

FSUNY-Fredonia School of Music

Simple Part Forms

From

Form in Tonal Music, by Douglass Green

Form: refers to both the design of a piece and its tonal structure.

Design: the organization of melody, rhythm, cadences, timbre, texture, and tempo.

Tonal structure: the harmonic organization of a piece.

One-part form: a piece that cannot be divided into parts is by design (no divisive aspect through strongly conclusive cadences or striking contrasts) or by tonal structure (the piece must consist of a single harmonic movement) is a one-part form. Examples: J. S. Bach, WTC, Vol. 1 Preludes 1 and 2.

Open part: a part of a composition that is harmonically incomplete. Such a part will not end with a conclusive cadence in the key in which it began. Any form with an "open" first part is a *continuous form*.

Closed part: a part of a composition that contains within itself a complete harmonic movement. Such a part will end with a conclusive cadence in the key in which it began. Any form with a "closed" first part is a *sectional form*.

Binary form: a form in two parts. The two parts may be similar or entirely different in their length and internal structures. Binary forms are either continuous or sectional.

Simple binary: no return in part two of thematic material (in the tonic) from part one.

Balanced binary: part two closes with a transposed restatement of a substantial portion of the bars that ended part one; that is, the ends of each part are identical or nearly identical (some variation is possible) except for pitch level. Part one usually ends on V of III while part two ends on I. Therefore, balanced binary forms will always be continuous.

Rounded binary: all or the beginning of part one returns toward the end of part two *in the tonic*.

Note: Kostka/Payne restrict rounded binary forms to those in which half of part one returns in part two. See K/P pp. 341-42 and 347.

Ternary form: a form in three parts. The chief characteristic of the design is statement-contrast-restatement. Ternary forms are either continuous, sectional or full sectional.

Continuous ternary: any ternary form with an "open" first part is continuous.

Sectional ternary: any ternary form with a "closed" first part is a sectional.

Full sectional ternary: all three parts are harmonically closed. The third part is typically exactly like or a varied repetition of the first. If all three parts are harmonically closed, the middle need not be of a contrasting character for the piece to be classified as full sectional ternary.

Descriptive Possibilities

Binary forms:

continuous/sectional	simple	binary
continuous/sectional	rounded	binary
continuous/sectional	balanced	binary

Ternary forms:

continuous	ternary
sectional	ternary
full sectional	ternary

Symbols for Design

Binary forms:

Simple	A-B or A-A'
Rounded	A-B-A or A-B-A'
Balanced	A-A'

Ternary forms:

A-B-A or A-B-A'

Rounded binary vs. ternary: the tonal structure and design of these two forms can be very similar. The difference is based solely on the amount of contrast between parts A and B. In the rounded binary form, the melodic and motivic material of B is clearly taken from A and the characters of the two sections are similar. In the ternary form, B is made up of new material or contrasts strikingly in some other way with A.