Are there any bad (or good) transformational analyses?

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Steven Rings, Network of "Lewin's Project"

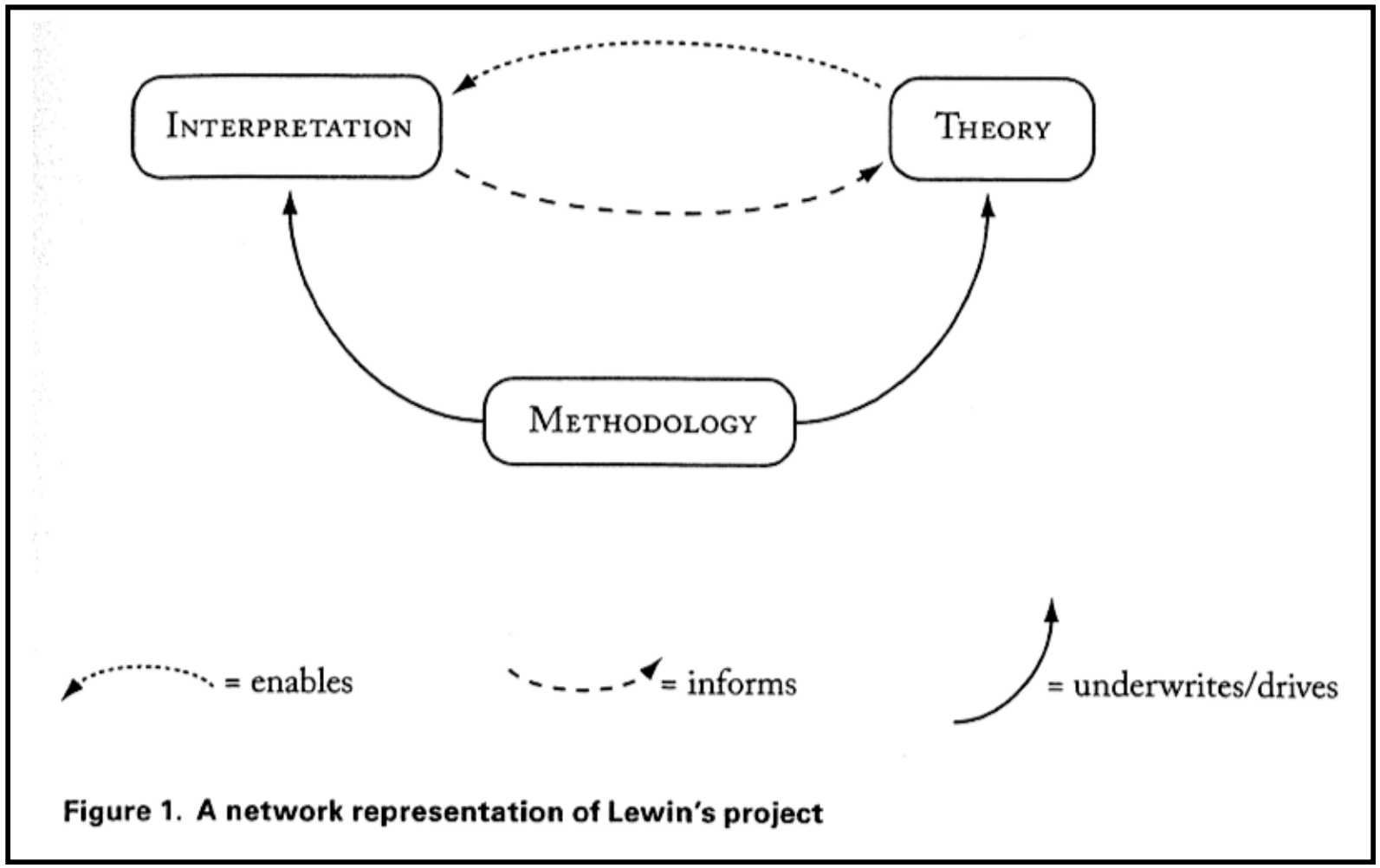
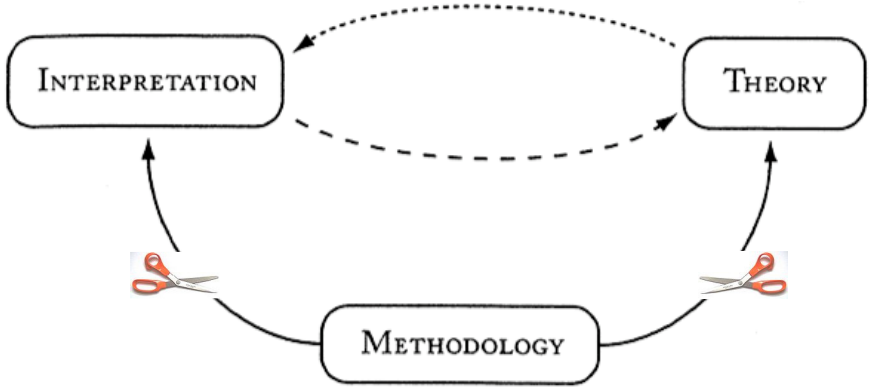


Figure 1. A network representation of Lewin's project

Rings, Steven. 2006. Review of three David Lewin books: *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations; Musical Form and Transformation: Four Analytic Essays; and Studies in Music with Text. JMT* 50/1: 111-127.

Rings on O'Donnell & Klumpenhouwer on Buchler on the methodology node

19 The polemical upheaval such abstraction can cause was recently on display in *Music Theory Online* 13/3 (September 2007), as various writers responded to Michael Buchler's (2007) critique of Klumpenhouwer networks. Tacitly at work in many of the responses was an effort to articulate the methodological principles that seemed violated by Buchler's proposal. The responses to Buchler from Henry Klumpenhouwer (2007) and Shaugn O'Donnell (2007) can be read as the most explicit attempts to "reattach the Methodology node" of Figure 1 to the questions of theory and interpretation circulating in the discussion.



Rings, Steven. 2006. Review of three David Lewin books: *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations; Musical Form and Transformation: Four Analytic Essays; and Studies in Music with Text. JMT* 50/1: 111-127.

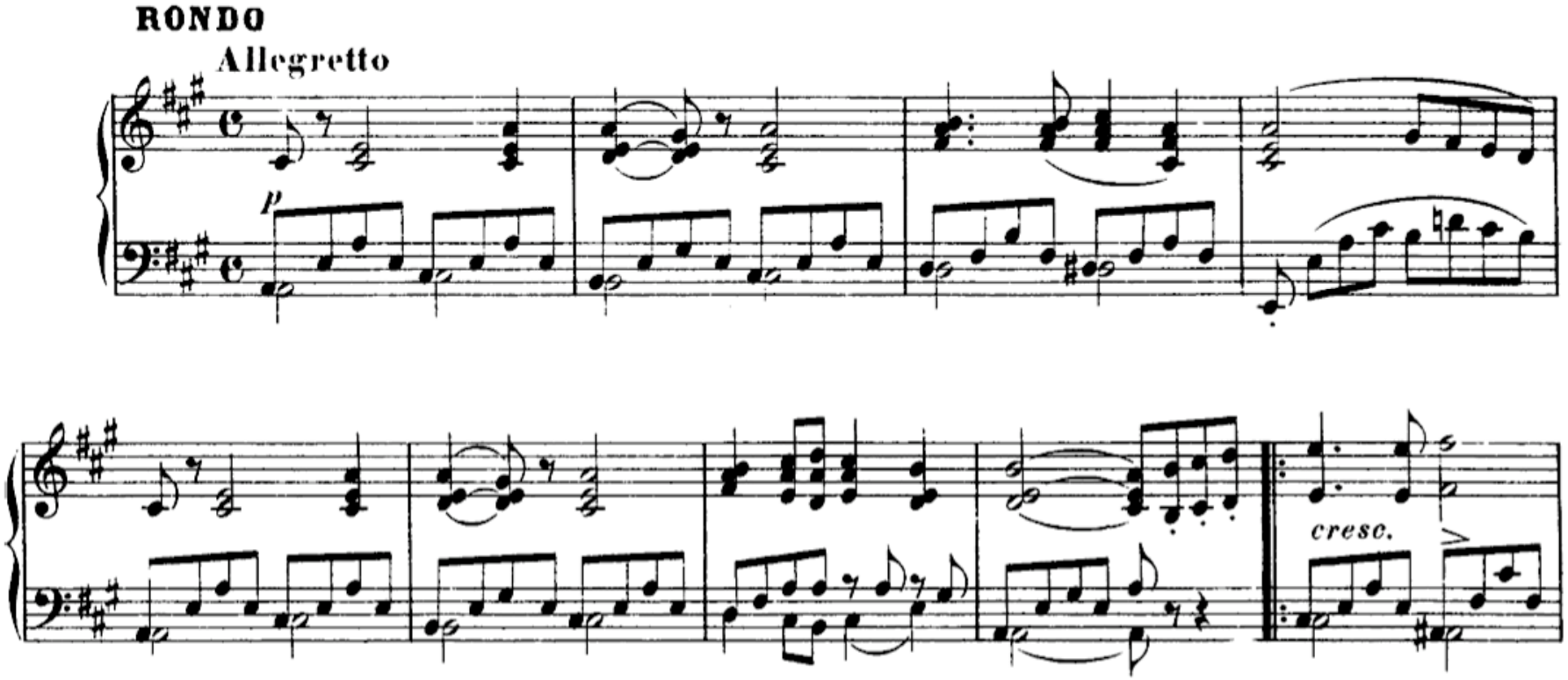
Roeder's (2009) Preference Rules

[12.1] Across these various transformational approaches to the Bartók passage, I have taken care to articulate the goals and principles underlying their construction, proceeding from and elaborating upon those discussed by Lewin in *MFT*. Achieving an expressive analysis is by no means assured. It is always an art, but certain constant concerns have been evident, which are summarized below as a series of guidelines for choosing objects and transformations:

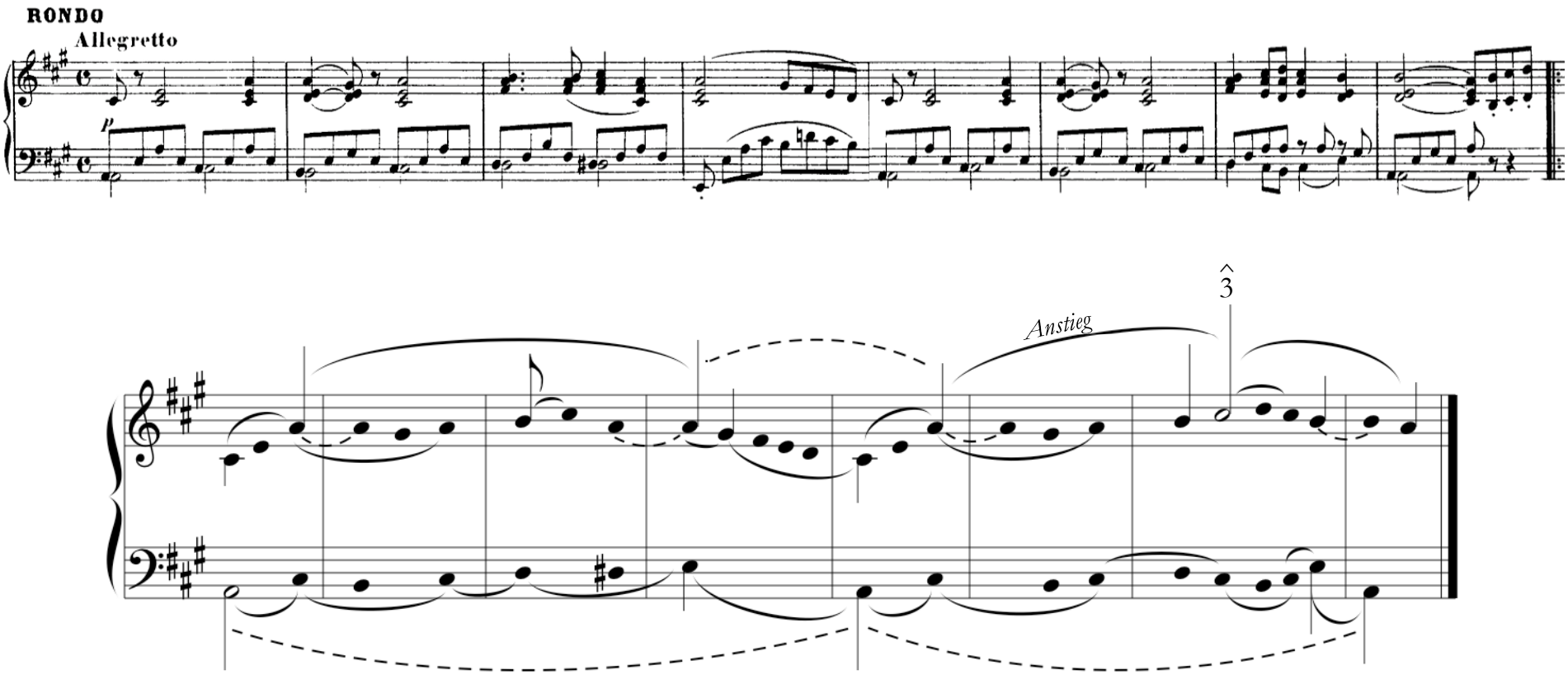
- Choose the most aurally salient analytical objects that will still belong to a single family and have an economical transformational structure.
- Choose an object family that is complete (including all objects that appear in the piece) but minimal (not entailing many objects that do not appear).
- Choose transformations that occur prominently (preferably manifesting distinctive aural signatures) and repeatedly, so establishing themselves as characteristic, while satisfying the formal constraints necessary for network structure and isography.
- Choose transformations that may be applied to other families of objects in the same composition.
- Organize the transformational network to be homologous with musical form, such that the characteristic gestures correspond to segments, phrases, sections, and the processes that constitute them.
- Event-oriented networks (in which two nodes may have the same content) are good for illustrating isomorphic gestures statically, or for discussing network structures that are not easily visualized as temporal gestures.
- Spaces are most effective for analysis if the pathways taken by the piece are made evident, for example, by the characteristic gestures of an animated agent. Agents and their motions should be designed to focus on the musical processes identified by the analysis (clarifying the musically relevant sameness and difference of gestures), and to elicit viewers' empathetic participation in the ongoing making of musical structure, while minimizing extraneous connotations.
- Suitably constrained representation can enhance signification.

[12.2] The presentation above of so many different views of the same passage shows that multiple representations are sometimes needed to get at different aspects of a passage, even those that are consistent with each other. This is not to say that there is no best analysis—on the contrary, I have given many bases above for judging which analyses are most effective—but only to acknowledge that, like words, transformational analyses are at best imperfect and incomplete signifiers of musical experience.

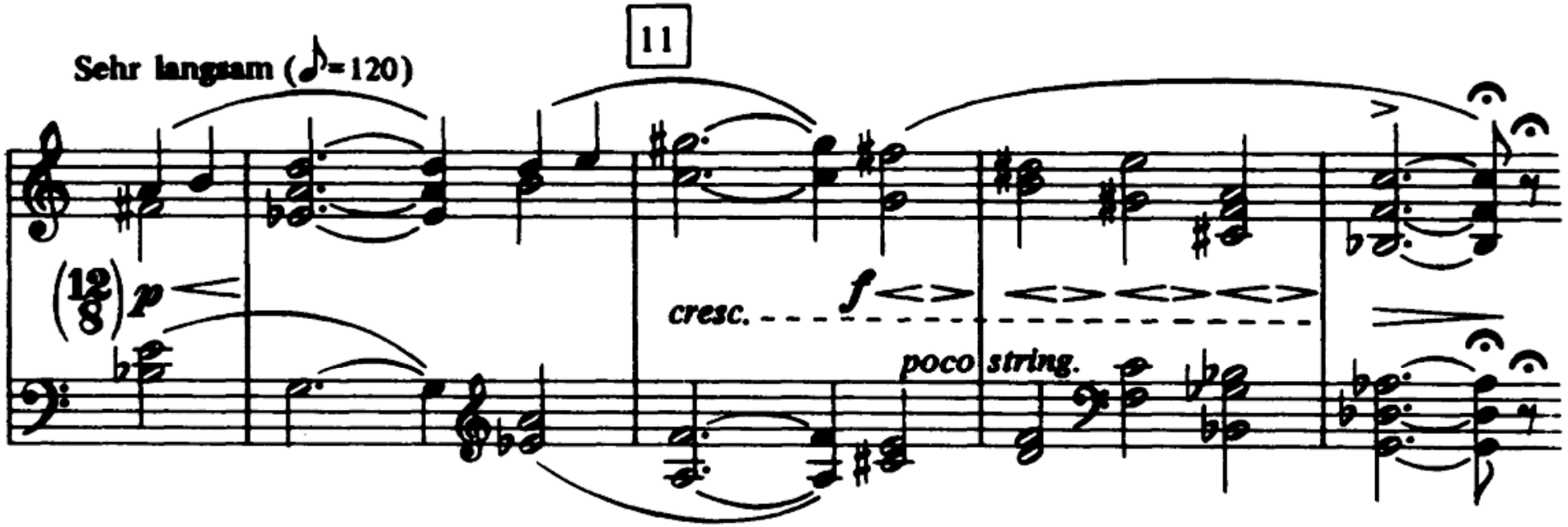
Schubert, Piano Sonata, D. 959, iv, mm. 1-8



Schubert, Piano Sonata, D. 959, iv, mm. 1-8



Chorale from Schoenberg, op. 11, no. 2

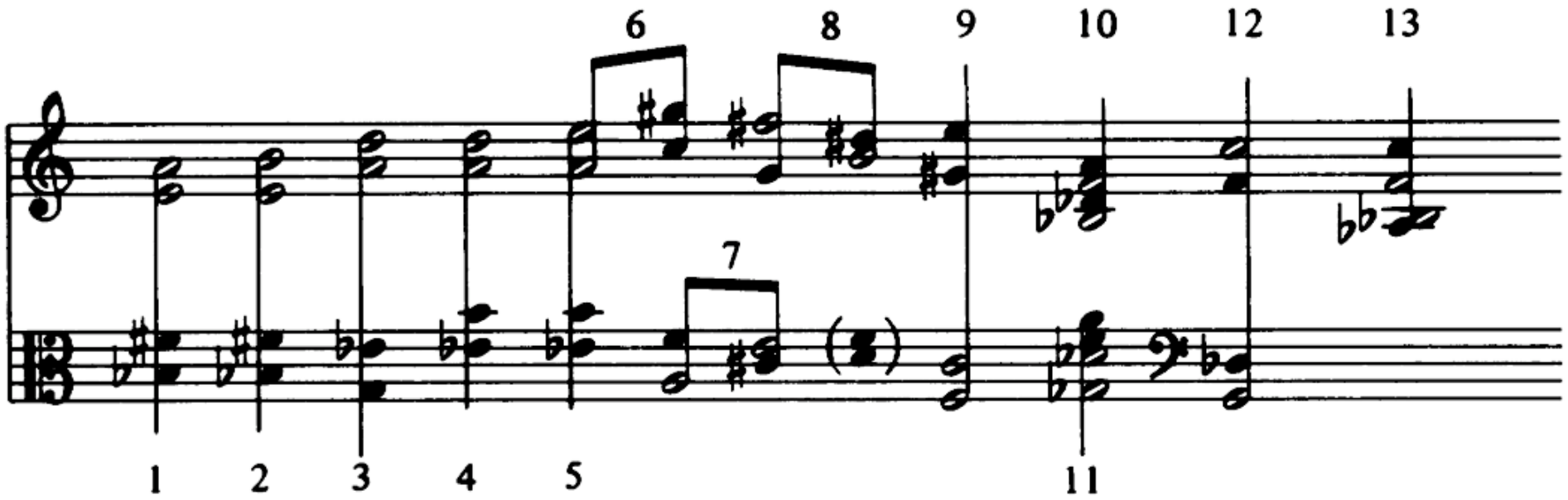


Example 1

(p. 80 of Lewin's article)

Lewin, David. 1994. "A Tutorial on Klumpenhouwer Networks, Using the Chorale in Schoenberg's Opus 11, No. 2." *Journal of Music Theory* 38: 79–101.

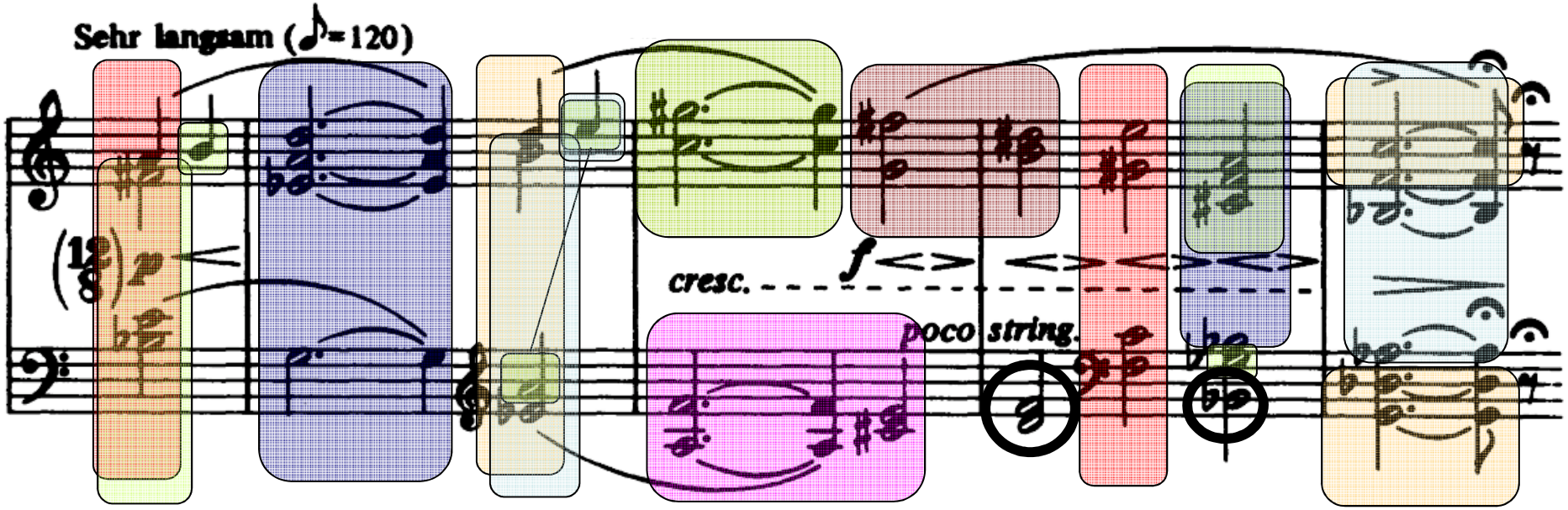
Lewin's segmentation into chords for analysis



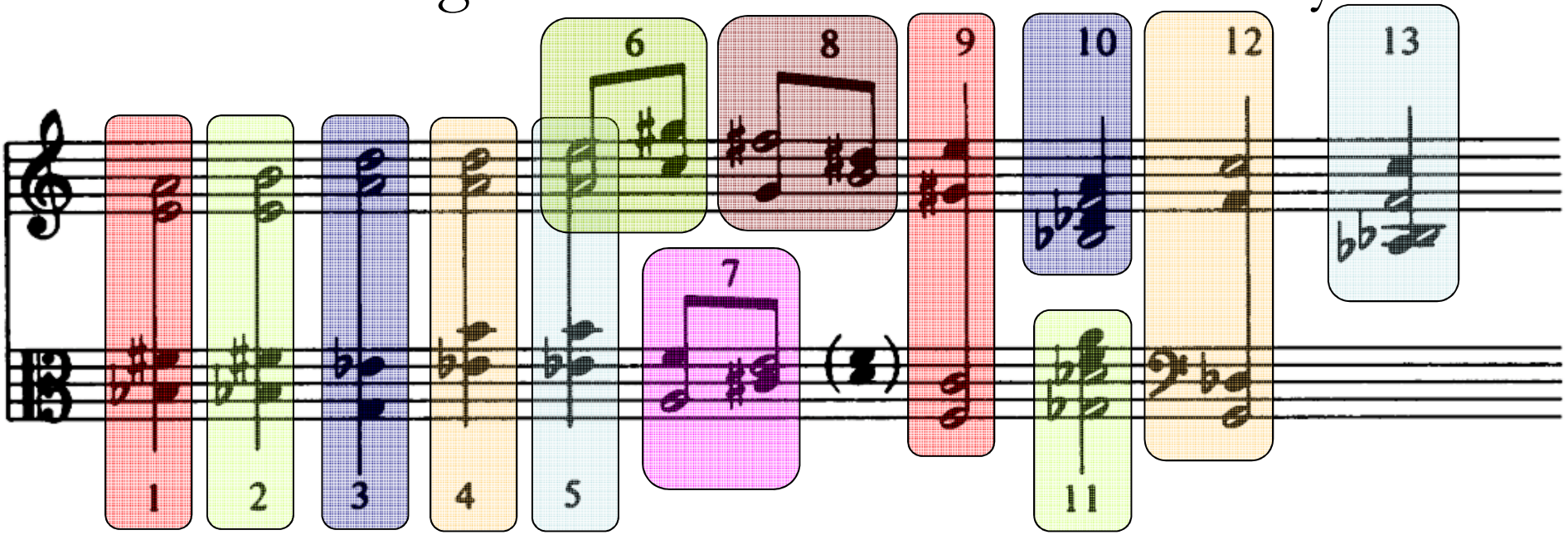
Example 9

(p. 87)

Lewin, David. 1994. "A Tutorial on Klumpenhouwer Networks, Using the Chorale in Schoenberg's Opus 11, No. 2." *Journal of Music Theory* 38: 79–101.



Lewin's segmentation into chords for analysis



Lewin's agenda for analyzing this excerpt

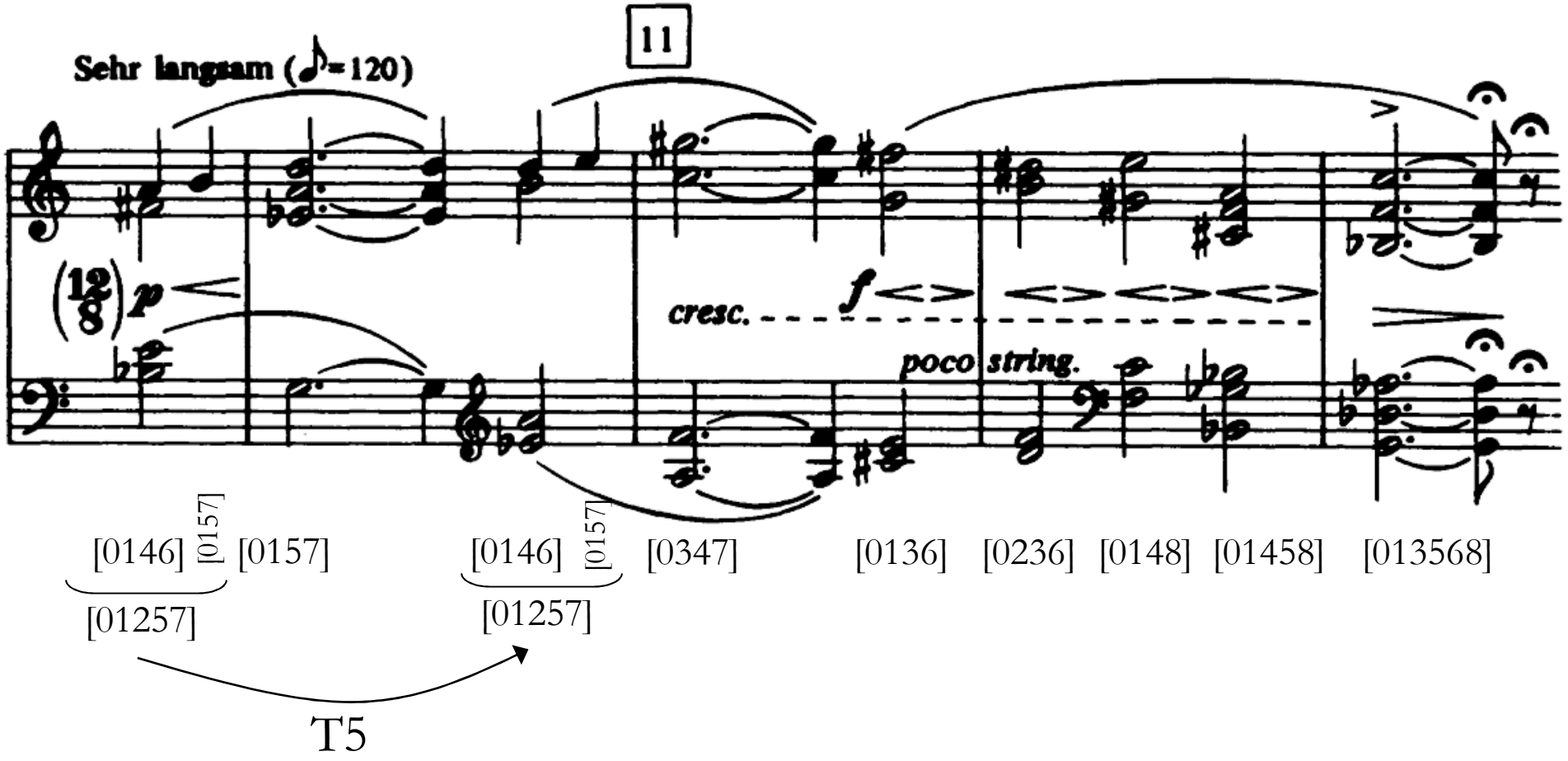
Agenda 1: To formulate an overall view of the chorale, we must somehow relate the 4–19 = [0148] sets of its middle to the 4–16s = [0157] and 4–Z15s = [0146] of its opening.

Agenda 2: The cadence chord of the chorale must be integrated into that view.

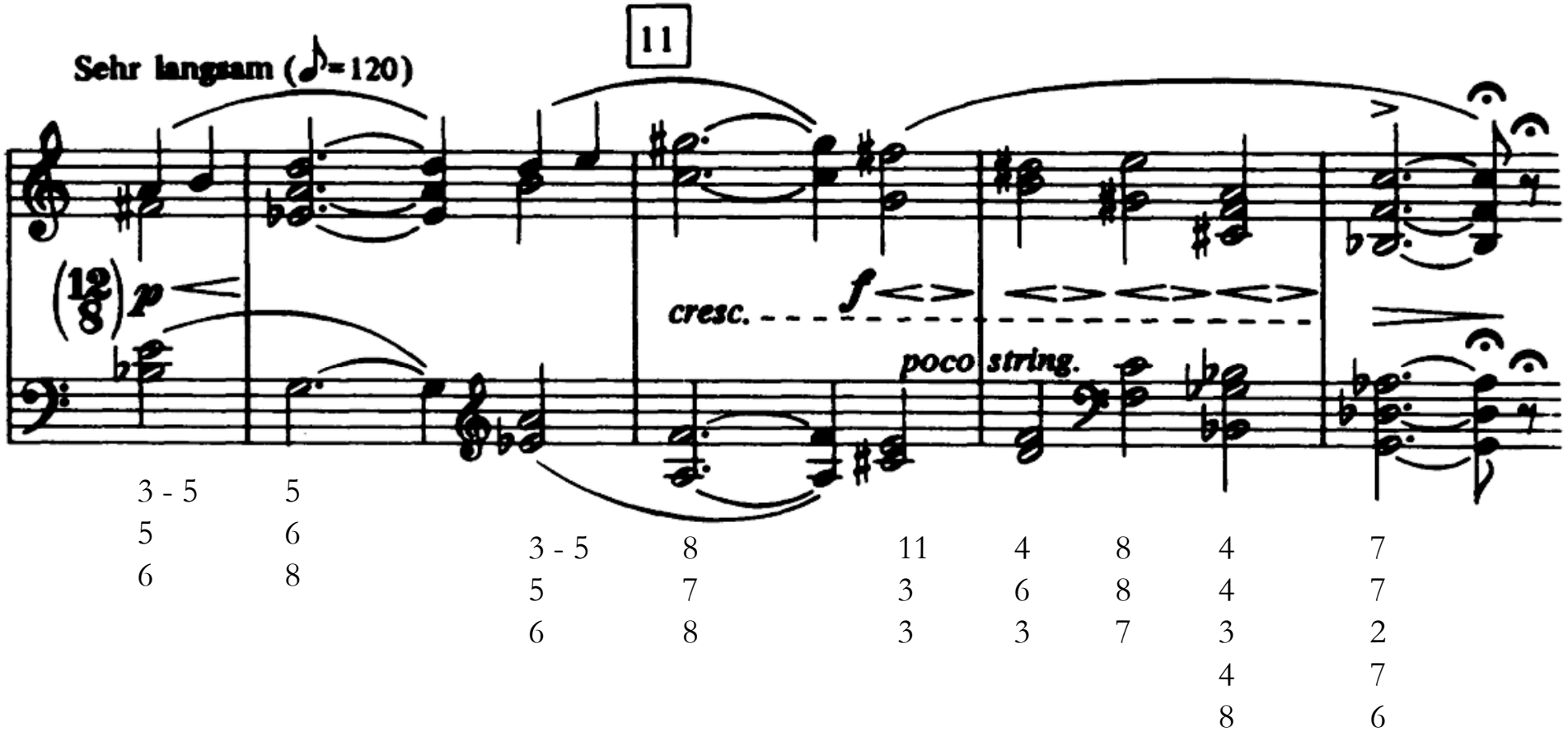
Agenda 3 : So must the verticalities at the end of measure 11 and the beginning of measure 12, chords that strongly project diminished triads. Example 5 showed to some extent how the left and right hands of the chords fit into a scheme of 4–19 sets, but the effect of the chords as vertical totalities cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the {D4, F4} of the chord at the beginning of m. 12 was not addressed by example 5; this dyad has yet to be integrated into any overall harmonic view of the chorale.[6]

(p. 86 of Lewin 1994)

Chorale from Schoenberg, op. 11, no. 2



Chorale from Schoenberg, op. 11, no. 2



3 - 5	5	3 - 5	8	11	4	8	4	7
5	6	5	7	3	6	8	4	7
6	8	6	8	3	3	7	3	2
							4	7
							8	6

harmonic spacing, measured in semitones

Diverse or Unified?

The passage is clearly a single phrase, yet its harmonic structure sounds diffuse. That is a significant aspect of its aesthetic effect, and we shall take some time to explore more precisely some of its diverse features. Then we shall approach a question which arises naturally from this context: is there some way in which we can sense the harmonic field of the phrase as unified, rather than diverse? We shall see that Klumpenhouwer Networks provide a positive answer to that question.[2] We shall also see how they provide useful theoretical machinery for exploring further aspects of harmonic diversity in the passage.

(p. 79 of Lewin 1994)

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