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When Is an Ending Finished? Codas, Continuations, and the Coordination of Closure in Chopin's Op. 25 Études

In Chopin's Op. 25 Études, arrival does not necessarily bring motion to an end. A tonic may be firmly established, the principal thematic material may have returned, and the overall form may seem complete. Yet the hands continue: arpeggios unfurl, double notes remain active, a rhythmic figure recurs, or a final surge restores energy that seemed ready to dissipate. Elsewhere, the opposite occurs. The music enters a recognisably terminal region, even as its strongest melodic-harmonic cadence has yet to be articulated. These differences are especially consequential in an étude, where a characteristic pianistic action can saturate nearly every measure and acquire formal significance through repetition. When such activity continues beyond a significant arrival, the ensuing music cannot be dismissed as merely an afterthought. Conversely, when that activity fragments, slows, shifts register, or disappears, the resulting change can itself help articulate the ending.

The analytical problem is therefore not simply where a coda begins or how many measures remain after the return of the principal material. The more consequential question is which processes have reached completion at a given moment and which continue beyond it. A formal design may be complete while its decisive large-scale cadence remains ahead. Structural closure may already have occurred while the technical premise, phrase rhythm, texture, and dynamics continue to project motion. The literal endpoint supplies yet another

kind of finality. Distinguishing these events clarifies the function of terminal music without treating every late tonic, coda, or final measure as equivalent.

Throughout Op. 25, Chopin reshapes closure by varying the temporal distance among four kinds of completion: formal, structural, expressive, and global. The corpus-level analysis reveals a strong ordering. Formal closure either precedes or coincides with structural closure. Structural closure either precedes or coincides with expressive closure. Expressive closure either precedes or coincides with global closure. What varies is the spacing between these events. No. 10 compresses all four into the final B-minor event at m. 119, where its rapid octave mechanism remains integrated into the principal closing drive until formal, structural, expressive, and global closure converge at once. Other études, by contrast, place substantial music between formal and structural closure or between structural closure and expressive cessation. Codas and post-structural continuations are therefore not synonymous. A coda may remain necessary to produce structural closure, while a post-structural continuation may confirm, dissolve, transform, or rhetorically intensify an ending that is already tonally complete.

Analytical Framework: Closure as a Coordinated Process

A useful point of departure is the refusal of Mark Anson-Cartwright to reduce closure to a single universally sufficient event. He surveys theories that locate closure in tonal structure, form, rhythm, and motivic organisation and stresses that these parameters need not coincide. Texture, orchestration, and dynamics can likewise reinforce or complicate tonal completion (Anson-Cartwright 1–2). This multidimensional view is particularly apt for Op. 25 because Chopin frequently allows one dimension to settle while another remains conspicuously active. A cadence may stabilise the tonic while the defining figuration continues without interruption. Conversely, the technical mechanism may begin to dissolve before the strongest final harmony. Harmonic arrival remains indispensable, but its analytical

status depends on what phrase rhythm, texture, register, dynamics, and technical action are still doing around it.

Complementing this multidimensional account, V. Kofi Agawu supplies a hierarchical perspective. His study of Op. 28 by Chopin distinguishes local, intermediate, and global closure according to the span controlled by a closing event and argues more broadly that different musical dimensions can come to the fore at different points (Agawu 6). That sensitivity to hierarchy is retained here, but the vocabulary is narrowed to the specific problem posed by Op. 25: the separation of formal, structural, expressive, and global completion.

Taken together, these perspectives support treating the four categories as discrete points of closure rather than extended closing zones. Each refers to an identifiable moment—a particular beat, cadential arrival, or sounding event—at which the relevant musical process reaches completion. The spans that prepare for or follow these moments are described separately as closing processes, terminal regions, codas, or continuations, depending on their formal position and function.

Table 1. Working definitions of the four closure types

Closure type	Definition	Primary analytical evidence	Schematic example
Formal closure	Point at which the expected large-scale design completes its principal return or closing function	Formal schema, thematic return, phrase grouping, arrival of the cadential conclusion to the returning material	In an ABA form, the returned A section reaches its actual conclusion
Structural closure	Most important large-scale tonic cadence	Cadential bass and harmony, melodic	At a structurally privileged late point, a

	at which the governing melodic and harmonic processes achieve persuasive completion	completion, tonic stability, formal placement, subsequent music	prepared dominant resolves to tonic and later music does not reopen the governing melodic-harmonic process
Expressive closure	Point at which texture, dynamics, register, tempo, technical motion, and rhetorical pacing collectively achieve finality	Cessation or transformation of the technical premise, textural and registral change, dynamic withdrawal or culmination	Continuous figuration yields to sustained stillness
Global closure	Literal endpoint of the piece	Final sounding event and cessation	The final sonority ends, and no music follows

Within this framework, formal closure depends partly on recognising the formal expectations established by the piece. In an ABA design, for example, the return of A creates an expectation that the principal formal process will eventually complete, but the first reappearance of opening material is not itself the formal close. A deceptive cadence, extension, or renewed continuation can postpone that point. Formal closure therefore marks the moment at which the expected design has actually fulfilled its concluding function.

Structural closure, by contrast, requires greater caution because the term carries a specifically Schenkerian history. In *Cadence: A Study of Closure in Tonal Music*, William Caplin notes that Anson-Cartwright's concept of structural or tonal closure refers, in a strict Schenkerian sense, to the specific temporal point at which the Ursatz reaches completion (Caplin, *Cadence* 8). Here, structural closure is used in a Schenkerian-informed sense to denote the most consequential large-scale tonic-directed melodic-harmonic close, rather than simply any late perfect authentic cadence. Complete Ursatz reductions of all twelve études lie beyond the scope of the project, so a strong late arrival is treated first as a candidate. Its status

is confirmed only if subsequent music does not reopen the governing tonal or melodic process.

This temporal qualification allows a strong arrival to be tested retrospectively. Later music can reveal that an apparently decisive event was only provisional, but continued figuration alone does not invalidate a structural close. The more important question is whether subsequent music establishes a new governing tonal or melodic dependency or instead prolongs an already secured field. This distinction becomes especially important in No. 12, where a large-scale C-major close is followed by substantial technical and expressive motion that continues without reopening the tonal process.

Within this structural account, Caplin further distinguishes cadence from the broader phenomenon of closure. Cadence is a primary source of closure, but it is not the exclusive one. Closure can also be produced by non-cadential processes (Caplin, *Cadence* 9). He likewise distinguishes cadential arrival, a precise point in time, from cadential function, the larger span that prepares the arrival and culminates in it. This distinction is particularly useful for Op. 25 because an étude can spend several measures in an unmistakably closing process before the structural close itself occurs. Continued repetition can also sustain openness. Drawing on the paradigm of repetition and terminal modification, Caplin shows how repeated patterns generate expectations of continuation until some marked change makes stasis more probable (Caplin, *Cadence* 2–4). The technical premise of an étude often operates in precisely this way.

At the melodic level, the work of James MacKay on imperfect authentic cadences adds another qualification. Harmonic arrival and melodic completion need not occur at the same instant, and tonic harmony can support genuine cadential function even when the soprano does not close on scale degree 1 (MacKay 38). Structural closure is therefore not

assigned from tonic harmony or the top voice alone. Bass progression, melodic behaviour, formal placement, and the subsequent music must support the same hearing.

Moving from structural to expressive completion, the distinction drawn by Robert Hatten between tonal and expressive closure clarifies the third category. Hatten allows dramatic or expressive processes to remain unresolved after tonal syntax has achieved closure. Rhythm, dynamics, articulation, pacing, texture, gesture, and topic can carry trajectories that extend beyond harmonic completion (Hatten, pars. 2–3). Expressive closure is used here for the point at which those remaining processes collectively cease to project significant continuation. It is not a label for every diminuendo or registral contraction. The category becomes analytically meaningful only when several expressive parameters together change the state of the ending.

Alongside these four closure points, three additional terms describe spans rather than points. Terminal region is the broadest, referring to a recognisably ending-oriented passage near the conclusion of an étude. Coda is used more narrowly for a distinct concluding region that begins after the principal formal design has completed, even if structural closure has not yet occurred. Post-structural continuation is purely temporal: it refers to music occurring after structural closure. These terms can overlap, but none entails the others. Most importantly, a coda can begin before structural closure and remain responsible for producing it.

Beyond these formal and tonal distinctions, the étude genre adds one further kind of evidence: the technical premise, the recurring pianistic mechanism through which a study organises both sound and physical action. An analysis by Eugene Montague of Op. 25 No. 1 demonstrates that instrumental gesture can possess a long-range trajectory of its own. He identifies the ascent to G ♭ 6 at m. 34 as the culmination of a physical expansion involving the right-hand fifth finger and the widening hand span. After that point, the central expansion process loses its former necessity (Montague, pars. 8.3–8.4, 8.6). This does not mean that

technical difficulty creates closure. Rather, when a single mechanism saturates an étude, its persistence, contraction, or disappearance becomes evidence about whether a process remains active.

This genre-specific use of technical evidence is supported by embodied-music scholarship. Rolf Inge Godøy relates musical sound to trajectories of sound-producing bodily motion and argues that listeners can project familiar motor images onto heard sound (Godøy, pars. 1.2–1.3). Mariusz Kozak similarly treats motor-intentional engagement as constitutive of musical organisation rather than merely a reaction to it (Kozak, pars. 3.16, 4.1). The gestural-kinesthetic approach of Jocelyn Ho focuses still more directly on what she calls "structural sensations of performance," including the corporeal feeling of climaxes, peaks, resolutions, and endings and the ways those moments interact (Ho, par. 6.1). In an étude, the cessation of a saturated technical action can therefore help articulate formal boundaries and contribute to expressive finality, alongside evidence from cadence, phrase rhythm, and thematic completion.

Method and Set-Wide Evidence

The comparative method applies the same questions to all twelve études. First, the large-scale design is established, and the precise point at which its principal return or closing process completes its formal function is identified. Second, the strongest candidate structural cadence is tested against bass and harmonic progression, melodic completion, formal position, and the behaviour of the music that follows. Third, expressive and global closure are located separately. Finally, the processes connecting these points are tracked through phrase rhythm and hypermeter, thematic recall or liquidation (the progressive reduction of characteristic motivic content towards a cadence), technical figuration, texture, dynamics, register, and tempo.

Because these categories were refined through corpus analysis rather than fixed in their final form from the outset, the method was iterative. After the first aggregate comparison exposed apparent inconsistencies, I returned to all twelve études and reapplied the refined definitions to each ending. The set-wide ordering therefore emerged through consistency checks rather than being imposed on the individual readings. The definitions could evolve during analysis, but every closure point reported below was tested against the same final criteria.

Two temporal concepts used throughout this comparison also require distinction: phrase rhythm and hypermeter. Phrase rhythm concerns how phrase-level, especially melodic, grouping aligns with or cuts across the metrical and hypermetrical grid. Hypermeter refers more specifically to a hierarchy of strong and weak measures above the notated bar. A phrase can therefore begin, continue, or close at a hypermetrically displaced position even when the broader grid remains stable. Samuel Ng demonstrates that phrase rhythm can participate directly in formal function and closing zones rather than merely decorating them (Ng 53–54). Soo Kyung Chung similarly shows that mixed hypermetric groupings can articulate important formal cadences in the Ballades and Scherzos of Chopin (Chung, par. 9). The Op. 25 analyses do not force every ending into a fixed hypermetric grid. Where the evidence supports only phrase grouping or functional segmentation, the analysis remains at that level rather than specifying a hypermetric hierarchy.

Finally, perceptual research serves as a methodological constraint on claims about listener experience rather than determining the score-based analytical readings. Nicholas Cook's experiments on large-scale tonal closure caution against assuming that listeners consciously register every structural relation at long time spans (Cook 203–05). David Sears, William Caplin, and Stephen McAdams likewise show that cadential category, formal context, melodic dissonance, and other rhetorical features influence perceived closure,

especially for trained listeners (Sears et al. 397–99). The score analyses below therefore distinguish analytical structure from immediate perception while treating converging evidence across multiple parameters as more reliable than any single parameter considered in isolation.

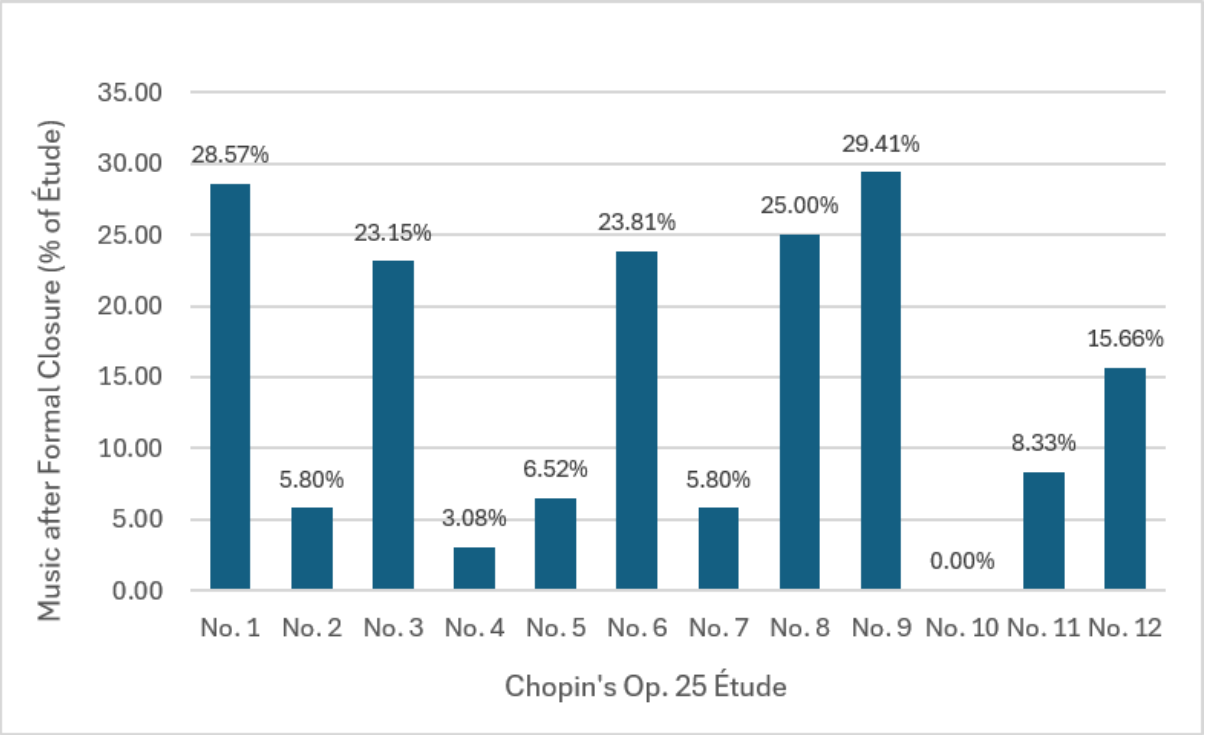


Figure 1. Proportion of each étude remaining after formal closure. Percentages are bar-level estimates derived from the formal-close points in Table 2. Intra-measure locations are treated proportionally where the score permits.

Figure 1 shows that the amount of music remaining after formal closure varies substantially across the set. At the upper end, Nos. 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9 leave approximately 23–29% of each étude after formal completion. No. 12 occupies an intermediate position at approximately 16%. By contrast, Nos. 2, 4, 5, 7, and 11 contain much shorter spans, while

No. 10 reaches formal closure only at the final event and therefore leaves no post-formal continuation. The graph is deliberately limited: it measures distance, not function. A long span may be genuinely post-structural, as in Nos. 1, 9, and 12, or remain structurally necessary, as in Nos. 3, 6, and 8. The corresponding measure-by-measure trajectories appear in Appendix 1.

Table 2. Temporal relationships among formal, structural, expressive, and global closure across Op. 25

Étude	Formal Close	Structural Close	Expressive Close	Global Close
1	m. 36, downbeat	m. 36, downbeat	m. 49	m. 49
2	m. 66	m. 66	m. 68	m. 69
3	m. 56, beat 1	m. 70	m. 70	m. 72
4	m. 64	m. 64	m. 65	m. 65
5	end of m. 129	m. 130	m. 138	m. 138
6	m. 49	m. 62	m. 63	m. 63
7	m. 66	m. 68	m. 68	m. 69
8	m. 28	m. 36	m. 36	m. 36
9	m. 37	m. 37	m. 51	m. 51
10	m. 119	m. 119	m. 119	m. 119
11	m. 89	m. 95	m. 96	m. 96
12	m. 71	m. 71	m. 83	m. 83

Read alongside Figure 1, Table 2 reveals a set-wide relationship that was difficult to see from the individual analyses: formal closure precedes or coincides with structural closure,

which precedes or coincides with expressive closure, which in turn precedes or coincides with global closure. The table is diagnostic rather than prescriptive. It makes mismatches visible and allows the final definitions to be tested consistently across the corpus.

Two cases clarify how the framework distinguishes preparation from closure. In No. 4, diminuendo, rallentando, and the weakening of the syncopated, off-beat chordal mechanism that defines the *Agitato* texture prepare the ending through mm. 61–63. Formal and structural closure then coincide with the broad *Lento* A-major tonic at m. 64. Measure 65 supplies expressive and global confirmation. A related process occurs in No. 6: fragmentation in mm. 60–61 prepares rather than completes expressive closure. Structural closure arrives at m. 62, and the final G-sharp-major transformation, complete technical cessation, and fermata at m. 63 supply expressive and global finality. These cases show why withdrawal or liquidation should not itself be labelled expressive closure until the larger expressive state has actually changed.

A different problem emerges in No. 12. The C-major passage beginning at m. 71 closely recalls material that, on its earlier appearance, becomes the opening of the B section. In the reprise, however, the same material follows the recomposed return and functions terminally as a coda or codetta rather than launching another contrasting section. Formal and structural closure therefore coincide at m. 71. Measure 81 marks a major textural contraction within the post-structural continuation, while expressive and global closure arrive at m. 83.

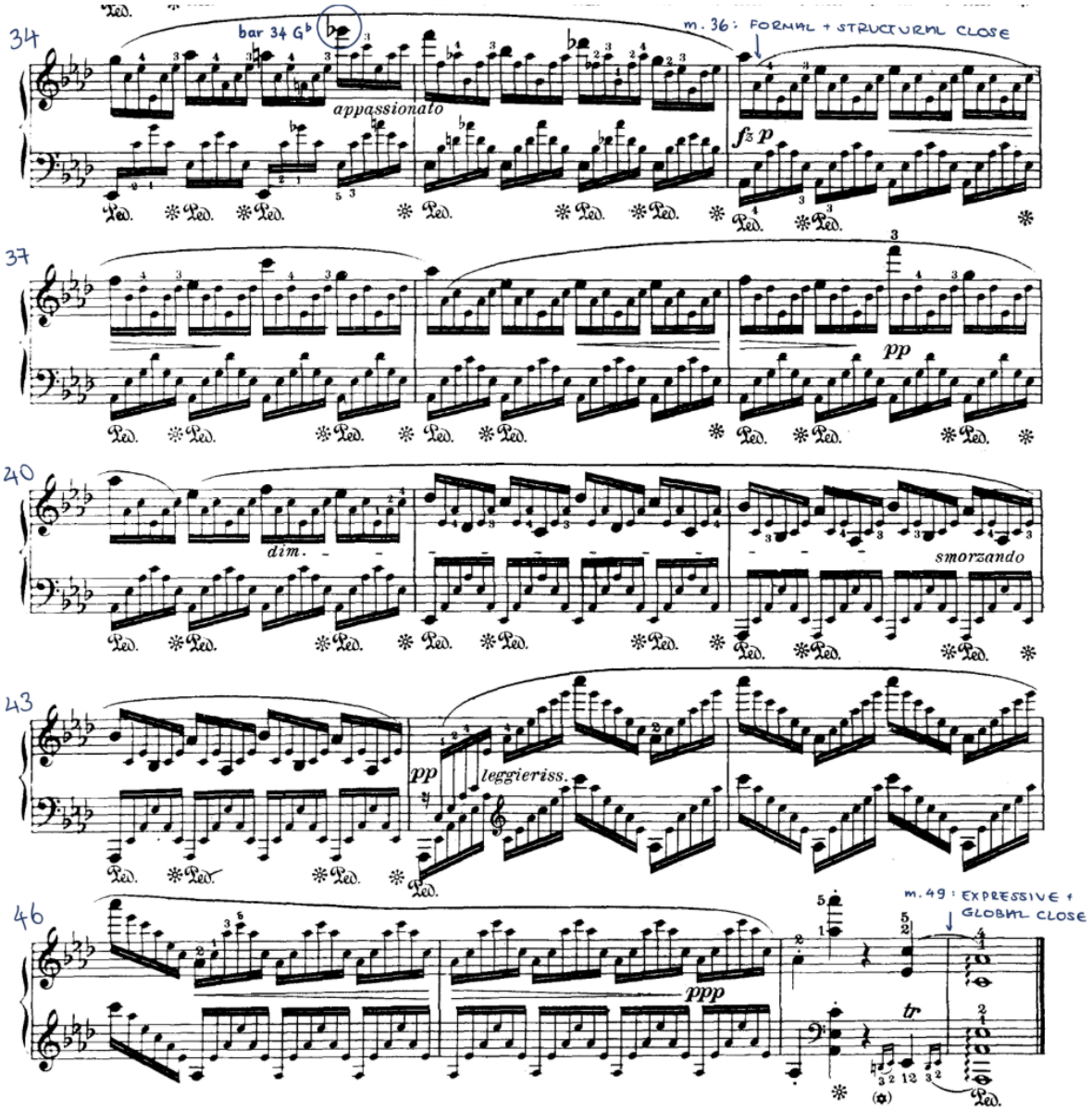
Four Contrasting Endings

With this corpus-level pattern established, individual scores explain how Chopin creates it. Appendix 1 gives the corresponding measure-by-measure trajectories for all twelve études. The four detailed examples below were selected because they represent contrasting relations among closure points: post-structural dissolution in No. 1, a long closure-producing

continuation in No. 3, climactic closure-production in No. 11, and the contextual reassignment of repeated material in No. 12. The score excerpts are annotated with measure numbers and the closure points discussed in the prose so that the analytical claims can be read directly against the notation.

1. Op. 25 No. 1: Structural Arrival and Post-Structural Dissolution

Op. 25 No. 1 offers a clear demonstration that structural completion and expressive finality can be separated without reopening the tonal process. The returning formal design reaches completion on the downbeat of m. 36. That same arrival also supplies the structural close. What follows does not merely remain centred on A-flat: the A-flat tonic chord has already been secured, and the subsequent measures prolong that completed harmonic field while the opening-derived arpeggiated mechanism continues. The analytical interest lies in the mismatch between completed form and harmony on one hand and continuing technical motion on the other.



Example 1. Chopin, Étude Op. 25 No. 1, mm. 34–49: gestural culmination, formal and structural closure, and post-structural dissolution.

The gestural analysis of Eugene Montague explains why the music after the return can be heard as retrospective rather than developmental. The ascent to G ♭ 6 at m. 34, shown in Example 1, culminates a long physical expansion in which the right-hand fifth finger progressively reaches new registral territory. Once that goal has been attained, the return in the following measures changes the status of the gesture, and the later right-hand fifth-finger

melody gradually subsides (Montague, pars. 8.3–8.4, 8.6). The gestural culmination identified by Montague and the m. 36 structural close are not the same event, but their proximity is significant. Two long-range processes reach their goals before the final sounding measure.

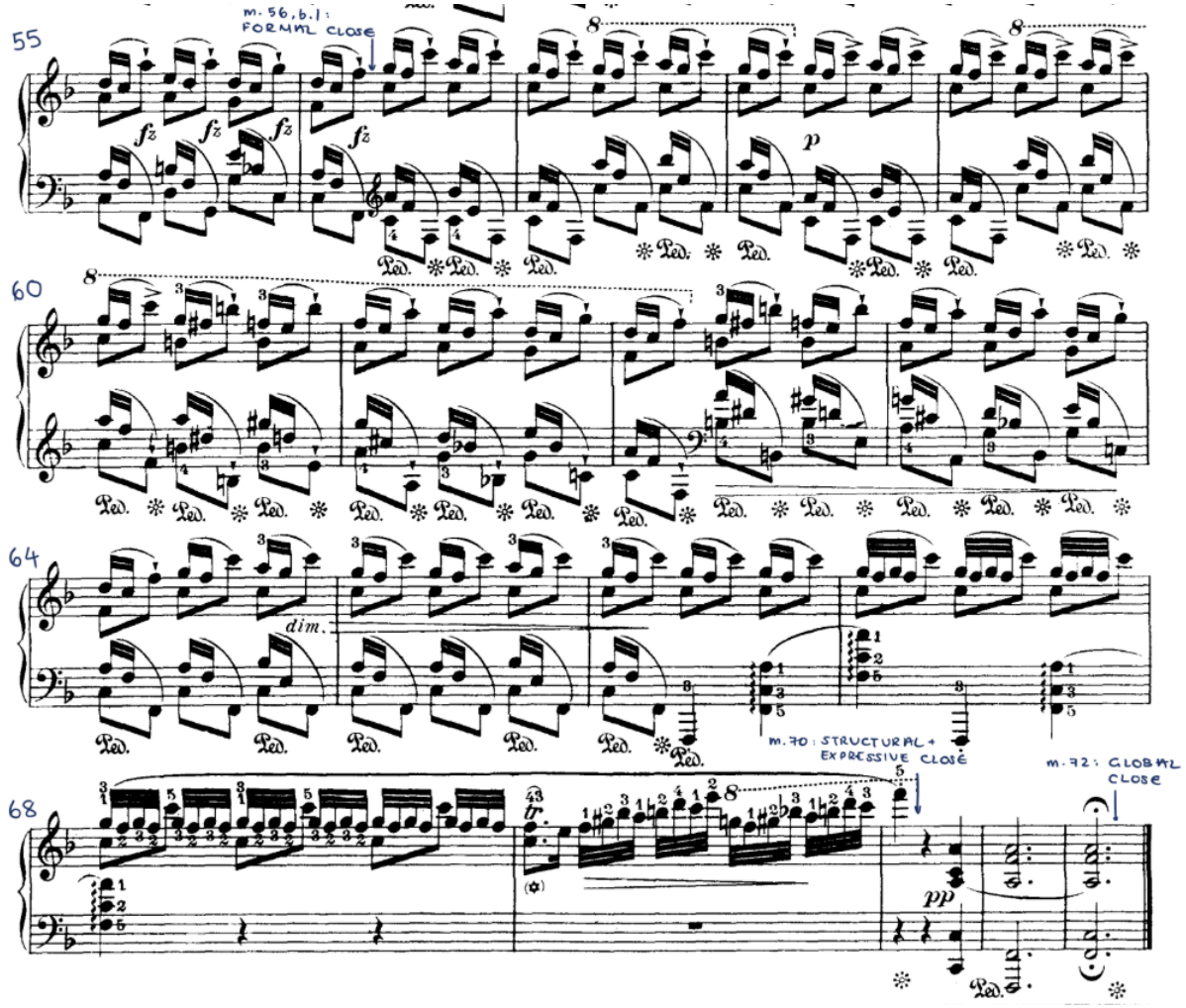
The post-structural region then proceeds largely through dissolution. From m. 36 through m. 43, arpeggiation remains continuous enough to preserve kinship with the opening, but the harmony now prolongs the A-flat tonic rather than directing the music towards another large-scale destination. The *leggierissimo* continuation in mm. 44–46 lightens the texture and reduces thematic specificity. Measures 47–48 interrupt and fragment the almost continuous technical flow, and m. 49 replaces that flow with a sustained A-flat-major sonority. Expressive and global closure therefore coincide only after the characteristic kinetic state of the étude has finally dissolved.

The passage after m. 36 can be described both as a coda and as a post-structural continuation, but the terms answer different questions. Coda identifies its formal position after completion of the principal design. Post-structural continuation identifies its position after the decisive large-scale close. The distinction matters because the music is not tonally necessary in the same way as the endings of Nos. 3 or 11. Its work is to transform an already achieved formal and structural close into textural, physical, and rhetorical finality.

2. Op. 25 No. 3: Formal Closure before Structural Closure

Where No. 1 separates structural completion from expressive finality, No. 3 separates formal and structural completion more sharply. The returning formal process reaches its formal close on beat 1 of m. 56, but beat 2 immediately launches a new chain of compact closing modules. Those units repeatedly cross the bar line through m. 64 before giving way to broader cadential expansion and liquidation. On this reading, the strongest structural close

arrives only at m. 70, where structural and expressive completion converge. Measure 72 supplies the global endpoint.



Example 2. Chopin, Étude Op. 25 No. 3, mm. 55–72: formal closure, displaced post-formal modules, cadential liquidation, structural and expressive closure, and final stillness.

Measure 56 remains an important cadential boundary, even though the present analysis does not assign it the principal structural role. Its formal force is reinforced by the completion of the returning material, yet the immediate beat-2 launch prevents the passage from settling. Phrase rhythm is therefore central to the effect of registering m. 56 as a real formal boundary without making the tonal process sound complete. The work of Samuel Ng

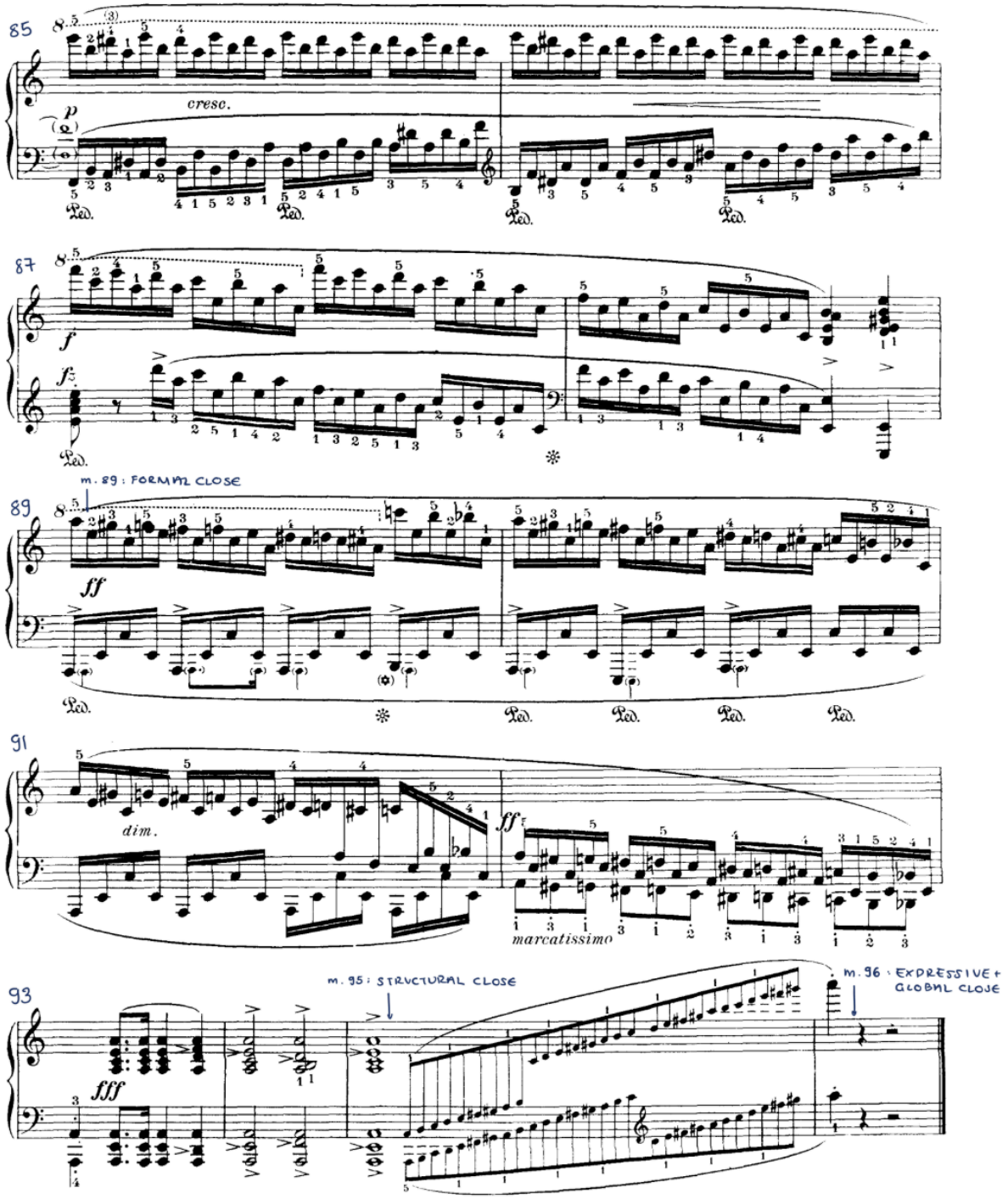
demonstrates that phrase rhythm can participate in formal function and that closing zones can be shaped by the relation between cadence and end-accented grouping (Ng 53–54). The principle is useful here even though No. 3 does not follow a Classical period or sentence schema. The comparison invokes phrase rhythm as a formal participant rather than treating Classical form as a direct model for Chopin. The principal formal return has therefore completed, while the displaced modules immediately initiate a new process directed towards structural closure.

The continuation changes function again after m. 64. Repetition no longer reproduces the compact units intact. The pattern broadens into cadential expansion and liquidation. This change is precisely the kind of terminal modification that Caplin identifies as capable of counteracting the expectation of further repetition (Caplin, *Cadence* 2–4). The active surface is progressively redirected towards the structural arrival at m. 70. At that point, the large-scale melodic-harmonic process achieves its strongest completion, and the recurrent technical activity loses its structural necessity. The final two measures confirm and sustain that state until literal cessation at m. 72. No. 3 therefore demonstrates why post-formal music cannot automatically be called post-structural. The coda-like continuation begins after the form has closed, but most of that span remains involved in producing the structural close. The defining issue is not the appearance of "ending music" but the status of the melodic-harmonic process inside it.

3. Op. 25 No. 11: A Terminal Peroration That Produces Structural Closure

No. 11 preserves the same formal-before-structural ordering but intensifies the separation through a climactic terminal drive. Formal closure occurs at m. 89. The following measures continue to intensify and liquidate the preceding material. Running figuration condenses into increasingly vertical, accented gestures, and mm. 93–95 drive towards a fortississimo chordal and chromatic peroration. Structural closure arrives at m. 95. Measure

96 then supplies expressive and global closure through the final A-minor tonic, complete technical cessation, and rhetorical finality.



Example 3. Chopin, Étude Op. 25 No. 11, mm. 85–96: post-formal intensification and a terminal region that produces structural closure.

The distinction between m. 89 and m. 95 prevents terminal rhetoric (the gestural and expressive signals that a passage is approaching its end) from being confused with completed structure. After m. 89, the passage projects unmistakable terminal rhetoric, although its strongest melodic-harmonic close has yet to occur. The discussion by Christy Keele of climactic codas in the scherzos of Chopin offers a useful analogue. Such codas can contain several peaks of intensity, combining unpredictable features that heighten the sense of climax with more conventional gestures that establish a convincing sense of finality (Keele 22). No. 11 follows a comparable logic, using escalating intensity to transform a post-formal passage into a directed approach towards structural closure. Late intensity matters not because loudness is inherently structural, but because the peroration narrows diffuse virtuoso energy into a cadence-directed process.

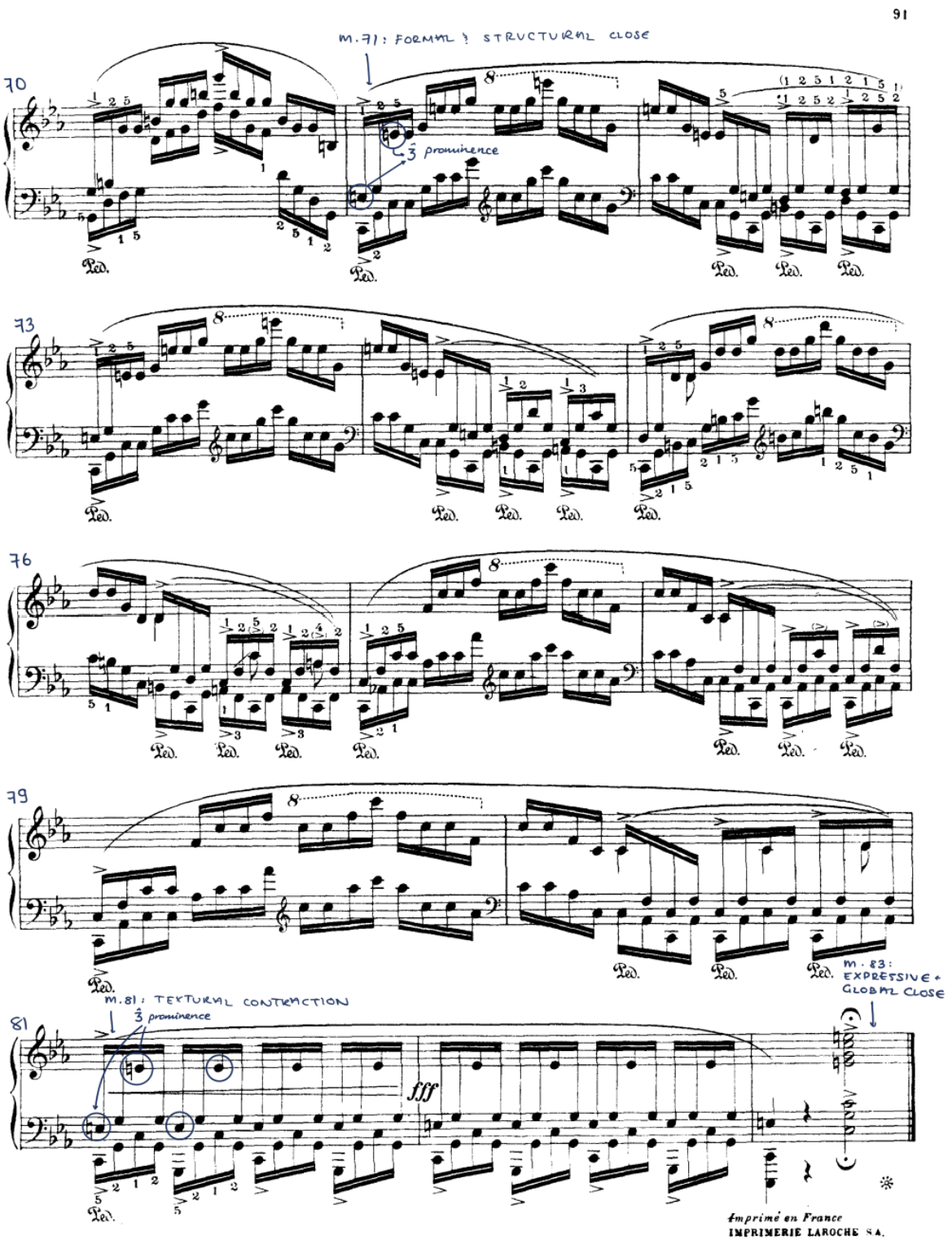
The one-measure separation between structural closure and expressive and global closure is also analytically significant. At m. 95, the governing harmonic process has done its decisive work. Measure 96 does not need to establish another tonal destination. It converts that structural arrival into complete technical and rhetorical cessation. No. 11 therefore demonstrates a coda-like region that is structurally generative for most of its duration and only briefly post-structural at its end.

4. Op. 25 No. 12: Formal Reinterpretation and Post-Structural Continuation

The final case shifts attention from the temporal separation of closure types to the contextual reinterpretation of formal function. No. 12 provides the clearest demonstration in the set that formal function can depend on context rather than thematic identity alone. In the first large rotation, the C-major passage beginning at m. 15 can initially sound like a codetta to the opening A section. As the passage continues, however, its expansion and repetition make it retrospectively intelligible as the beginning of the contrasting B section; by m. 21 its sectional function is unmistakable. When closely corresponding C-major material returns at

m. 71 after the recomposed return of A, it does not inaugurate a second B section. In its new position it functions terminally as a coda or codetta. The same material therefore performs different formal work on its two appearances.

This functional reinterpretation places both formal and structural closure at m. 71. Measures 69–70 intensify dominant pressure, and m. 71 resolves to C major at precisely the point where the returned A material yields to the terminal passage. Formal closure occurs because the principal return has completed its large-scale function. Structural closure occurs there because m. 71 is the strongest large-scale tonic-directed arrival, and the music that follows remains within the established C-major field rather than creating a new tonal destination. The arpeggiated waves that continue after m. 71 are therefore post-structural continuation rather than evidence that the large-scale tonal process remains open.



Example 4. Chopin, Étude Op. 25 No. 12, mm. 70–83: formal and structural closure at m. 71, post-structural technical continuation, textural contraction, and expressive and global closure.

An alternate reading would hear the return of the C-major passage at m. 71 as the beginning of a second B section and would delay formal closure until m. 81, producing an ABAB-like large-scale design. I discard that reading because the second appearance follows the recomposed return, remains within the final tonic field, and leads directly into increasingly terminal contraction rather than recreating the earlier developmental role of B. The contrast between the two hearings provides a useful analytical distinction. The formal function of the passage is determined retrospectively by its position and consequences, not by thematic identity alone.

Measure 81 nevertheless remains an important event. Here the large rising-and-falling waves contract into compact, repeatedly articulated C-major cells. Harmonic motion largely ceases, and the texture becomes more vertical. That change intensifies the sense of finality without establishing a further point of structural closure. The last two measures intensify and terminate this already secured state, and m. 83 supplies expressive and global closure through the final C-major sonority and complete technical cessation.

The prominent scale degree 3 in the soprano at m. 71 introduces a Schenkerian qualification. A strict claim about completion of the Ursatz would require a full reduction beyond the scope of this project, and the foreground upper voice does not provide a conventional descent to scale degree 1 at the structural point. MacKay's discussion of imperfect authentic cadences is useful here because it demonstrates that tonic cadential function need not be invalidated by the absence of melodic closure in the soprano (MacKay 38). The present structural reading therefore rests on the convergence of bass and harmonic progression, formal placement, tonic stability, and the behaviour of the subsequent music rather than on the soprano alone. Other endings in Op. 25 also appear to give scale degree 3 substantial final weight, although a systematic study of final soprano scale degrees across the entire set would be needed before claiming a collection-wide pattern. No. 12 thus clarifies the

limits of the term “structural closure” as it is used here: Schenkerian-informed, hierarchical, and tonic-directed, but not presented as a complete Ursatz demonstration.

Functional Synthesis across the Twelve Études

Taken together, the four case studies show that a stable corpus-wide ordering can produce markedly different types of endings. The principal differences lie in the processes that occupy the spaces between formal, structural, expressive, and global closure. Three broad functions recur: completion, confirmation, and transformation. These categories are not mutually exclusive. They identify the dominant work of a passage at a particular stage of the ending.

The first function, completion, describes terminal music that remains necessary because a major formal or structural process is unfinished. Nos. 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 belong primarily to this group because formal closure precedes structural closure. Within this group, No. 5 reaches formal closure at the end of m. 129 and structural closure at m. 130, after which the E-major field is prolonged and intensified until m. 138. A much larger separation appears in No. 6: formal closure at m. 49 is followed by double-third recall, expansion, climax, and liquidation before structural closure at m. 62. No. 7 follows the same broad sequence more compactly, moving from formal closure at m. 66 to structural and expressive closure at m. 68. At the extreme, No. 8 extends closure-production to the global endpoint. Formal closure at m. 28 is followed by continued double-sixth motion and chromatic intensification, and structural, expressive, and global closure converge only at m. 36.

By contrast, confirmation describes music that follows a persuasive structural close, reinforces that close, and allows it to register perceptually without reopening it. Nos. 1, 2, 4, 9, and 12 provide contrasting versions. In No. 2, formal and structural closure arrive at m. 66, but triplet motion dissipates through diminuendo and ritardando before expressive closure at

m. 68 and global closure at m. 69. No. 4 compresses the same broad sequence into one final measure after the m. 64 formal and structural close. At the other end of the spectrum, No. 9 expands confirmation dramatically: formal and structural closure occur at m. 37, after which the music withdraws from the preceding intensity, recalls earlier material in increasingly retrospective form, narrows into tonic-centred repetition, and fragments the recurring technical gesture before expressive and global closure at m. 51. No. 12 offers another variant, reaching formal and structural closure at m. 71 before reusing earlier B-section material with terminal function; the texture then contracts at m. 81, and expressive and global closure arrive at m. 83.

Transformation, meanwhile, cuts across both categories rather than forming a mutually exclusive third class. It describes a change in the modal, gestural, thematic, or rhetorical meaning of an arrival and can occur within either completion or confirmation. Nos. 5 and 6 make modal transformation especially audible through their major-mode endings. In No. 6, the final G-sharp-major sonority does not replace the structural closure at m. 62; instead, it changes the modal and rhetorical colour of an ending already achieved. No. 12 extends the principle from mode to form: material that earlier inaugurated the B section returns after closure with the function of a coda.

Against this range of separated processes, No. 10 stands at the opposite extreme. Its rapid octave premise remains fully integrated into the principal closing drive, and formal, structural, expressive, and global closure all converge at m. 119. There is no post-formal continuation to classify. The example is significant because it demonstrates that intense terminal rhetoric does not, in itself, constitute a coda. A closing drive may remain part of the principal formal process through the final event.

The resulting data therefore suggest that the primary variable across Op. 25 is not the order of closure but its degree of temporal separation. Formal, structural, expressive, and

global completion tend to unfold in a stable hierarchy, yet that hierarchy can be compressed into a single point or distributed across a substantial terminal region. Coda function depends on which stage has already been achieved when the terminal passage begins.

Technical Cessation as Formal and Expressive Evidence

The technical premise is best understood not as a fifth autonomous category of closure, but as evidence bearing on the four categories already established. A repeated figuration does not become structural simply because it is difficult, and its disappearance does not automatically create formal closure. Its significance derives from saturation. When one mechanism has governed almost every phrase, continued motion after a major cadence can preserve a sense of active process. Fragmentation, registral change, slowing, or replacement by sustained sonority can help articulate formal boundaries and contribute to expressive finality.

The discussion of terminal modification by Caplin clarifies why this evidence matters. Repetition tends to sustain expectations of continuation, while a marked change can make stasis or "nothing further" the more probable next event (Caplin, *Cadence* 2–4). In Op. 25, the technical premise often acts as the repeated process that must be modified, but the resulting trajectories diverge. In No. 1, the arpeggiation survives structural closure and gradually dissolves. By contrast, the double-sixth mechanism of No. 8 continues because structural closure has not yet occurred. No. 11 offers a third possibility by intensifying its technical surface into the structural cadence. In No. 12, the arpeggiated waves continue after the m. 71 structural close, demonstrating that technical persistence can sustain expressive motion without reopening the already completed large-scale tonal process. Their contraction at m. 81 and cessation at m. 83 help locate expressive closure rather than structural closure. At the opposite extreme, No. 10 shows that technical intensity can remain fully integrated into all four kinds of closure until the last moment.

The rapid figuration that continues into the terminal region of an étude can therefore serve different functions depending on its position relative to the other closure points. The technical premise becomes meaningful through its interaction with these other processes rather than functioning as an independent sign of closure.

Coda: Final Considerations

Op. 25 as a Collection

The framework so far has treated global closure at the level of the individual étude. A final consideration is whether complete local closure can coexist with prospective relationships across the published set. This distinction matters because prospective links between études do not imply that the preceding étude has failed to achieve local closure. Daniel Bento argues that the cohesion of Op. 25 depends on both a broader harmonic plan and local subthematic relationships among the pieces, while acknowledging that some of those affinities are comparatively tenuous (Bento 252, 258). The closure data suggest a related possibility: an ending may be locally complete while still shaping the listener's hearing of the following étude.

Table 3. Principal and final keys in Op. 25 Nos. 5–7

Étude	Principal key	Final key
No. 5	E minor	E major
No. 6	G-sharp minor	G-sharp major
No. 7	C-sharp minor	C-sharp minor

Nos. 5–7 most clearly illustrate how the ending of one étude can prepare the listener for the next. Within this group, No. 5 begins in E minor but ends in E major. No. 6 likewise ends in the major mode, moving from G-sharp minor to G-sharp major. That G-sharp-major sonority can, in turn, point prospectively towards the C-sharp minor of No. 7. Bento explicitly hears Nos. 5, 6, and 7 as linked through their Picardy-third relationships (Bento 252). The connection is significant precisely because the endings first function locally. The G-sharp-major sonority of No. 6 can prepare C-sharp minor without implying that No. 6 itself has failed to close.

More broadly, the concept of compatibility developed by Jeffrey Kallberg serves as a useful check against making stronger cyclic claims than the evidence supports. His discussion of multipartite publications by Chopin identifies deliberate ordering in tonal relationships, codas, thematic placement, and the treatment of closure while also recognising the independent circulation and performance of individual pieces (Kallberg 416–17). Compatibility therefore allows local completeness and collection-level consequence to coexist. Op. 25 need not share one coda model or one continuous structural trajectory in order to function coherently as a set.

At the end of the collection, No. 12 raises the same issue at a larger scale. The C-major sonority at m. 83 is both the global close of No. 12 and, because the étude concludes the set, the literal endpoint of Op. 25. That fact does not by itself establish a single Schenkerian structural close governing all twelve pieces. Collection-level finality and local structural closure should remain separate unless a different analysis demonstrates that larger dependency.

Analytical Consequences for Performance

Performance can sharpen the distinctions among closure points, but it should not be used to manufacture analytical certainty. In “On Performing Chopin’s Barcarolle,” David Kopp presents analysis and performance as informing each other while resisting the idea that an analytical observation dictates one uniquely correct performance decision (Kopp, pars. 2, 4). The same principle applies here.

Applied to the case studies, this principle produces different pacing demands. In No. 1, the downbeat of m. 36 can register as a genuine arrival before the long dissolution that follows. If mm. 36–49 are treated as one uninterrupted drive towards the last chord, the distinction between structural completion and expressive cessation becomes harder to hear. By contrast, No. 3 requires the opposite balance. Measure 56, beat 1 should register as a real formal boundary without being made to sound as though the entire tonal process is finished. The displaced units and cadential expansion still carry structural direction towards m. 70.

A different performance problem appears in No. 11. Measure 89 marks formal completion, but the ensuing peroration should not sound like a relaxed afterthought. The music still has structural work to perform until m. 95. Only after that cadence can the final measure operate primarily as expressive and global confirmation. No. 12 demands a third kind of balance. The C-major arrival at m. 71 should register as a genuine formal and structural close even though the arpeggiated process continues. The continuation can remain active without sounding tonally unfinished; the contraction at m. 81 can then intensify terminality, and m. 83 can provide expressive and global cessation.

These implications concern pacing rather than prescriptions about exact rubato or dynamics. The analytical questions are temporal: which arrival should be allowed to register, which process should remain audibly active, and when should the listener sense that a previous kind of motion has genuinely ceased?

Conclusion

Across the twelve Op. 25 Études, Chopin treats the ending as a coordinated sequence of processes rather than a single event. Formal closure asks whether the principal design has completed its expected function. Structural closure identifies the most consequential large-scale melodic-harmonic close. Expressive closure marks the point at which remaining technical, textural, dynamic, and rhetorical motion achieves finality. Global closure is literal cessation. Coda and post-structural continuation describe different dimensions of the ending and therefore cannot be used interchangeably.

Once these categories are applied consistently, a strong corpus-level ordering emerges. Formal closure precedes or coincides with structural closure. Structural closure precedes or coincides with expressive closure. Expressive closure precedes or coincides with global closure. The principal compositional variable is the temporal distance between those stages. At one extreme, No. 10 compresses all four into m. 119. By contrast, Nos. 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 retain structurally necessary music after formal completion. A second group—Nos. 1, 2, 4, 9, and 12—achieves structural closure earlier and continues towards expressive or global finality. Within those broader patterns, Nos. 4 and 6 show that liquidation can prepare expressive closure without constituting it, while No. 12 shows that the same thematic span can change formal function from sectional opening to coda.

Cadence remains the strongest single indicator of structural closure, but it does not explain an ending by itself. Phrase rhythm and hypermeter affect whether an arrival coincides with a grouping boundary or generates further continuation. Thematic return clarifies when a formal design is complete. Texture, register, dynamics, and tempo contribute to expressive finality. The technical premise supplies genre-specific evidence about whether the characteristic action of the étude still projects momentum. The argument of Caplin that

cadence belongs within the broader domain of closure is therefore particularly apt for this repertoire.

Accordingly, length alone cannot determine function, because the crucial issue is whether the remaining music still completes a formal or structural process or instead prolongs an already achieved close. A long terminal passage may remain structurally necessary or occur entirely after structural closure. A short final span can carry decisive cadential work, while a highly intensified ending can remain integrated into the principal form until the last measure. What matters is not simply how much music remains, but which process has already closed when that music begins. Chopin reshapes closure across Op. 25 by controlling the pacing with which formal design, tonal structure, expressive motion, and literal cessation are brought into alignment at the close of each piece.

Appendix 1
Measure-by-measure closure trajectories and closing processes across Op. 25

This appendix records the sequence of closure points and the musical processes connecting them. It is evidentiary rather than argumentative and allows the main text to refer selectively to the corpus without reproducing several pages of measure-by-measure narrative.

No. 1

m. 36, downbeat: FORMAL AND STRUCTURAL CLOSE

→ mm. 36–43: tonic-centred arpeggiation continues; thematic profile progressively dissolves

→ mm. 44–46: broader leggierissimo arpeggios prolong tonic while reducing thematic content

→ mm. 47–48: figuration fragments and the continuous technical motion is progressively interrupted

→ m. 49: EXPRESSIVE AND GLOBAL CLOSE; sustained final A-flat-major sonority replaces the flowing technical texture

No. 2

m. 66: FORMAL AND STRUCTURAL CLOSE; preceding dominant preparation resolves to F minor

→ mm. 66–67: broad triplet figuration continues over tonic; diminuendo and ritardando progressively dissipate momentum

→ m. 68: EXPRESSIVE CLOSE; continuous triplet motion has ceased and sustained pianissimo tonic replaces it

→ m. 69: GLOBAL CLOSE; final sustained tonic prolongation completes the étude

No. 3

m. 56, beat 1: FORMAL CLOSE

→ m. 56, beat 2–m. 64, beat 1: repeated two-measure closing units extend the returned material

→ m. 64, beat 2–m. 69: repetition gives way to cadential expansion and progressive liquidation

→ m. 70: STRUCTURAL AND EXPRESSIVE CLOSE

→ mm. 70–72: quiet tonic confirmation and sustained finality

→ m. 72: GLOBAL CLOSE

No. 4

mm. 61–63: diminuendo, rallentando, and cadential liquidation progressively weaken the syncopated, off-beat chordal mechanism of the Agitato texture

→ m. 64: FORMAL AND STRUCTURAL CLOSE; the broad Lento A-major tonic completes the principal formal and melodic-harmonic process

→ m. 65: EXPRESSIVE AND GLOBAL CLOSE; sustained tonic confirmation provides complete rhetorical cessation

No. 5

mm. 124–128: isolated registral attacks, rests, and sustained tones interrupt the returned material and prepare the E-major ending

→ End of m. 129: FORMAL CLOSE

→ m. 130: STRUCTURAL CLOSE; stable E-major closing field is established

→ mm. 130–138: sustained E-major sonorities, neighbouring-note oscillations, tremolo, and dynamic intensification prolong the structural arrival

→ m. 138: EXPRESSIVE AND GLOBAL CLOSE; full-register E-major arpeggio and fermata provide the final registral and rhetorical release

No. 6

m. 49: FORMAL CLOSE; opening-derived double-third material is recalled in the terminal process

→ mm. 49–52: thematic recall

→ mm. 53–56: recalled material expands and regains energy

→ mm. 57–59: reaches a final climactic saturation

→ mm. 60–61: fragmentation and liquidation prepare the final cadence without yet completing expressive closure

→ m. 62: STRUCTURAL CLOSE; sustained vertical harmony replaces rapid linear motion

→ m. 63: EXPRESSIVE AND GLOBAL CLOSE; the G-sharp-major transformation, complete technical cessation, and fermata provide final rhetorical release

No. 7

mm. 64–65: cadential continuation; ritenuto and diminuendo progressively weaken the lyrical motion

→ m. 66: FORMAL CLOSE

→ mm. 66–67: textural thinning and *smorzando*

→ m. 68: STRUCTURAL AND EXPRESSIVE CLOSE

→ m. 69: GLOBAL CLOSE; final tonic and complete cessation

No. 8

m. 28: FORMAL CLOSE

→ mm. 28–31: double-sixth motion continues in an increasingly tonic-directed closing drive

→ mm. 32–34: chromatic expansion and registral intensification increase cadential pressure

→ mm. 35–36: final cadential process; continuous double-sixth motion is brought to a stop

→ m. 36: STRUCTURAL, EXPRESSIVE, AND GLOBAL CLOSE

No. 9

m. 37: FORMAL AND STRUCTURAL CLOSE

→ mm. 37–40: post-climactic withdrawal reduces the preceding intensity

→ mm. 41–44: earlier four-measure material returns an octave higher in a lighter, increasingly retrospective form and begins to liquidate

→ mm. 45–49: gesture narrows into repeated tonic-centred motion under diminuendo

→ mm. 49–50: rests and fragmentation progressively dissolve the recurring technical gesture

→ m. 51: EXPRESSIVE AND GLOBAL CLOSE; final G-flat tonic and complete cessation

No. 10

mm. 103–114: rapid octave mechanism is developed and increasingly directed towards the ending

→ mm. 115–118: octave writing reaches maximum dynamic, registral, and technical intensity before compressing towards the final cadence

→ m. 119: FORMAL, STRUCTURAL, EXPRESSIVE, AND GLOBAL CLOSE; continuous octave motion converts directly into the final B-minor tonic sonority

No. 11

mm. 85–86: quiet tonic-pedal preparation temporarily reduces the preceding intensity

→ mm. 87–88: renewed closing surge rebuilds momentum

→ m. 89: FORMAL CLOSE

→ mm. 89–92: running figuration condenses and liquidates into increasingly vertical, accented gestures

→ mm. 93–95: fortississimo chordal and chromatic peroration intensifies the final cadential approach

→ m. 95: STRUCTURAL CLOSE

→ m. 96: EXPRESSIVE AND GLOBAL CLOSE; final A-minor tonic, technical cessation, and rhetorical finality

No. 12

mm. 69–70: extended dominant pressure prepares the final major-mode resolution

→ m. 71: FORMAL AND STRUCTURAL CLOSE; the C-major arrival completes the large-scale function of the recomposed return and establishes the final tonic field

→ mm. 71–76: large arpeggiated waves continue through the established C-major field as post-structural continuation

→ mm. 77–80: tonic-oriented and harmonically inflected activity continues while progressively losing developmental momentum

→ m. 81: major textural contraction; the large arpeggiated waves condense into compact, repeatedly articulated C-major cells as harmonic motion largely ceases

→ mm. 81–82: post-structural tonic confirmation and increasing verticalisation intensify the sense of finality

→ m. 83: EXPRESSIVE AND GLOBAL CLOSE; final C-major sonority and complete technical cessation

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