Notes on Form for MUTH 251

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Sections:

1)   Introduction

During term 3 we learn about units larger than the period or double period. These forms may be entire movements or they may comprise clearly defined sections within movements. The individual names will be introduced as we go; collectively they are usually referred to as **small forms** or **song forms**. This latter term has a long pedagogical history, but it can be misleading; few of the pieces of music we will look at could be described as songs, and while some songs are in these forms, many songs are organized in other ways.

2)   Binary Form

Any movement or well-defined section of a movement that has a clear two-part form has what is called a **binary form**. We have already seen that grouping units must divide into either two or three smaller units; binary form names division into two parts at the level of the movement or of the significant section of a movement. These two parts may be defined in a variety of ways (e.g. contrast of key or of instrumentation), but the most common way is by repeating each part.

Getting to the end of the first section and then resuming from the beginning defines the boundaries of the first section: the beginning is already a beginning by merit of starting the section, and the end is defined as an end by the return to the beginning – recognizing a new beginning, what preceded the new beginning is retroactively understood as a very significant ending. Passing the end of the first section the second time, the listener is then prepared to hear what comes next as another new beginning; this defines the beginning of the second section. Similarly, at the end of the second section, the return to the beginning of the second section tells the listener that they just heard an ending; the return to the beginning of the second section also confirms that beginning <u>as</u> a beginning. In this way the two parts are defined for the listener. In many cases these repeats are indicated by repeat signs; in some cases, in order to introduce variations the second time through, the repeat may be written out.

We will designate the parts of binary forms using capital letters, A and B.

Example 1 shows a binary form, the theme from the final movement (a theme and variations) of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E, Op. 109.

3)   Simple and Rounded Binary Forms

Binary form comes in two varieties: simple binary form and rounded binary form. Both have the characteristic two sections, A and B; the difference between the two has to do with the structure of the B section.

The beginnings of B sections of binary forms are often somewhat harmonically unstable, in one way or another avoiding tonic harmony. Binary forms end with cadences in the original key, so at some point there will be a return to tonic harmony. In some cases this return is synchronized with a recollection (sometimes fleeting, sometimes extensive) of the melodic material that began the A section. In such cases we hear the outlines of a three part form: a beginning, a contrast, and a return to the beginning, both melodically and harmonically. If it is a binary form, though, this three-part structure is subsumed within the more dominant two-part organization defined by the repeats. We call this **rounded binary form**, and to describe it we will need two hierarchical levels. At the highest level we have A B, but then we specify A=a, B=ba. Binary forms that lack this rounding are called **simple binary forms**.

Because the main melodic material from the A section in Example 1 never returns, this passage has a simple binary form. In contrast, look at Example 2, the second Bourrée from Bach's Fourth Cello Suite. Here, after four measures of contrasting material, the material from the A section returns to close out the B section. This is a rounded binary form.

Distinguishing between simple binary and rounded binary forms:

The following chart lays out the difference between the two kinds of binary form.

	simple binary	rounded binary
Return of opening melody:	maybe	yes
Return of opening melody synchronized w/ return of tonic key:	no	yes

4)   Sectional and Continuous Binary Forms

In addition to simple and rounded, there is another pair of descriptors that may be applied to binary forms: sectional and continuous.

When a grouping unit ends with an authentic cadence in the same key in which it began, we describe that unit as harmonically closed. This is because it could stand alone as a complete harmonic unit. When a grouping unit ends with a half cadence or with an authentic cadence in a different key, it is called harmonically open; this is because it is not harmonically complete by itself.

If the first section of a binary form is harmonically closed, the binary form is described as **sectional**, because each of the main sections could stand on its own. When the first section is harmonically open, the binary form is described as **continuous**, because the first section needs the second to provide harmonic closure – the whole cannot be divided into two self-standing parts.

5)   Charting Form

As with the smaller forms learned in earlier terms, we will represent these larger forms graphically. Here some differences may exist between sections of the theory core, and the procedures developed here may not apply exactly to your section. You should consult your instructor about this.

As before, we will represent form on a timeline using slurs for grouping units. But now, in order to make it easier to see the larger aspects of the form, we will omit subphrases (this aspect in particular is likely to vary from section to section).

In general we will name sections of a form using letters; because we will eventually have a significant number of nested levels, we will use several kinds of letter. At the highest level (not needed yet) we will use bold face capital letters: **A**, **B**, etc. Below this simple capitals: A, B. Then lower case: a, b, c, etc. For the smallest level (when needed) we will use Greek letters: α, β, γ, δ, ϵ, etc.

Example 3 is a chart of the Beethoven passage given in Example 1, and Example 4 charts the Bach cello suite movement from Example 2. Note that the music is charted as written, not as heard; the A and B sections each appear once, not twice. This will be our usual practice with notated repeats; written-out repeats will be charted separately, as the variant has different measure numbers from the original.

There are just a few features that deserve special attention. In Example 3, only the large sections of the binary form are named. The individual phrases are not named because there are no returns that could be made apparent by doing this; the phrases would be named a, b, c, and d. In Example 4, because of the rounding of the binary form, lower-case letters are needed to describe the three-part organization, aba, that is found inside of the larger binary form, AB. Also, the slur over the first four measures has two labels, A and a. This occurs because those measures function as a single unit at two different hierarchical levels.

In general, we will use as many levels of letter names as are needed to show thematic returns. Example 5 shows the Minore (an unusually named Trio) from the Minuet and Trio from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 22, a rounded binary form in which precise charting of thematic relationships requires another level of letter names. As shown in Example 6, which charts this movement, the two phrases of the A/a_1 section have been labeled as α_1 and α_2. This is in order to show the precise relationship with the a_2 section. a_1 has two phrases where a_2 has one, with a_2 having a closer relationship to the second of a_1's phrases, α_2. This is because both organize the sixteenth notes in the left hand as descending thirds (look at the first of each four-note group) and because both end with PAC's. The grouping unit labeled a_2 is therefore also labeled as $\alpha_2{}'$. Greek letters were used for the chart of rounded binary form shown in Example 6 but not for the chart of rounded binary form shown in Example 4. This is because the additional level of letters allows a relationship to be more precisely described in Example 6, while in Example 4 they would have provided no additional information. <u>Take note of this as a general principle</u>: while details are always relevant to the larger musical picture, in making these charts they should be included if and only if they allow the precise differentiation of similar sections.

6)   Using subscript numbers and primes

The previous example uses two notations to describe similarity and difference. There is some similarity among units called α, but α_1 and α_2 are different. Similarly, there is similarity between units called α_2, but α_2 and $\alpha_2{}'$ are different. In general, subscript numbers will be used to mark larger differences, primes smaller differences. The exact

differences marked will vary from piece to piece. In this case, α_1 and α_2 are similar as the two phrases of a parallel period, but differentiated in their melodic continuation (the second moving more uniformly in a chain of descending thirds) and by the keys and types of their cadences. α_2' is associated with α_2 because both share the descending chain of thirds and both end in PAC's – two shared points of contrast with α_1. α_2' receives the prime because it stays in the tonic where α_2 modulates to the dominant.

7)   Ternary Form

Some pieces or major sections have a similar structure to rounded binary forms, but they lack the repeats – there is some initial music, this is followed by some contrasting music, and at the end the initial music returns, possibly with some alteration. In a rounded binary form, the repeat would result in a motion from the end of the second a section to the beginning of the b section, the motion that fuses b and a together as the larger unit B. Lacking the repeat, such pieces are almost always heard as three-part forms, or **ternary forms**, designated ABA. (To avoid confusion with compound ternary forms, introduced below, ternary forms that are not compound will sometimes be described as **simple ternary forms**.)

Deciding whether a piece or section is in rounded binary form or ternary form is straightforward: if b and a are repeated as a unit it is a rounded binary form, and if not it is a ternary form. (Bear in mind, of course, that repeats may be written out, probably with some variation.)

There are also features that are characteristic of rounded binary or ternary forms, but that are not necessary, defining features.

The most typical ternary form is extremely stable, even static. All of the major sections will generally be harmonically closed, ending with authentic cadences in the same keys in which they began. Each section can stand on its own, with its own melodic interest, and when the A section returns, it returns in its entirety.

In contrast, the most typical rounded binary form (especially for Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven – Bach's practice has somewhat different norms) is a much more dynamic form. The first section will usually modulate to some contrasting key; in major this will likely be the dominant, in minor either the mediant or else the minor dominant. Harmonically open, it will not be stable and self-sufficient like the typical A section of a ternary form; rather it will demand continuation. (This amounts to a claim that continuous rounded binary forms are more typical than sectional ones.)

The b section will be even less stable, whether compared with the A section or with the B section of a ternary form. It will often lack melodic material of its own, perhaps using some motive from the first section to create short, fragmented segments of music, and it will almost certainly be open harmonically, as it must lead smoothly into the big event of

the form, the return of the material from the first section in the original tonic key. The b section usually ends with a half cadence or with a cadence that overlaps the return of a.

Finally, the concluding a section will often (again, especially for Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven) be shorter than the original. Its main tasks are to state the opening melodic material and then to bring cadential closure in the original tonic key, and these tasks do not require the kind of full-breathed exposition that an initial section will usually offer: the first section will often have two phrases, the return of the a section only one. (There may well be some post-cadential extension to allow the reverberations of the conclusion of the drama to resound; for this reason the contrast in length is more consistent when counting phrases than when counting measures.)

The following chart summarizes this discussion:

Deciding between rounded binary and ternary:

	rounded binary	ternary
Defining criterion:		
Repeats (ba):	yes: aa(ba)(ba)	no: ABA
Typical features:		
A closed	more often not	usually
B closed	virtually never	frequently
B new melodic material	more often not	usually
A:A′	2:1 (esp HMB)	1:1

These contrasts are exemplified by the Minore from Beethoven's Op. 22 that was given as Example 5 and by Chopin's Mazurka Op. 33, No. 3, shown in Example 7 and charted in Example 8. In the Beethoven, the A section is harmonically open, modulating to the dominant; the B section is also harmonically open, starting in C minor and ending in G minor; the B section is melodically unstable and based on the main motive from A; and a_1 is twice as long as a_2, counted either by measures or by cadences. In contrast to this, the Chopin has: major sections that are all harmonically closed; new material for the B section that has its own stable phrase structure; and opening and closing A sections that have the same length.

As already emphasized, deciding between ternary and rounded binary form is always based on the presence or absence of repeats in the approach used here (check with your instructor as this may vary). A rounded binary form will sometimes have almost all of the other features typical of ternary forms, but it will be considered a rounded binary form if it has the repeats. (It is common, for example, for rounded binary forms to have closed A sections; if this were not the case, the term "sectional rounded binary form" would be of little use.) And there are a good number of ternary forms that have all of the features typical of rounded binary forms (open A and B sections, fragmented, subsidiary B material, and a second A section half the length of the original) but that lack the repeats. Because of this one decisive feature, they will be categorized here as ternary forms. You may decide that you really hear such pieces as rounded binary forms; if so there are a good number of musicians who would agree with you. If you encounter this or some other disagreement with these notes, consult your instructor about how best to convey both the "correct answer" and the way you actually hear the music.

8)   Compound Ternary Form

When at least one of the main sections of a ternary form is itself a small form (binary, rounded binary, or ternary), the larger ternary form is called a **compound ternary form**. In the Baroque period, the most common compound ternary forms were paired dances, such as Gavotte 1 and 2 or Minuet 1 and 2. It was generally either stated or understood that the performer should go back and play the first dance again after finishing the second. (The instruction for this "da capo," means "to the head" in Italian.) The sequence of performance would be (for example) Gavotte 1 – Gavotte 2 – Gavotte 1, creating a ternary form; because each of the two dances would almost certainly have a binary form, the whole would have a compound ternary form. (Remember, though, that it is only necessary for *one* of the main sections to be a small form in order for the whole to be a compound ternary.) This practice survived in Classical and Romantic periods in the form of Minuet and Trio and Scherzo and Trio movements, and Classical and Romantic composers also found new opportunities for compound ternary forms, especially in slow movements.

We have already seen the second Bourrée from Bach's Fourth Cello Suite as Example 2; Bourrée 1 is given as Example 9, and together they constitute a compound ternary form. Compound ternary forms become large enough that a single phrase diagram with all of the information will probably be hard to read. The notes will therefore chart different levels separately. The whole form will be charted as in Example 10, showing only the largest level of the form, using bold-face capitals to name the largest sections, and with written-out measure numbers replacing the railroad tracks (or, as here, using movement names if the second of the pair is independently numbered). Each of the major sections will then be charted separately. Example 11 charts the first Bourrée, and Example 12 charts the second. In the context of the paired movements as a compound ternary form, Example 12 is needed as a replacement for Example 4 because of the letters used. Capital letters A and B had already been used in Example 11 for the two sections of the

binary form, and reusing them would have implied a similarity of material. Because Example 11 did not use lower-case letters, a and b could be used for the subsections of the rounded binary form in Example 12. Be careful about when letters need to be used consistently and when they don't. There is no need for letters at different levels of hierarchy to match, even when they are applied to the same section of the music. For this reason the subsections of the second Bourrée can be called a and b even though the larger sections are called C and D. It *is* important, though, that at each level of the hierarchy (bold capitals, regular capitals, etc.) the letters be used consistently across the analysis; this is why we replaced Example 4 with Example 12.

Note that the large chart creates an exception to a rule, as repeated music is charted twice. This will be our usual practice with da capo (or da segno) repeats as opposed to simple repeats; because the repeated music is heard after an interval and not immediately following the first hearing, the form will not be visually evident unless the repeated music is charted twice. The identifying information under the slurs will make the da capo clear.

9)   Transitions, Codas, and Codettas

Paired dance movements make for particularly straightforward examples of compound ternary form because the closure of each major section is so clear, both to the listener and to anyone looking at the score. When a compound ternary form is written out as a single movement without da capo, as often happens in slow movements from the Classical period and in 19th-century character pieces, it is not as easy to determine the form from a quick glance at the music. But while this notational device makes the form less obvious to the eye, the main sections may remain just as obvious to the ear. When composers want to create greater continuity in a compound ternary form, they sometimes add music at the ends of the major sections to smooth over the divisions in the form.

Example 13 shows a compound-ternary-form movement in which this happens, the slow movement from Mozart's Piano Sonata in C major, K. 330. The first **A** section, mm. 1-20, is a simple binary form in F major, and the repeats in the music that follows seem to define mm. 21-36 as another simple binary form in the parallel minor. But what are we to make of mm. 37-40? Their key and motivic content make them group strongly with the preceding music, as does the start of the second **A** section in m. 41. They sound like (and function as) a post-cadential extension, but the fact that we hear this extension only after the second playing of the cadence introduces extra complexity into their analysis. The repeat back to m. 29 after the cadence in m. 36 defines that cadence as the end of the body of the **B** section. The simple binary form is complete when we hear the cadence in m. 36 the second time; the PAC back in the section's key of F minor provides all the closure that is needed. Because the post-cadential extension that follows is heard only once, because it is not included in the repeated music, it is not a part of the body of the **B** section; it is best understood as a tack-on following the end of the main action. A section of this sort will be called a **codetta**, using an Italian word that reflects this status as an optional addition.

A codetta is a small **coda**, and a coda is a tail, in Italian. A tail is often not necessary for an organism's survival; cutting off the tail will rarely lead directly to death. Similarly, a movement or a large section of a movement may come to a point of clearly sufficient closure, but then have some extra music that follows this point of closure. The extra music will be called a coda or a codetta. Extra music at the end of a movement is called a coda, and extra music at the end of a large section is called a codetta. This status as "extra" should be understood in terms of function within a form; it is not meant to imply that this music is somehow less important or less satisfying. Though still viable, many animals will be much less happy without their tails (for example because of difficulties dealing with flies), and similarly a coda or a codetta will often be an essential part of the expressive quality of a piece of music.

Returning to the example at hand, mm. 41-60 return to the material of the **A** section, this time without the repeats. This section is still heard as a simple binary form, despite the lack of repeats; this is because we already understand that formal structure from having heard the repeats when the material was first presented.

Measures 61-64 are another post-cadential extension, and again we hear them as lying outside the body of the second **A** section. This is because the end of the **A** section was clearly defined by the cadence in m. 20, and by the start of new material following it; when that cadence returns in m. 60, we again understand it as concluding the body of the section.

At this point we must decide whether mm. 61-64 are a coda or a codetta. This may seem odd, as above I stated that "extra music at the end of a movement is called a coda, and extra music at the end of a large section is called a codetta." The key point to grasp here is that mm. 61-64 are found *both* at the end of the movement *and* at the end of the second **A** section; this means that they could be heard either as a coda or as a codetta, depending on whether they are understood to extend the entire movement or only the second **A** section. The two options are charted as Examples 14a and b.

The criteria used in making this decision are not precise, and a judgment call will often be necessary. Most often it has to do with a sense of proportion; a very short extension is more easily heard as a codetta modifying just the final section, while a much longer passage of music could be strange as a codetta, as the final extension could start to rival the length of the music being extended.

In this case the content of the extension makes the decision relatively straightforward. Measures 61-64 are extremely similar to mm. 37-40, and both belong to the world of the **B** section in all respects except the major mode of the ending. The melodic material clearly comes from the start of the **B** section, as do the repeated 16th's in the left hand. Measures 61-64 would therefore make a rather odd end to the second **A** section; if mm. 41-64 were performed as an independent movement, the ending would seem somewhat out of place. The final four measures are a coda, not a codetta; by returning to the material of the **B** section they round out the entire piece and help to unify the whole.

Because the final measures are heard as a coda, Example 14a presents the larger-scale form of the movement, but we will chart is as in Example 14c. Note that Example 14c appears to violate one of the most basic rules of grouping structure: it has five groups at the highest level. This is because Example 14c is understood to represent the analysis shown in Example 14a. Because the final measures are labeled as a coda, we understand that they follow and confirm the ending of the body of the piece as a whole. So as shown in Example 14a, at the highest level there are two groups. And because mm. 37-40 are labeled as a codetta, they are understood to group together with the **B** section; therefore the body of the piece is divided into three subgroups, not four, in Example 14a. The labels "codetta" and "coda" in Example 14c give all of the information needed to understand the grouping structure shown in Example 14a; the extra slurs in Example 14a are therefore unnecessary.

The final kind of musical connective tissue is called a **transition**. In a compound ternary form, transitions occur between the major sections. In contrast to codettas, which confirm the closure of sections, transitions lead on to the next section harmonically and also often in terms of motivic content and texture.