

I:PAC MC: Poetic Resonances in Schubert's Sonata Form Works

Gabriel Henrique Bianco Navia

Universidade Federal da Integração Latino Americana – Av. Tancredo
Neves, 3838, Foz do Iguaçu/PR, 85867-000

Abstract. Transitions that close with a full cadence in the tonic key (I:PAC MC) are relatively rare in the repertoire, often reserved to small-scale works and slow movements. The use of a I:PAC MC does not carry significant implications in light works, however, when applied to complex pieces, it may incorporate a prominent role in the structural and expressive unfolding of the plot. Through the lens of Sonata Theory, this paper examines Schubert's treatment of the I:PAC MC, demonstrating how the complications derived from this non-normative procedure alters the work's structural and rhetorical layout. In search of an accurate and complete understanding, the examination of the I:PAC MC embraces five formal complications that often accompany the MC articulation: 1) the complete or apparent absence of TR, 2) an overemphasized MC articulation, 3) the use of a "transitional" caesura-fill, 4) the non-normative or highly dramatized structuring of S and 5) a recapitulatory formal compensation. An analysis of the "Unfinished" Symphony provides an illustration.

Keywords: Sonata Theory, Medial Caesura, "Unfinished" Symphony, Schubert's Sonata Form.

1. Introduction: Tonally Over Determined TRs and the I:PAC MC

What should be expected of a transition in a sonata form work?¹ What is its function? Does it always modulate? The transition is the portion of the exposition that links the primary and secondary thematic zones, an area of rhythmic verve and increased harmonic activity that leads to the medial caesura (MC), setting the stage for the secondary key area. As pointed by William Caplin, "the transition need not modulate" (Caplin 1998, 125). Hepokoski and Darcy hold the same position, according to them "the term transition should not be understood to imply an obligatory modulation" (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 94). A common classical procedure was to articulate the end of a non-modulating transition with a I:HC MC, in which case the dominant chord would be reinterpreted as the tonic of the new key (in major mode sonatas).

Some transitions, however, are excessively static from a harmonic perspective, demonstrating a certain difficulty to leave the tonic area. Should one be concerned with

¹ For an extended discussion of the role of the transition in sonata form works, see Caplin 1998, 125–138, and Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 93–116.

such TR areas? According to William Caplin, “[the transition] serves to destabilize the home key so that the subordinate key can emerge as a competing tonality in the exposition” (Caplin 1998, 125). By the same token, Hepokoski and Darcy include in their list of common TR tactics an increased harmonic activity, “sequential activity, accumulative rhetorical energy, a drive toward a structural dominant, and perhaps a concern for modulation” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 94). Thus, despite the non-need for modulation, transitions *are* expected to be harmonically active. A transition that over emphasizes the home key, or more precisely, its tonic, should be conceived as “deformational,” a departure from an internalized tradition, a conscious decision to avoid the norm.² Hepokoski and Darcy affirm that the appearance of one or more I:PACs within TR “suggests an interpretation whereby TR is understood to begin with the decision to reaffirm or over determine the tonic key” (ibid, 114). In such cases, the analyst must speculate the formal and rhetorical reasons as well as consequences for TR’s penchant for the tonic area, a search for the “poetic impulse” and the resultant “emotional properties” of such determination (Wollenberg 2011, 50). In Schubert, this tonal imprisonment may be conceived as reflecting a natural lyrical impulse whose poetic properties transcend the possibilities of the classical procedures available.

The end of TR is often punctuated by a rhetorically stressed cadence and followed by a brief gap, the *medial caesura* (MC), which prepares the arrival of the secondary-theme (S). Sonata Theory offers three cadential options as standard MC articulators: a half cadence in the new key (V:HC MC in major mode sonatas, and either III or v:HC MC in minor-mode ones); a half-cadence in the home key (I:HC MC); and a PAC in the new key (V:PAC MC). Hepokoski and Darcy rank these according to their frequency of occurrence in the Classical repertoire as first-, second-, and third-level defaults, respectively. In addition, the theorists present the rare I:PAC MC as a fourth-level default, mostly found in small-scale works and slow movements (Hepokoski and Darcy, 25-36). Naturally, the I:PAC MC is closely related to TR areas that overstate the tonic, perhaps the result of a tonal over determination. Its use does not carry significant expressive implications in light works, however, when applied to complex pieces, it may incorporate a prominent role in the structural and expressive unfolding of the plot.

2. Franz Schubert and the I:PAC MC

Schubert’s penchant for tonic oriented TRs has been extensively explored in the literature. As stated by James Webster, “Schubert hates to leave the tonic in the classical manner ... indeed his first group may close with a full cadence in the tonic” (Webster 1978, 24). Susan Wollenberg regards such reluctance to leave the tonic area “not in the sense of an inability to launch into the necessary processes of modulation, but rather as showing a poetic impulse, endowing the departure from the tonic with emotional properties” (Wollenberg 2011, 50). Indeed, as demonstrated below, the structural and expressive consequences of tonally over determined TRs often extend well beyond their realization.

Regarding Schubert’s treatment of the I:PAC MC, Webster has pointed out that in Symphonies 8 and 9, the shift from the primary to the secondary key is accomplished by a common-tone modulation (Webster 1978, 23). In a more detailed study, Susana

² Further on the concept of deformation, see Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 3–13.

Clark has provided a complete analysis of the I:PAC MC complication in both symphonies. She uses her findings to justify what she terms “the repositioning of the fifth-space,” a structural relocation of the traditional tonic-dominant axis.³ Susan Wollenberg has labeled the TR area of the two symphonies as “magical transitions,” or transitions that, after reaching a I:PAC, release their poetic effect through a “quick transition pared down to essentials” (Wollenberg 2011, 62). However, the use of a I:PAC MC introduces structural and rhetorical complications whose consequences can be detected well past the MC articulation. As Wollenberg has noted, “the poetic resonances of these transitional moments extend far beyond their immediate impact” (ibid, 67). For Hepokoski and Darcy, the I:PAC MC implicates in “a ‘failed’ (or gesturally weak? or obstinate?) TR that, still in the grip of the grounding tonal principle of the P-zone, dwells on an unusually static tonic.” The theorists then go on to say that “this emphasis, in turn, demands analytical and hermeneutical interpretation” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 29).

Through the lens of Sonata Theory, this paper examines Schubert’s treatment of the I:PAC MC, demonstrating how the complications derived from this non-normative procedure alters the work’s structural and rhetorical layout. In search of an accurate and complete understanding, the examination of the I:PAC MC embraces here five formal complications that often accompany the MC articulation: 1) the complete or apparent absence of TR, 2) an overemphasized MC articulation, 3) the use of a “transitional” caesura-fill (CF), 4) the non-normative or highly dramatized structuring of S and 5) a recapitulatory formal compensation.

1) The use of a I:PAC MC might create the impression that TR (or at least TR-rhetoric) is all together missing, naturally influencing the interpretation of the cadential articulation. Frequently, if the passage that precedes the MC demonstrates an intensified rhythmic verve and a certain level of harmonic instability (in other words, any TR-activity), then the arrival at a I:PAC will produce estrangement on the listener, but a subsequent S-theme will still be expected. In this case, TR will be interpreted as a 4th-level default, as suggested by Hepokoski and Darcy (ibid) (e.g., Symphony 8, D. 759/i, mm. 1–38, see detailed discussion below). Conversely, if the passage that precedes the cadence is marked by a complete absence of TR-activity, the arrival at the I:PAC will be heard as P’s expected closure, implying the onset of TR. The subsequent appearance of an S-theme would then be conceived as deformational, inducing the listener to reinterpret the just heard cadential articulation as a I:PAC MC (e.g., C Major Quintet, D. 956/iv, mm. 1–45; and Piano Trio in Eb, D. 929/iv, mm. 1–74)

2) The apparent absence of TR and the non-normative cadential choice are often compensated by an over emphasized MC, which clarifies its function through a strong rhetorical punctuation. The stressed affirmation is achieved either by a highly dramatized dominant chord that confirms the tonic’s hegemony or by a sustained tonic chord that expands the MC area. A sort of “standing on the tonic” that dissipates the energy accumulated through the course of TR, preparing the arrival of S (e.g., Symphony 8, D. 759/i, mm. 36–38; Symphony 9, D. 944/i, mm. 130–132; C Major Quintet, D. 956/iv, mm. 42–45; Piano Trio in Eb, D. 929/iv, mm. 69–74).

³ Clark interprets the tonic as a tonal point around which third related keys may form a fifth-space. In a sonata form work, opposing third-related secondary keys in the exposition and recapitulation (e.g., mediant and submediant) would be one way to create such spatial relocation. For a detailed discussion of the procedure, see Clark 2011, 228–246.

3) The non-normative cadential articulation is often followed by an active caesura-fill, which takes the burden of TR, incorporating the hitherto missing transitional function. Many theorists have misinterpreted the procedure as an instance of Schubert's abrupt transitions.⁴ Therefore, it is important to clarify that, despite accomplishing TR's ultimate task, the modulatory CF does not substitute for TR from a formal and rhetorical perspective: the overemphasized MC articulation combined with CF's obvious filling rhetoric does not allow for a retrospective interpretation of the MC^(CF)S formal junction. In other words, there is no formal transformation; the initially sounded CF will still be interpreted as filling after the modulation (e.g., Piano Sonata in a, D. 784/iii, mm. 45–51; Symphony 8, D. 759/i, mm. 38–42; Symphony 9, D. 944/i, mm. 132–134).

4) The inability to leave the tonic in the first part of the exposition often introduces complications to the course of S: it may appear in a non-normative key, as if attempting to scape the tonic's initial oppression at any cost (e.g., Symphony 8, D. 759/i, mm. 42–93); it may take the form of a trimodular block (TMB⁵), in which case TM²'s transitional activity and the newly articulated MC incorporate a corrective function, allowing the introduction of a normative theme as TM³ (e.g., Symphony 9, D. 944/i, mm. 134–240); or it may have its utmost goal (EEC⁶) delayed, as if the tonic were trying to drag S into a formal collapse at the moment of closure, avoiding its tonal affirmation (e.g., C Major Quintet, D. 956/iv, m. 46ff). It is important to notice that these formal complications within S-space are quite common in Schubert's late works and, in some cases, might not be related to the MC deformation. The analyst must speculate the probable causes for each formal anomaly, judging whether it is pertinent to associate the complications as cause and consequence.

5) The I:PAC MC could be seen as an easy way out in the recapitulation. Normatively, TR would have to be reworked in order to properly prepare the arrival of S in the tonic level. The I:PAC MC would allow a much simpler procedure, only requiring a *verbatim* restatement of P and TR. However, as one would expect, the recapitulatory transition is often highly expanded, dramatizing the tonal importance of the new MC and injecting an illusory hope into S. Indeed, the virtually inexistent expositional TR seems to be compensated by a rhetorically active passage that attempts to fix “what went wrong” in the first time. It articulates a new MC that, in most cases, allows S to breath fresh air before being imprisoned again by the tonic (e.g., C Major Quintet, D. 956/iv, mm. 169–267; Symphony 9, D. 944/i, mm. 356–440).⁷ Figure 1

⁴ See Wollenberg 2010, 56 and 62; 1998, 22; and Webster, 1978, 23.

⁵ The concept of the trimodular block (TMB) was devised by Hepokoski and Darcy to precisely define the stages of what was commonly explained as a three-key exposition: “Considered as a whole, the TMB (trimodular block) situation conveys the impression of a flawed or unsatisfactory first S-idea, TM¹, followed by some sort of TR-texture-based corrective action, TM² [which is followed by the articulation of a new MC], and a ‘better’ S-idea, TM³” (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 172). For a more comprehensive definition of the trimodular-block, see *ibid.*, 170–77. On the three-key exposition, see Webster 1978, 19–31).

⁶ Hepokoski and Darcy define the EEC, Essential Expositional Closure, as “the first satisfactory PAC that occurs within S and that proceeds onward to differing material” (2006: xxvi).

⁷ Schubert's penchant for the subdominant recapitulation provides here an analogous instance. As observed by Boyd Pomeroy, “although parallel sonata form could be (mis-) used as a mechanical formula (or in Rosen's words, a ‘lazy manneirism’) to minimize or eliminate the need for recomposition in the recapitulation, Schubert's wide-ranging experimentation with different possibilities seems to

summarizes the most common formal and rhetorical complications associated with the I:PAC MC.

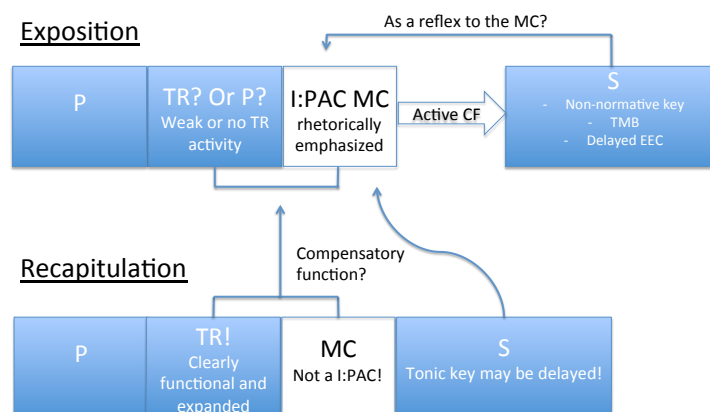


Figure 1. The I:PAC MC: Formal Complications

The I:PAC MC is featured in six of Schubert’s works: first movement of Symphonies no. 8, D. 759 (1822) and no. 9, D. 944 (1825-26), and finale of the String Quintet in C, D. 956 (1828), Piano Trio in Eb, D. 929 (1827), Piano Sonata in G, D. 894 (1826) and Piano Sonata in a, D. 784 (1823). The I:PAC MC formal complications introduced above are readily apparent in the two symphonies as well as in the quintet, and partially present in the three remaining pieces. In order to illustrate Schubert’s treatment of this unorthodox cadential choice, I provide an analysis of the first movement of Symphony no. 8.

3. The I:PAC MC in the “Unfinished” (*allegro moderato*)

The Eight Symphony was written in 1822, but was kept away from the general audience until 1865, when it was finally premiered. Questions regarding the work’s incompleteness abound in the literature, however its obscured history has kept Schubert scholars from a definite answer (Chusid 1968, 3–11; and Deutsch 1940). Prior to moving into the analysis of such a celebrated work, I take the liberty of reproducing Martin Chusid’s wise words, presented in the preface to his first edition of the critical score: “the analytical notes have been written with the full awareness that a great work of art invites analysis from many points of view and that the principal benefits of analysis ultimately remains with the analyst” (Chusid 1968, 1).⁸

The beginning of the “Unfinished” Symphony is marked by a glooming opening motto (P⁰, mm. 1–8) that professes the work’s doomed reality, injecting highly pessimistic expectations into its expressive course.⁹ The initial statement is followed by an agitated, tormented rhythmic stream (P^{1.0}, mm. 9–12) that sets the stage for the

indicate a concern more with its compositional challenges than with any potential as a labor-saving device” (Pomeroy 2008, 20). See also Malcolm Boyd 1968, 12–21.

⁸ For other analytical works on the “Unfinished,” see (selectively) Damschroder 2010, 159–178; Taruskin 2010, 108–112; Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 89, 91, 183, 220 and 305; Chusid 1968, 71–87; Clark 2011, 188–189, 235–240.

⁹ In addition, the work is cast in B minor, a key “associated with the darkest, grimmest, most ‘pathetic’ moods” (Taruskin 2010, 108).

arrival of the main theme (P^{1.1}, mm. 13–20), a meditative melodic line that seems to impatiently reflect about its fate. After extending the key of B minor, P prematurely moves to the mediant, articulating a III:PAC in measure 20. The appearance of the mediant at this point might suggest a desperate attempt to scape the minor mode's negativism through an early motion to the secondary key. However, III does not materialize as a new key; indeed, it is almost instantly overridden by a sudden shift to the dominant of B minor, which, in turn, sets up the return of the main melody. The following section begins as a normative consequent and initially seems to extend P, but the increased harmonic activity and dynamic level from measure 26 onward propose a retrospective reinterpretation of the passage as TR (mm. 22–38), one of the dissolving consequent type.¹⁰ Despite its perceptible transitional character, TR fails to free itself from the minor mode, ending in a fatalistic i:PAC MC (m. 38). After the confirmation of the tonic key, one might wonder if the just sounded passage was not merely the expected consequent phrase, which would then be followed by TR. Nevertheless, the subsequent active CF and the introduction of a new, self-contained theme retrospectively confirm the MC status as well as the transitional function of the previous passage. In addition, the overemphasized MC articulation, a typical feature of the I:PAC MC option, suggests that this cadence occupies a privileged position in the unfolding of the work (figure 2).

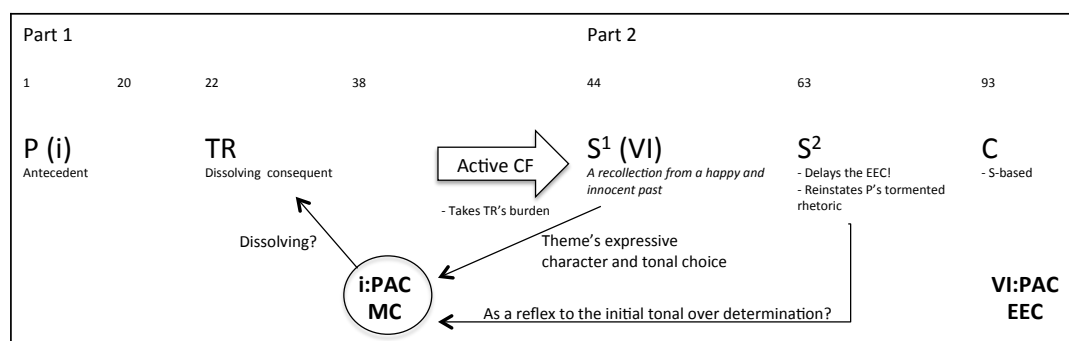


Figure 2. Schubert, Symphony no. 8, D. 759/I (exposition)

The MC is directly followed by a modulating CF, which incorporates a pseudo “transitional function,” leading us into the unexpected key of G major (VI). As discussed above, despite accomplishing TR’s task, CF should not be interpreted as TR.¹¹

The S-theme (S^{1.1}, m. 44ff –preceded by two measures of S^{1.0}) emerges as a moment of relief, as if the troubles of our mundane world had suddenly vanished. Richard Taruskin has described it as “an island of repose, a fair and fleeting *Augenblick* magnified into what philosophers call a ‘specious present’—a considerable duration that nevertheless represents instantaneousness” (Taruskin 2010, 110). For David Damschroder, “the simple yet perfect melody that opens the G major region is timeless, seemingly stemming from a distant past and extending through eternity” (Damschroder 2010, 162). Similarly, Susana Clark has noted its “non-teleological status” (Clark 2011, 240). I would add that the theme’s naïve harmonic and melodic quality associated with its dance-like character suggest the pastoral topic, implying such connotations as a lost

¹⁰ Following P, structured as an antecedent, TR begins as a normative consequent, eventually dissolving into transitional activity. See Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 101–102.

¹¹ For a detailed examination of the Unfinished’s medial caesura and caesura-fill from a transformational viewpoint, see Clark 2011, 236–240.

happiness, a lost innocence and the recollection of childhood.¹² In addition, the key of G major seems to contribute to this interpretation in that the choice of a non-normative “harmonic region” suggests a distant metaphorical place in the sonata’s trajectory. Thus, it could be argued that the over determination of the exposition’s first part defines the expressive character of S which arises as a timeless recollection of a happy and innocent past, postponing the work’s unavoidable fate.

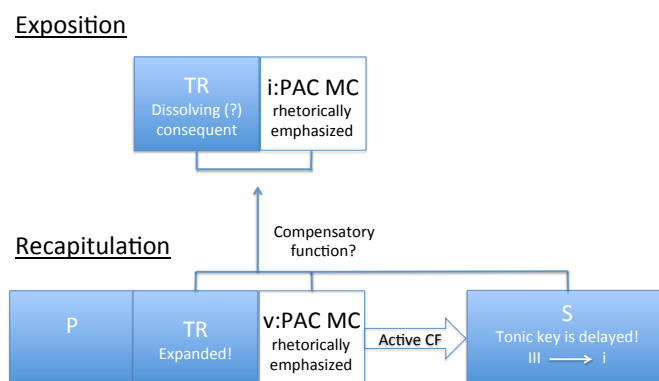


Figure 3. Schubert, Symphony no. 8, D. 759/I - Recapitulation’s compensatory function

S^{1.1} is structured as an abbreviated, perhaps deformational sentence in which an 8-bar compound presentation (c.b.i. + c.b.i.) is followed by a highly compressed 2-bar cadential gesture, ending in a VI:PAC. The final cadence elides with the onset of the theme’s restatement, which initially seems to move towards the EEC without any difficulty. However, prior to securing the expected cadence, a dramatic halt brings the theme to a formal collapse that reinstates P’s tormented character. The contrapuntal texture and the sequential harmony of the new passage (S², mm. 63–93) disturb the theme’s peaceful homophony, perhaps suggesting a tonal threat. S² manages to withstand the pressure, finally achieving the EEC in measure 93. Immediately after the articulation of the VI:PAC, a shortened version of S^{1.1} is introduced as the head-theme of a non-normative closing section, overwriting any negative thoughts that could perhaps arise from a P-based motive.¹³

In the recapitulation (figure 3), the P-theme is restated in its entirety, but the concluding III:PAC is evaded: V⁷ in D major is transformed into a ii⁶₅ chord in E minor, eventually resulting in a weak iv:PAC that triggers TR. As expected, TR is now expanded, as if compensating for its handicapped condition in the exposition. After an initial evaded motion towards the submediant, it heads to V_N, eventually articulating a rhetorically emphasized v:PAC MC. If it had occurred in the exposition, the sounded MC would have been interpreted as a normative choice, however, its unorthodox appearance in the recap raises questions as to the work’s harmonic course. One could argue that it compensates for TR’s expositional harmonic over determination, allowing S to breath fresh air before the unavoidable return of the tonic key. From a transformational perspective, the recapitulatory MC could be explained as the most efficient choice to prepare the key of D major (III), –S’s starting key– mirroring its

¹² For more on the pastoral topic, see Hatten 2004, 53–67. Further on the S-theme’s dance-like character, see Chusid, 1968, 80–82 and Taruskin 2010, 110–112.

¹³ A fascinating reading of the S–C complex can be found in Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 183.

expositional counterpart, the submediant.¹⁴ Regardless of our final interpretation, the new key does delay the arrival of the home key, compensating for the over determined expositional P and TR.

4. Conclusion

It seems clear that, as proposed above, the poetic resonances of tonally over determined TRs extend well beyond their realization. The tonal and formal complications featured in Schubert's "Unfinished," first movement, seem to be derived from the expressive interaction between the minor and major modes as well as the character, temperament and function assigned to each one of the chosen keys. Needless to say, the I:PAC MC plays a pivotal role in the plot: it arises as the final statement of an obstinate, tonally static and rhetorically defective TR, and becomes an interpretative point of reference to the remainder of the work, influencing the structure and character of S, and resulting in a dramatically charged recapitulatory compensation.

5. References

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¹⁴ For Susana Clark, the choice of third related keys for both, expositional and recapitulatory, S-spaces implicates in the relocation of the tonic-dominant's fifth-space. See Clark 2011, 228-246.