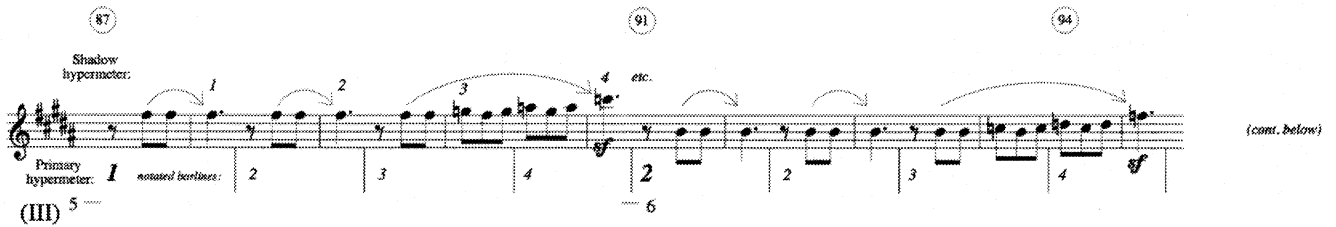
[16] In regard to metrical dissonance, see Krebs 1999, and for the term shadow meter, see Samarotto 1999b.

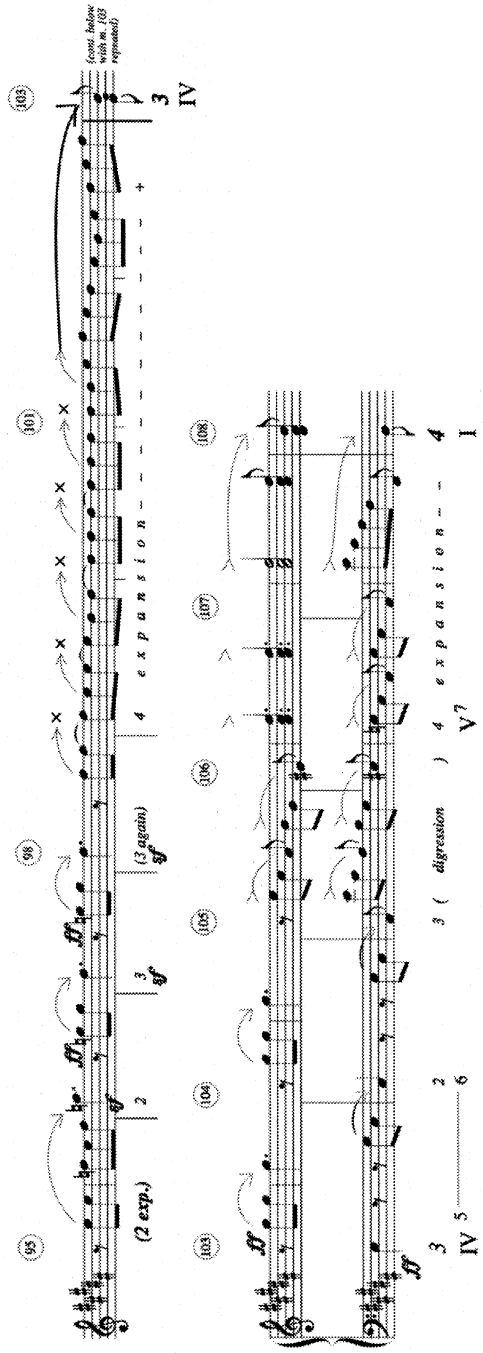
[17] My use of the term stresses its "shadow" aspect; typically, it is not the "true" meter, but the recurrence of accents at regular intervals nonetheless gives it the sense of an ongoing meter.

Example 9a. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, Trio, rhythmic dissonances in the opening phrase.



Example 9b. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, Trio, rhythmic conflict and resolution in the second part.




(cont. below with m. 105 repeated)
(2 exp.)
(3 again)
4 expansion
3 (digression) 4 expansion
IV
V7
I

melody nor bass aligns with what ought to be the primary hypermeter.

Thus, the first part of this binary form pits melody against bass, as portrayed by the conflicting bar lines in Example 9a. In the second reprise, the conflict is more dramatically worked out, and the melody takes the lead in competing with the primary hypermeter; the analysis in Example 9b focuses on the upper part as the instigator of metrical conflict. The process begun in the first reprise continues into the second; the melody again drives toward the end of its four-measure groups, expanding its upbeat motion into a huge arrival on IV. In the last system, the Trio's climactic cadence gathers all parts together into sputtering repetitions of the dissonance that finally—with one added eighth note—release into the final tonic. The discharge of the final cadence derives its power from the labored expansion that delays it. Removing the expansion reveals the essential symmetry of the two reprises, as is seen in the deep-level rhythmic reduction shown in Example 10, which is distilled from the tonal and temporal information in Examples 7 and 9. To be sure, this reduction smooths over the rough surface, but it shows that, at least at some level, the normative primary hypermeter is exerting a *sub rosa* control.[18]

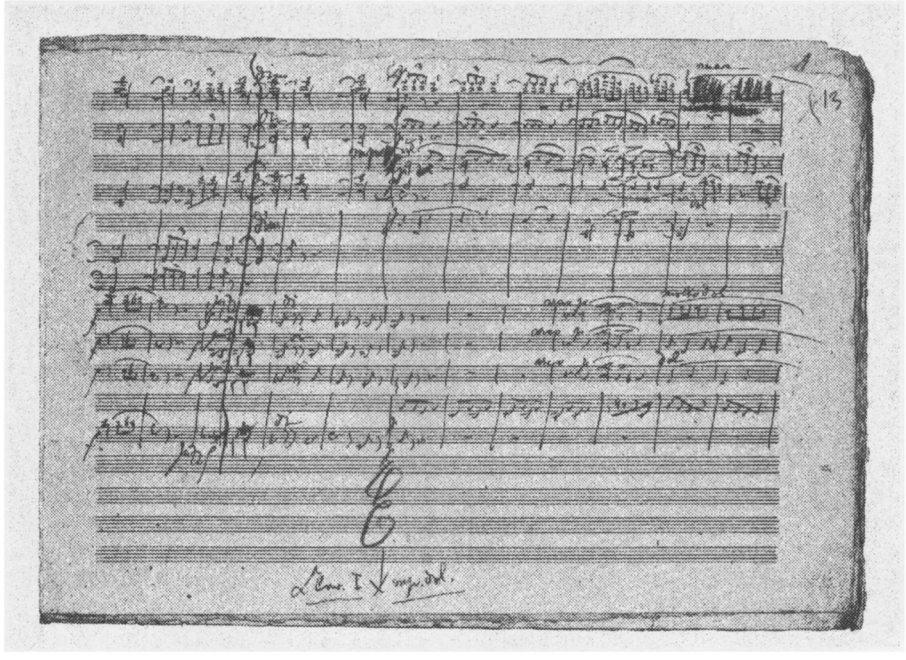
The emergence from the Trio comes as a sudden shock—an abrupt return to reality—and in the light of the real world, the Trio's relationship with the Intermezzo is soon clarified. The transitional passage shows some rare but telling evidence of compositional revision. Example 11 reproduces a change in the autograph manuscript in which a single original measure was

---

[18] There is a salient perceptual difference between surface and background that requires comment: The final tonic of the deep-level model is placed on a fourth hyperbeat (presumably heard as weak), but closer to the surface, the lengthy expansion places such weight on the arrival of the final tonic that it thereby acquires the quality of a strong first beat. This is quite typical of the final phrases in binary form pieces, which strive to place the closing tonic in as strong a position as possible; this is usually best understood as the reinterpretation of a fourth hyperbeat as the first beat of a lower-level metric unit, often filled out with codetta material (not the case here—the Trio is immediately followed by a transition with its own scansion). The recall of the Trio at the end of this movement has a brief expansion (in measures 161–3) that also imbues the final chord with the essence of a downbeat.

elongated into two, an explicit cue that the process of expansion is ready to resume in earnest.[19] Another, more subtle connection with the rhythmic world of the Intermezzo theme is hidden in the accompanimental figuration that lingers from the Trio. In Example 12, I first suggest that the offbeat accents of the Trio's melody, so central to its rhythmic conflicts, might be heard as latent within the Intermezzo theme's opening expansion. Moreover, in the reprise at m. 115, the Trio's triplet rhythms persist and reach an accentual

Example 11. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, autograph, mm. 109–121, showing expansion of original m. 111 to two bars by elongating the rhythm from quarter-eighth-eighth to half-quarter-quarter.

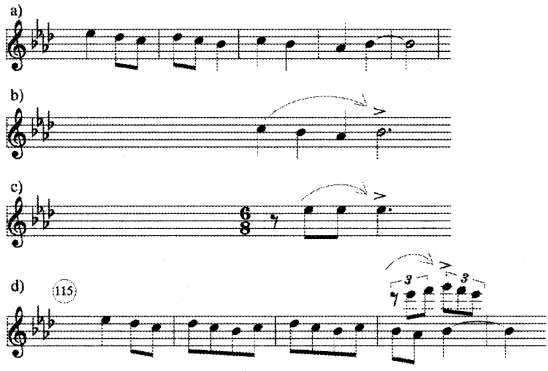


Photographic Credit: The Piermont Morgan Library, New York

[19] A facsimile of the autograph manuscript (only the last three movements are extant) is reproduced in Brahms 1986. My Example 11 is found on p. 29 of that edition.

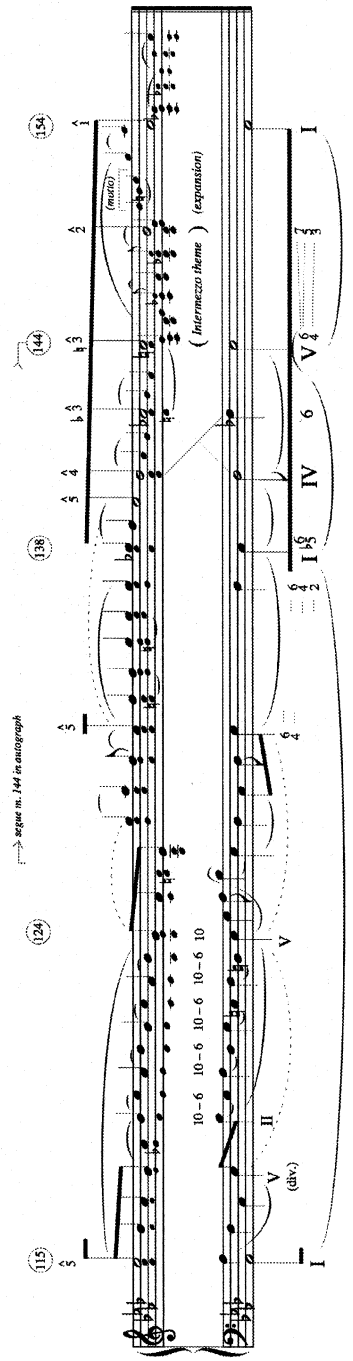
highpoint that coincides with the expanded B♭ of the Intermezzo theme's five-measure unit, thus making explicit a connection that would otherwise seem distant (and implausible).[20]

Example 12. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, derivation of Trio rhythm.



Let us return to the overview of the whole movement in Example 6. In my reading, the transition after the Trio leads back to a dominant, one that effects an interruption of the fundamental line. The double return of tonic and the Intermezzo theme represents a true re-beginning of the movement's opening content, and a genuine return to the opening phrase. However, this phrase is also greatly expanded, and no real break or closure is attained until the end of the movement. This is not to say that there are no opportunities for closure; as seen in the more detailed reading of this section given in Example 13, the recomposed passage that begins in m. 126 has all the intentions of initiating a cadence. This attempt is abandoned in favor of the more deliberate, and somehow more introspective cadence that begins in m. 138. I take this latter attempt as the structural cadence, one whose progress is momentarily stayed by yet another parenthetical recall of the

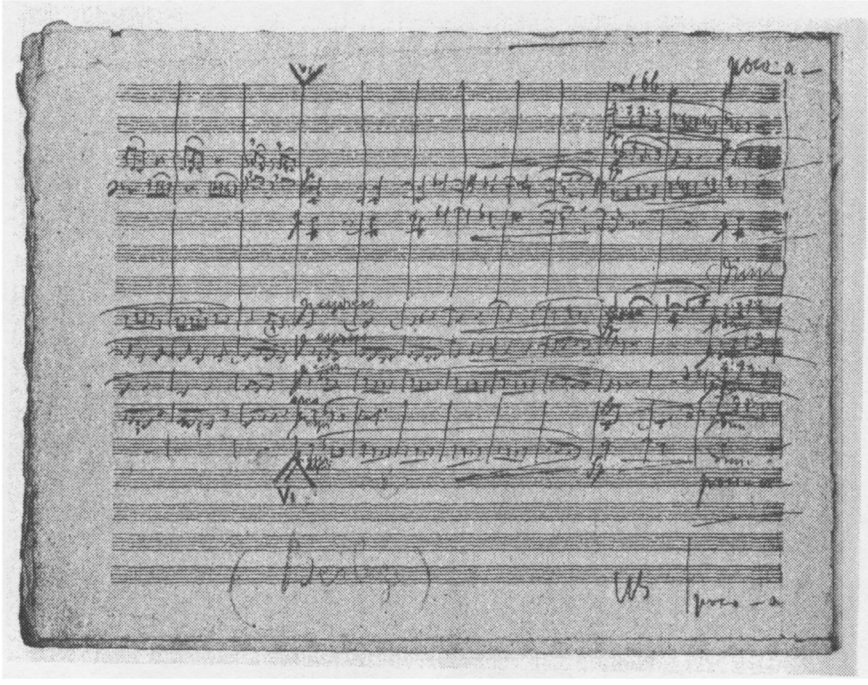
[20] The boundary play already noted in Example 5a prepares the main motivic idea of the Trio, a connection which is also made explicit at the same place cited in Example 12. Once more, a more disguised version, E♭–F♭–G♭–F♭–E♭, is heard before the recall of the boundary play's E♭–F–G–F–E♭.



Example 13. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, voice-leading sketch, mm. 115 to end.

Intermezzo theme, yielding yet more expansion. It is surely in m. 138 that a dramatic turning point brings the endless discourse to a final close. Given the clarity of that focal point, it is genuinely surprising to learn that an earlier version of the piece omitted this passage entirely, skipping from m. 124 to m. 144, as shown in the autograph page reproduced in Example 14.[21] It vividly demonstrates that the process of expansion—this time a truly substantial addition—continued past the point at which Brahms thought the piece complete.

Example 14. Brahms, First Symphony, third movement, autograph, showing original version connecting m. 124 with m. 144.



Photographic Credit: The Piermont Morgan Library, New York

[21] Brahms 1986, 30. The music to be inserted after measure 124 is found on the following page, numbered separately and filling recto and verso; given the number of staves, it is clear that the page is a different paper type. It was apparently sent to Desoff for the first performance after he had already received the full score.

Admittedly, it would be disconcerting to imagine this movement without these twenty-one measures. After all, as suggested here, this passage contains both the narrative climax of the piece and, as shown in Example 13, its structural cadence and background completion—and it is hard to envision another place where this could have occurred.[22] Assuming that the documentary evidence is to be taken at face value, I find at least two aspects worthy of further consideration.[23] The first relates to the overall movement, which, almost throughout, gives every indication of being a standard ternary form (not to mention its role as the third movement of a symphony). Contrary to expected conventions, the return of the A section is not nearly a full repeat of the first A section (even setting aside alterations needed to close on the tonic). We must regard this movement as special case in which an exact replay of the entire first section would negate the desired effect of continuing expansion. Or, to put it differently, the process of formal discursion must override a preference for symmetrical balance.

A second consideration involves the relationship of compositional procedure to tonal structure. It would be naïve to imagine that a composer proceeds consciously from some pre-conceived background to generate a piece—and there is no

---

[22] As an alternative to my reading, the dominant heard in measure 130 (embellished with a $\frac{6}{4}$) could be understood as prolonged (as a $\frac{6}{4}$) through the dominant of measure 144; nonetheless, the initial V of measure 130 still occurs within the inserted measures in question.

[23] Raymond Knapp has advanced the hypothesis that the revision under discussion represents the restoration of a cut made to an already completed movement. See Knapp 1988.

In my opinion, this is a speculation that has no supporting evidence (there is no extant earlier version) and one which relies entirely on ambiguous statements more plausibly explained otherwise. The weight of the argument rests on letters from Otto Desoff and Clara Schumann suggesting that the ending of the Intermezzo seemed too short; from the latter, Knapp concludes that Schumann must have heard some earlier hypothetical longer movement (and he does not mention that Desoff could not have encountered this hypothetical version). It is far more likely that both statements refer to how curtailed the repeat of the A section was in comparison to the conventional full repetition that would have been expected by any knowledgeable listener (and it is especially curtailed without measures 125–143, which is the autograph version to which the letters refer).

question that Schenker rejected this simplistic view.[24] Obviously, a piece may emerge from a continual reshaping that balances the small detail and the large trajectory. Less obviously, one might take the viewpoint that the point of background closure is not actually composed into a single moment, but rather derives its force from and is immanent in its relation to all other parts of the piece (what organicism means, really). The drastic recomposition that Brahms undertakes here may well shift our understanding of the background, and quite reasonably, since the whole movement's center of gravity shifts with those added measures.

The whole movement concludes with a final reference to the Intermezzo theme, now explicitly a quotation enclosed within dominant harmony, and one that also alludes to the symphony's celebrated opening chromatic motto.[25] (See Examples 13 and 4e.) At last, the Trio music reappears as codetta attached to the final tonic, recomposed so that its metrical conflicts are softened: the conflicting accents are fewer and the *dolce* marking suggests that they be minimized. (It is summarized in the manner of a Baroque exordium at the end of Example 13).

* * *

I have suggested that this movement sounds as a series of ever-expanding phrases that first grow organically out of the opening five measures, then subsume parenthetical diversions (including a whole Trio!) in their wake, and finally completely overwhelm any sense of the traditional formal divisions. Such a reading may seem extreme, but actually finds support when placed in the context of Heinrich Koch's expansion of an 8-measure period into a 32-measure sonata exposition through the myriad techniques of phrase manipulation he so carefully details. (See the Appendix for a transcription of his examples.[26]) Without a doubt,

---

[24] "The concept of the fundamental structure by no means claims to provide specific information about the chronology of creation..." *FC* §29, 18.

[25] This motto is traditionally traced to the opening three notes of the first movement.

[26] Koch 1782–1793, 226–230.

Brahms's version—if even comparable—is more extreme and fantastic, as might be expected. It is also significant that Koch's expansion of a model period does not just bring about a longer period; it changes the character of the piece to something suited to the symphony, more discursive and developmental. Brahms's Intermezzo is not just a Scherzo-Trio with longer phrases tied together by elisions; it is a massive expansion of the antecedent-consequent relationship of a parallel period—the fundamental relationship that underlies sonata form—albeit in a primordial way. Consciously or not, Brahms has reached back into the eighteenth century, not just for the outer semblances of form, but indeed also for a sense of the generative processes from which sonata form emerged.

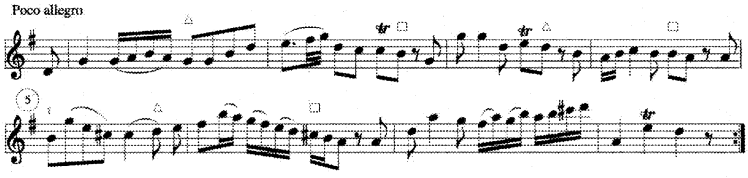
This brings to mind the common distinction between inner form and outer form. In this movement, inner form has taken over; the outer form is not even a vestige, perhaps only a nod to tradition.[27] It may also recall A. B. Marx, usually credited with foisting the catalogue of outer forms upon us; in fact, he intended these only as guides for beginners. In reality, Marx felt that there were as many forms as there are pieces of music, a veritable infinity, possible because genuinely artistic forms grow from within through organic necessity. Brahms's extraordinary enclosure of the Trio section within a prolonged dividing dominant is not, on its own, all that remarkable. As a close relative, one might compare the piano Intermezzo, Op. 118, no. 4, or in a different way, Op. 116, no. 5. Nonetheless, the particular way in which this piece grows out of its opening premises of expansion, even encompassing its formal articulations as a part of that growth, adds up to a unique statement. With its profound fluidity of form, this reinvention of the symphonic Scherzo echoes in memory as a single gesture.

---

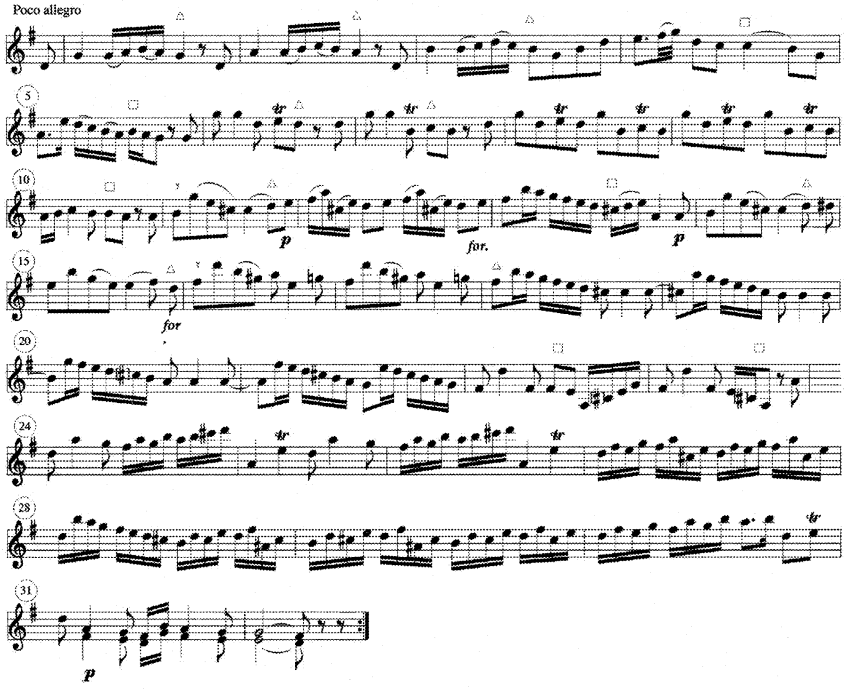
[27] I am thinking of common use of these terms in literary criticism, but they also recall Felix Salzer's well-known distinction applied to Schenker's method: note that here I am using outer form more in Salzer's sense of design; See Salzer 1952, 223ff.

Appendix: from Heinrich Koch, Introductory Essay on Composition *(1782/93)*

This 8-bar period:



…is expanded into these 32 bars:



References

Aldwell, Edward, and Carl Schachter. 2003. *Harmony and Voice Leading,* 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Schirmer.

Berry, Wallace. 1966. *Form in Music.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Brahms, Johannes. 1986. *Johannes Brahms, Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68: The Autograph Score.* Introduction by Margit L. McCorkle. New York, NY: Dover Publications.

Brodbeck, David. 1997. *Brahms: Symphony No. 1.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burney, Charles. [1776-89] 1935/R. *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period.* Edited by F. Mercer. London.

Kamien, Roger. 1993. "Conflicting Metrical Patterns in Accompaniment and Melody in Works by Mozart and Beethoven: A Preliminary Study." *Journal of Music Theory* 37/2: 311-348.

Knapp, Raymond. 1988. "Brahms's Revisions Revisited." *The Musical Times* 129: 584–88.

Koch, Heinrich. 1782-1793. *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition.* Rudolstadt and Leipzig.

Krebs, Harald. 1999. *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Neff, Severine. 1993. "Schoenberg and Goethe: Organicism and Analysis." In *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past.* Edited by Christopher Hatch and David Bernstein. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 409–33.

Salzer, Felix. 1952. *Structural Hearing: Tonal Coherence in Music.* New York: Charles Boni. Reprinted by New York: Dover Publications, 1962 and 1982.

Samarotto, Frank. 1999a. *A Theory of Temporal Plasticity in Tonal Music: An Extension of the Schenkerian Approach to Rhythm with Special Reference to Beethoven's Late Music.* Ph.D. diss., CUNY Graduate Center.

_____. 1999b. "Strange Dimensions: Regularity and Irregularity in Deep Levels of Rhythmic Reductions." In *Schenker Studies II,* edited by Carl Schachter and Hedi Siegel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 222–38.

Schachter, Carl. 1976. "Rhythm and Linear Analysis: A Preliminary Study." *The Music Forum* IV, edited by Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter. New York.

Schenker, Heinrich. [1935] 1979. *Free Composition.* Edited and translated by Ernst Oster. New York: Longman.