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MUTH 5360: Analytical Techniques II

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Leonard Meyer claims that "the significance of the slow introduction to Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 111 is quite different from that of the introduction to his String Quartet, Op. 130. The Sonata creates strong tension and suspense relative to the impending allegro which, because of what we know about sonata form in the classical style, is expected. The Quartet creates much less tension but serves as a source for many later developments as well as a factor in the articulation of events within the allegro proper (Meyer 60)."

On this paper I will focus on the piano sonata Op. 111, exploring the slow introduction's repercussions on important moments of the next allegro and on its influence on the design of the second movement's theme. I will start by first describing the proportions of the 3 opening gestures of the introduction's beginning exploring why, besides its evident harmonic instability with a clear direction towards the dominant of the piece (G major m. 11), I hear them as producing a sensation of uncertainty and tension which has direct implications on the proportions and design of important sections of the allegro and adagio.

The introduction starts with 3 strong gestures which, after stating the dominant key of G major in the first inversion (m. 2, 3rd beat), continue expanding leading the opening into instability,

tension, and uncertainty when the pattern breaks and a structural gap (Meyer 44, 130) is exposed in the third gesture of the opening adagio, measures 5-6. I hear this gap as breaking the pattern in two different ways; in terms of its harmonic content and on the comparative proportions regarding the two previous opening gestures, see example 1.

Example 1:

Maestoso. *f* *sf* *p* *cresc.* *f*

Sonate N° 32. *f* *sf* *p* *cresc.* *f*

Componirt im Januar 1822.

Gesture 1, 7 beats + 1/4 (8 beats)

Gesture 2 (8 beats)

Gesture 3* (7 beats) Breaks the pattern (contracts)

D. Diminish chord

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Bb minor harmony

p *dimin.* *pp* *sempre pp*

As shown on the previous example the two first strong gestures produce a pattern; both are 7 beats long plus a quarter note silence, and the first measure of both gestures is built over a fully diminish chord (mm. 1 and 3). The pattern is achieved by an exact transposition of the first gesture to a 4th up (mm. 3-4). The 3rd gesture starts also by continuing the transposition and expansion to a 4th up, but a structural gap is produced by breaking the expectations of the harmonic content of the 3rd gesture and by reducing its length in comparative proportion with

