

# Chopin's Poetics of Decline: The Largo Movement from the Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 65

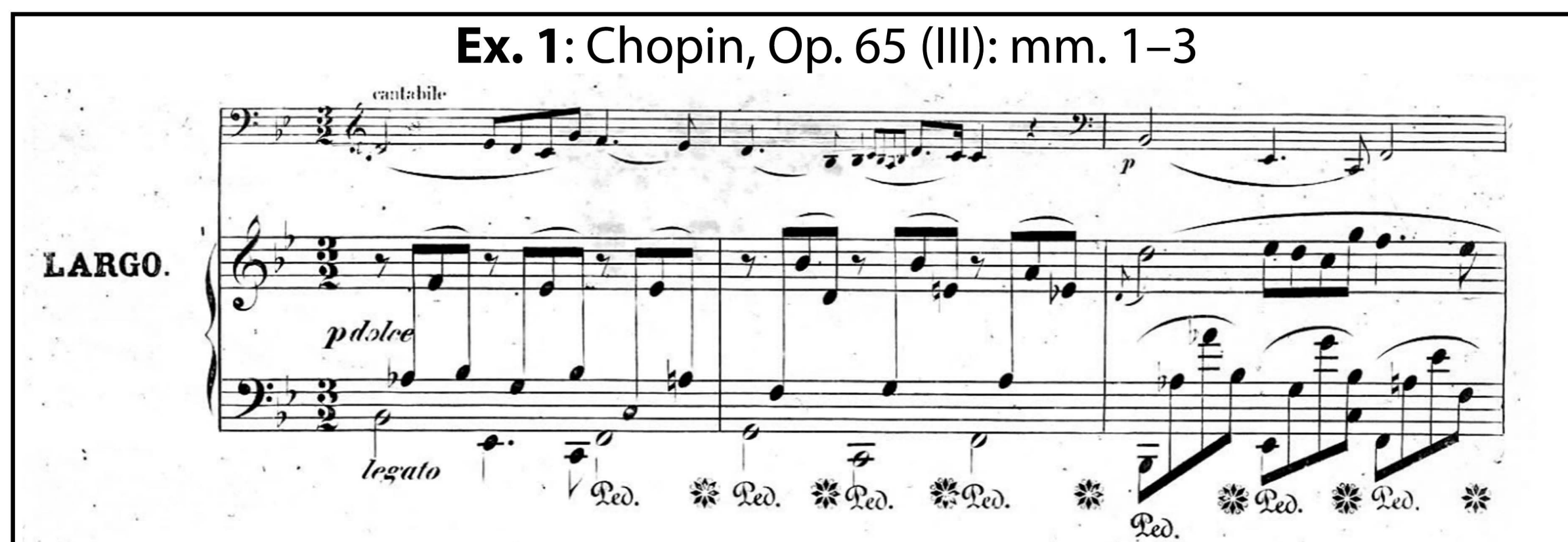


Alex Rodzianko  
arodzian@u.rochester.edu

University of Rochester | Eastman School of Music

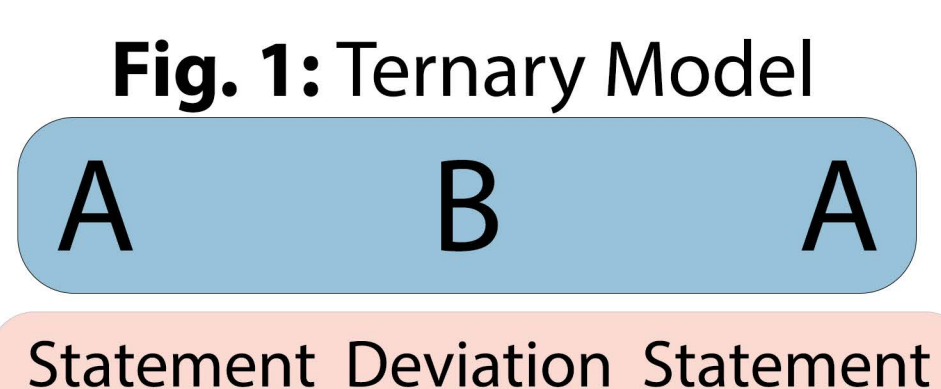
## Introduction

- The Third Movement (marked "Largo") of Chopin's Cello Sonata, Op. 65, appears unusually through-composed for the music the composer wrote in the 1840s.
- It has been suggested that the movement (**Ex. 1**):  
1) contains a counterpoint of parameters, with no clear form,<sup>[1]</sup> and 2) can be heard as an improvisatory duet between Chopin and its dedicatee, August Franchomme.<sup>[2]</sup>



**Aim:** Investigate the extent to which one can interpret the movement to inhabit a **multipartite formal model**.

**Hypothesis:** The expressive profile of Chopin's movement inhabits a ternary form (**Fig. 1**):



## Method

### 1. Paradigmatic Analysis<sup>[3]</sup>

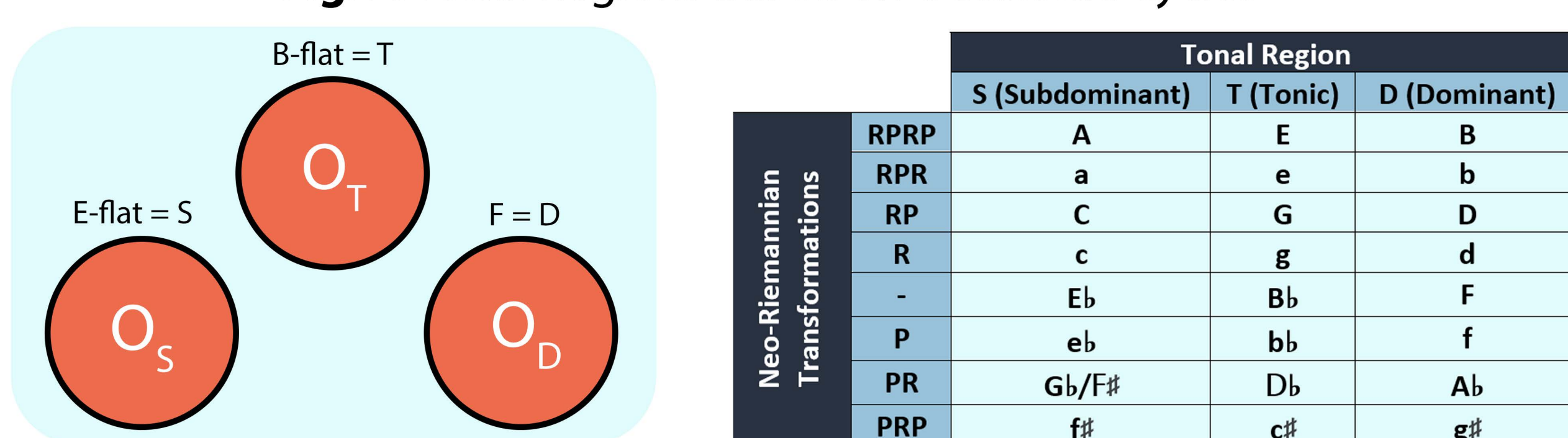
- I identified a melodic paradigm in mm. 1-2 (**Ex. 2**) and compared its contour to other two-bar melodic cells.
- Findings were compiled in a graph, showing deviations from the model.



### 2. Prolongational analysis

- Harmonic reductions of the movement were formed based on 1) pitch salience and 2) modulation.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Using octatonic cycles, local keys were grouped into Tonic, Dominant, and Subdominant regions:<sup>[5]</sup>

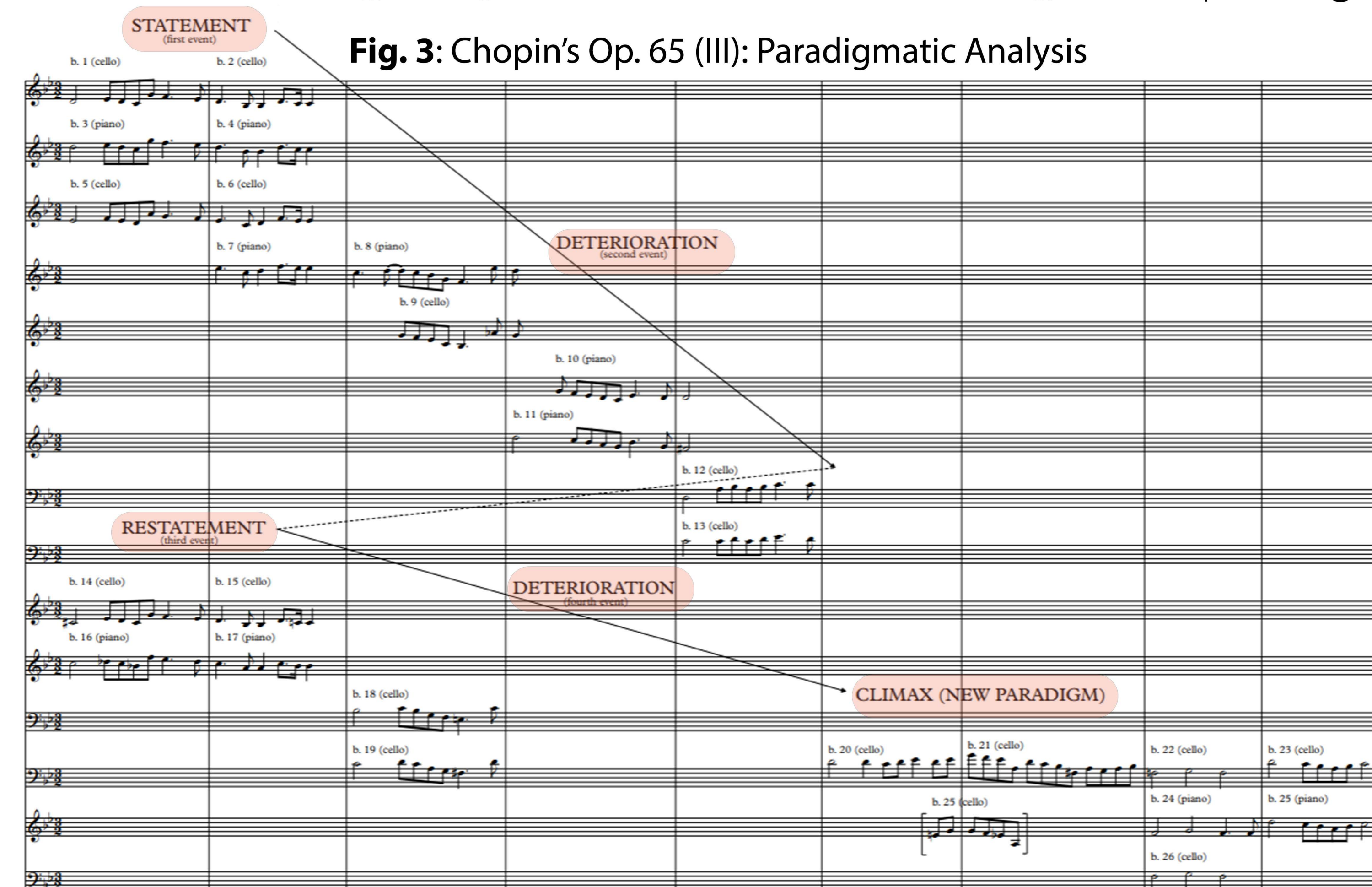
**Fig. 2: Tonal Regions based on Octatonic Cycles**



## Results

### 1. Paradigmatic Analysis

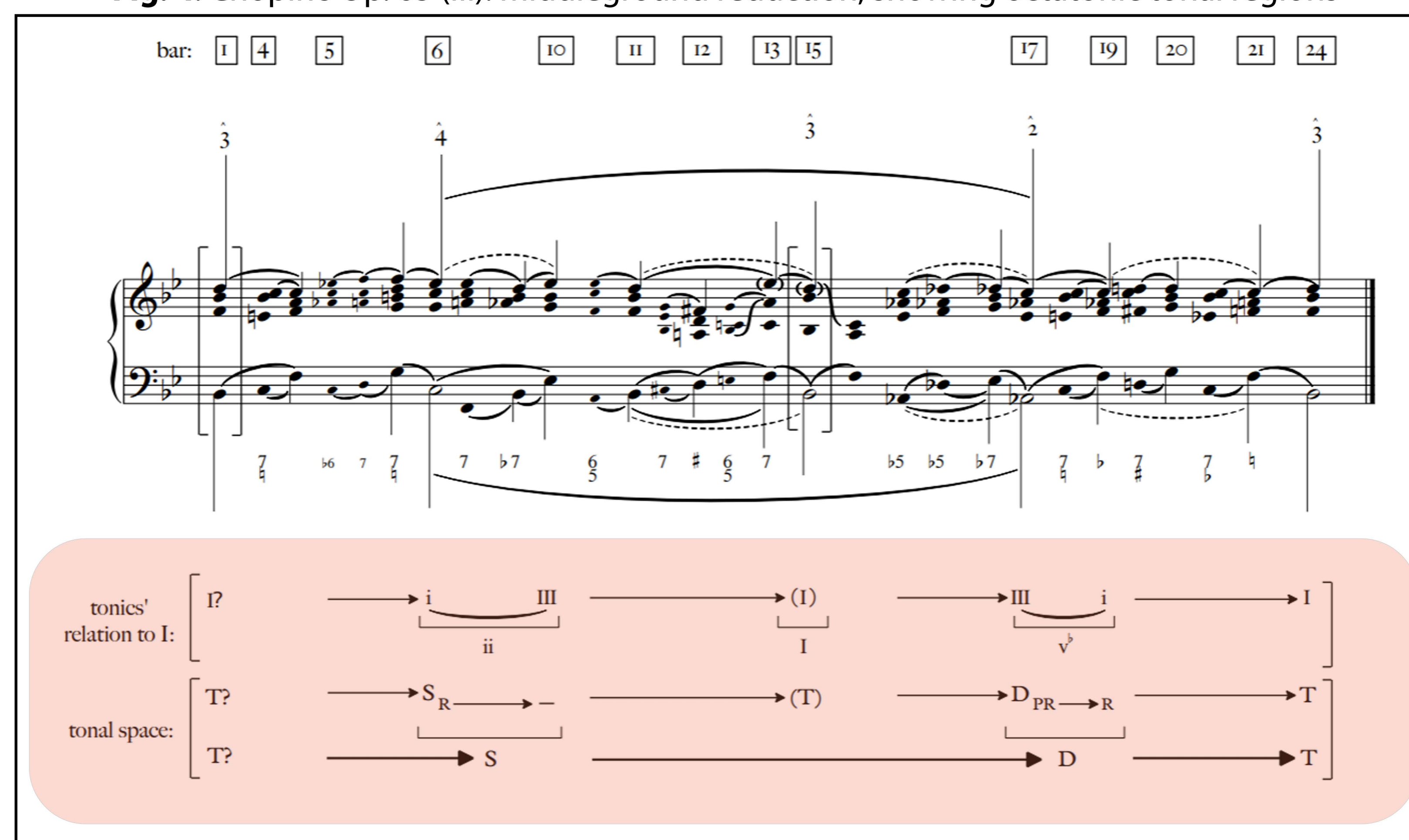
- The graph below shows a statement of, deviation from, and restatement of a melodic paradigm. B. 20 presents another deviation, breaking away from the form and forming a new paradigm.



### 2. Prolongational Analysis

- The middleground reduction below shows an allusion to **T**, a deviation to **S<sub>PR</sub>**, another allusion to **T**, and then a second deviation through **D<sub>PR</sub>**.
- This structure mirrors the paradigmatic analysis above. However, the statement of **T** in m. 24 occurs on a deeper structural level than in m. 25.

**Fig. 4: Chopin's Op. 65 (III): middleground reduction, showing octatonic tonal regions**



## Summary and Conclusion

### 1. Formal Considerations

- The paradigmatic and prolongational analyses suggest that the movement contains a ternary form, but that that form is embellished or extended by a second deviation from the tonic key or melodic model.
- The hypothesis that the movement unfolds a simple ternary design is oversimplistic. However, the movement contains parameters (melody and harmony) which form the expressive face of the movement and which one can read not merely to *operate* in complex counterpoint, but also to *cooperate* in order to create a form that resembles an embellished ternary model.

### 2. Poetic Considerations

- The paradigmatic analysis, especially, suggests that the deterioration (or decline) of a melodic model formed an important step in Chopin's compositional process (intentionally or otherwise) in the case of Op. 65.

### 3. Future Research

- Future directions for this project include:
  1. The formal and hermeneutic study of paradigmatic decline in Chopin's late music more widely.
  2. Analyses of other quasi-ternary forms in Chopin.

## References

- [1] Sutcliffe, Dean. 1999. "Chopin's Counterpoint: The Largo from the Cello Sonata, Op. 65." *The Musical Quarterly*, 83/1: pp. 114-133.
- [2] Schmalfeldt, Janet. 2011. *In The Process of Becoming: Analytical and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music*. Oxford.
- [3] Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. 1982. "An Analysis of Debussy's *Syrinx*." In *Toronto Semiotic Circle: Monographs, Working Papers and Pre-publications*: No. 4: pp. 1-35. Toronto.
- [4] Clark, Suzannah. 2011. *Analyzing Schubert*. Cambridge.
- [5] Cohn, Richard. 2012. *Audacious Euphony: Chromatic Harmony and the Triad's Second Nature*. Oxford University Press.