

Musical Articulation: A Synoptic View of Baroque Form

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As it does with any continuing stimulus, the response to a prolonged tone or group of tones will eventually disappear from consciousness. How long this takes to happen will depend on the nature of the stimulus: in the case of a single tone, obviously on its loudness, but also on its structure, on whether this is simply sinusoidal, or compound. In any event, the tone must be repeated or a different tone sounded if a melodic formulation is to arise.

From the creative point of view, the melodic formulation comes first; it is a theme or motif, or even a whole melodic phrase that is then repeated but with an ending that complements and is more conclusive than the original one. In a continuing style, a theme or motif can become the starting point of a continuous melodic flow in which any possible point of articulation is indefinitely postponed. Usually, however, a melody is made up of a succession of more or less well defined segments, or phrases, each of which is readily perceived as such and also bears certain obvious relationships to the phrases preceding and following it.

The simplest relationship of this kind is the repetition of a phrase by the following one. If the second statement of the phrase is louder than the first, it will have the character of insistence; if it is softer, it will have the character of an echo. If the two statements are of the same loudness, the second will appear simply as the repetition of the first.

A different kind of relationship of melodic phrases can be called a "diagonal relationship." Melodic phrases related in this way, however, cannot occur in a single voice. The prerequisite for them is the existence of two simultaneous melodic lines. If we then consider a melodic phrase in one of these lines, and that same phrase occurs again somewhat afterwards in the other line, the relationship of the second statement of the phrase to the first is called, logically enough, *imitation*. After completing the phrase in question, the line in which it first appears is free to continue melodizing in any way that is compatible with the sounding of the phrase when it appears in the second line. Thus the first line of the resultant two-voice texture can become entirely independent of past material.

When the second voice completes the original melodic phrase, that same phrase—in a three-voice composition—will be announced once again by a third voice, while the first two voices are free to continue melodizing in any way that is compatible with the third voice that has entered. When

this voice has completed the original melodic phrase, we have reached what can be called the end of the exposition. At this point the exposition can be repeated, which it often is, although sometimes in stretto fashion, so that each successive voice enters a measure sooner than it had originally. What follows can be thought of as freshly invented manipulations of the stated material. These new manipulations, however, are not literally new, but are in fact perceptibly derived from what has gone before, so that the composition in process of construction will retain throughout a characteristic unity of both material and style, which can be taken as a basic property of a Baroque musical work. The element of contrast is essentially excluded. It would appear then, that the articulation of such a work would represent one extreme of a range of possibilities, namely, the extreme of imperceptibility, or of concealment. The music gives the impression of unremitting continuity, that is, of lacking articulation altogether. The monolithic character of a Baroque work, however, suggests a number of further formal possibilities, each one of which has been realized in practice.

An imitative work can be coupled with a harmonic or figural piece, as in the prelude and fugue. Or imitative works can comprise a group in which the themes of the pieces are variants of one another or of the initial form. In addition to such coupling and grouping, of course, articulation may be intrinsic from the outset, as it is in the homophonic sections of an otherwise imitative work. Other clearly articulated works can be found in the suite. The Baroque suite usually is made up of a series of stylized dances, all in the same key. These are most often the *allemand*, *courante*, *sarabande*, and *gigue*, each of which is divided into two sections. The first section modulates to the dominant. The second section, which opens in the same melodic material, but in the new key, is longer than the first, and cadences in this new key. In the course of the second section, also, transitions to closely-related keys generally occur, until finally there is a return to the initial key of the section, and the whole section is repeated without change. What is found in each dance of the suite, then, is a two-part form with respect to key, and a three-part form with respect to material.

The structure of a Baroque musical work, of course, generally cannot be described simply as imitative or articulated. For just as imitative works have inserted homophonic sections, it is even more the case that homophonic works such as dances employ various kinds of polyphonic enrichment. The style of a Baroque musical piece is often not purely imitative or purely sectional.