Understanding Bach, 6, 35–50

The Implications of Bach's Introduction of New Fugal Techniques and Procedures in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book Two

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A comparative study of the two parts of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* reveals that the differences between them are more striking than their superficial similarities. One of the most significant differences is the stylistic diversity, the coexistence of old and new styles, of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book II (WTC II). It is tempting to ask whether this diversity is related to Bach's decision to write a second set of 24 preludes and fugues after composing the first volume in 1722, when he was not apparently planning to write the 'Zweyter Theil'.[1] If Bach did have a particular reason for compiling this second set in the late 1730s, it could have been to use all the stylistic devices he knew. Careful examination of Bach's other compositions of the late 1730s and early 40s, as well as those of his peers and sons, may reveal a glimpse of the truth.

It is certainly an interesting issue to pursue. The context of such a hypothesis seems clear and plausible, and it could have enormous consequence for our understanding of Bach the man as well as of his works. Bach was on good terms with many prominent musicians of his time, and his honorary appointment as *Compositeur* to the Royal Court Orchestra in Dresden in November 1736 must have created further opportunities for him to become familiar with the music of both the new and old styles. His awareness of the latter – the styles practised in old Catholic liturgical music, renowned for their serenity and durability – is crucial, as is shown not only in the copies Bach made of works by Palestrina, Caldara and Bassani, but also in the clear influence of these on his own compositions.[2]

However, finding examples of new and old in WTC II and seeking their models in the works of Bach's contemporaries is not the subject of this paper, for

1 In the absence of the title-page in Bach's autograph (GB-Lbl, Add. MS 35021), a fair copy in the hand of Johann Christoph Altnickol dated 1744 (D-B, Mus. Ms. Bach P 430) is currently considered both the earliest and most reliable description of the collection, which reads: 'Des Wohltemperirten Claviers, Zweyter Theil, besthehend in Præludien und Fugen durch alle Tone und Semitonien verfertiget von Johann Sebastian Bach ...'.

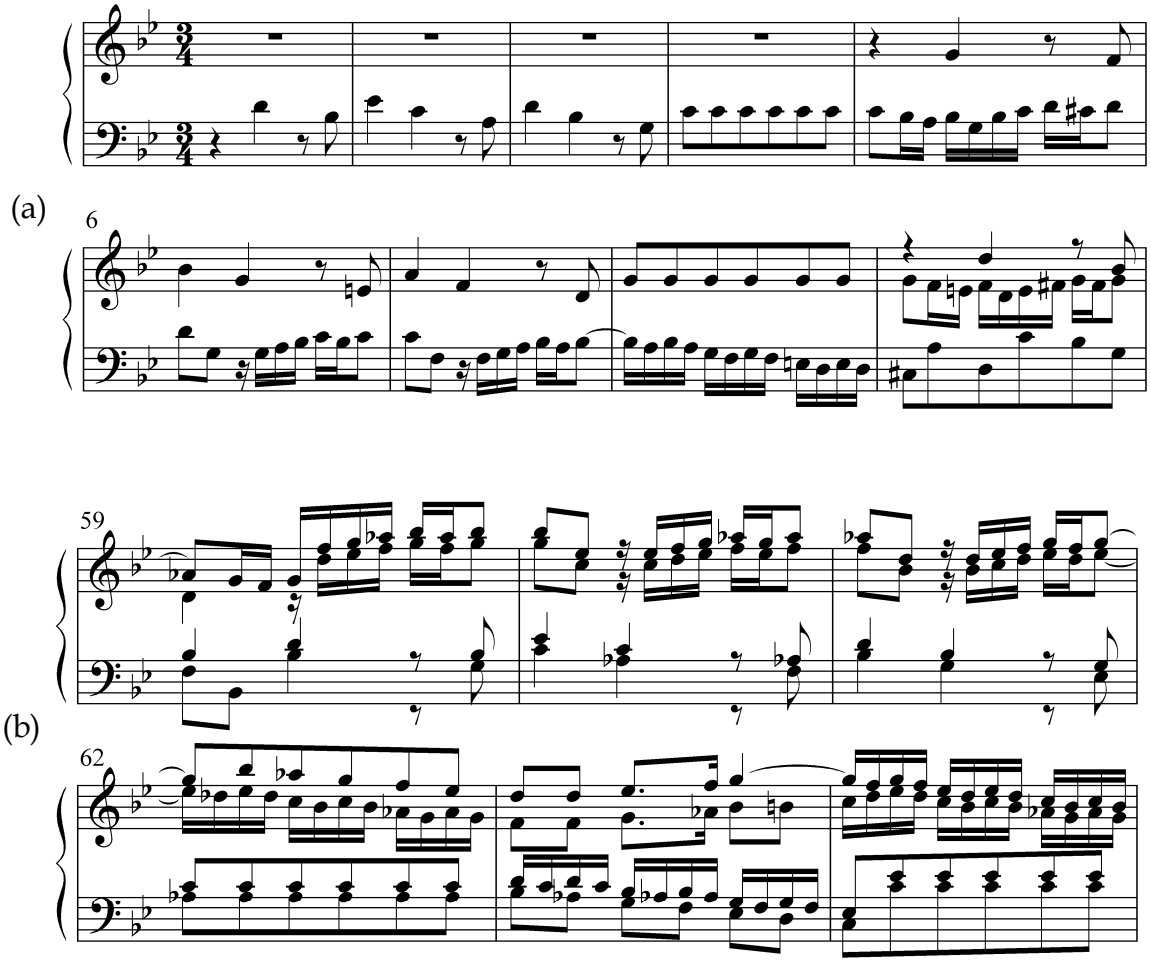
2 See Christoph Wolff, *Der stile antico in der Musik Johann Sebastian Bachs. Studien zu Bachs Spätwerk* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1968), esp. p. 36 f.

it is unlikely that a discussion of styles at the level of 'material' would on its own reveal much useful information about Bach's compositional approaches and ideals. Instead, I am going to concentrate on the mechanisms of his fugue writing, namely the techniques and procedures that made the fugues of WTC II more eloquent and powerful than those of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book I (WTC I), through the discussion of six selected fugues. I hope that this discussion will shed light on the stylistic features of Bach's compositions in this period.

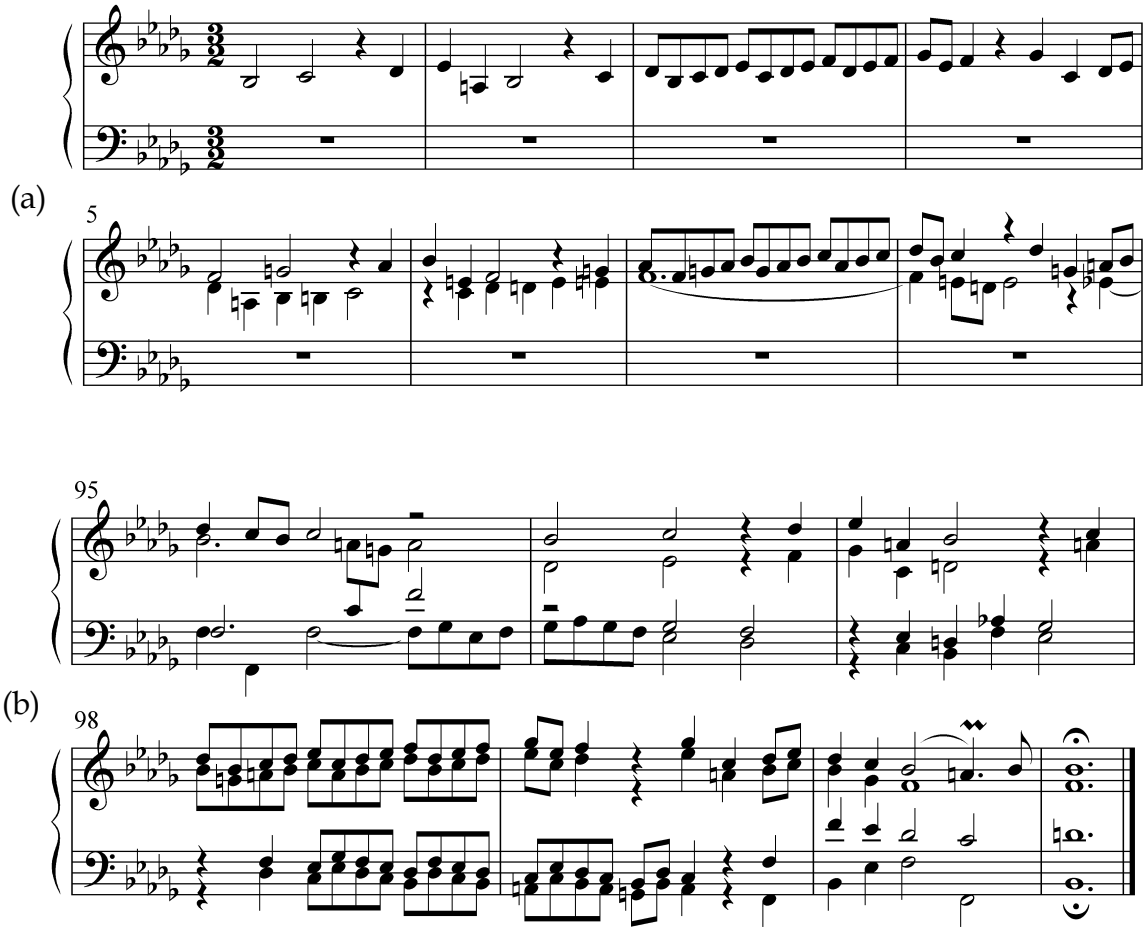
Bach's new fugal techniques and procedures

So what is 'new' in the fugues of WTC II and what truly stands out?

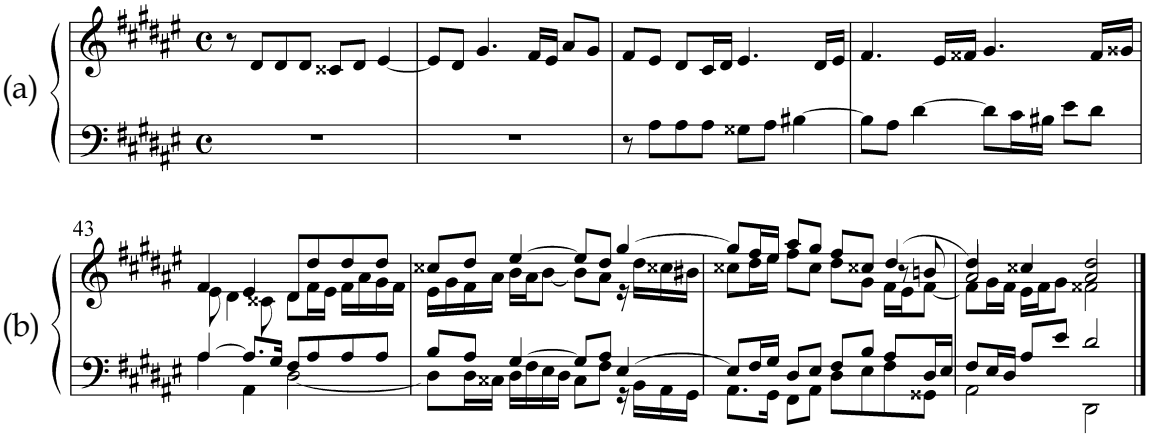
Most obviously prominent are the instances where Bach has emphasised a fugal subject by thickening its texture, for example, treating it as a double entry in thirds and sixths (as in Fugues in G minor and B♭ minor, shown in Examples 1–2 respectively) or creating a simultaneous entry against its inversion (as in Fugue in D♯ minor, shown in Example 3). These instances tend to occur at the climax of a dramatic fugal discourse. Bach did not use this technique in WTC I. I shall return to this point and examine it more closely.



Example 1: Fugue in G minor: (a) opening; (b) bars 59–64



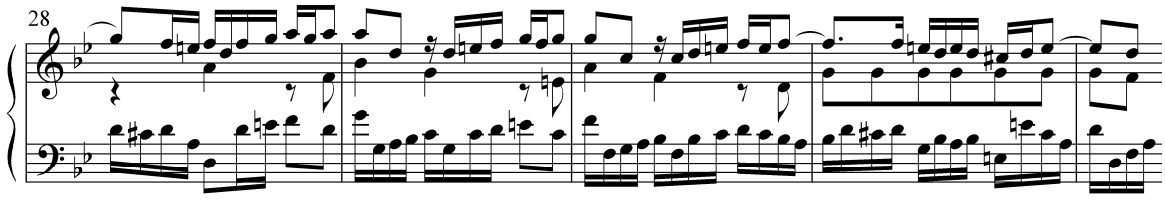
Example 2: Fugue in B♭ minor: (a) opening; (b) ending



Example 3: Fugue in D♯ minor: (a) opening; (b) ending

Another extraordinary feature, which is less obvious but more impressive technically, is the flexible use of double and triple counterpoint in which voices are interchanged at several intervals, namely the octave, tenth or twelfth (as in the fugues in G minor and B major). This not only permits doubled entries and strettos but also supplies new and exciting harmonic flavours, especially the secondary seventh chord, as shown in Example 4. Note that the interchange at the twelfth provides 9–8 suspensions in almost every bar (bb. 29, 30 and 32). The

interchange of the tenth and doubling in thirds,[3] as already shown in Example 1b, likewise provides spikily coloured secondary seventh chords in every bar. This fugue has double exchanges in both the subject and the countersubject. From a technical point of view, however, the interchange at the tenth is rarely used, especially in double fugues, owing to its complexity.[4] For those who know the technical difficulties associated with the use of this technique, this fugue is a particularly powerful demonstration of Bach's compositional skills.



Example 4: Fugue in G minor: bars 28–32

The interchange at the twelfth, a technique which is used more widely in WTC II (e.g. Fugues in C♯ minor, G minor and B major), comes in between the other two intervals.[5] There are some limited instances of interchange techniques used in WTC I,[6] but not to the extent of the great technical and expressive possibilities explored here. It is logical, therefore, that we find Bach exploring the interchange at the tenth and twelfth further in his next fugue project, *The Art of Fugue* (BWV 1080).[7]

Bach's fugal constructions or procedures have other interesting features which contribute directly to the fugal discourse. In WTC II, there is a greater variety, from very free to very strict. This may seem contradictory given that the fugues of WTC II explore fewer varieties in terms of the number of voices used, being in three and four parts only, whereas WTC I includes a two-part fugue as well as two five-part fugues. However, *Clavierübung* III and the *Goldberg Variations*, the compositions Bach was working on alongside WTC II in the late 1730s, show that he seems to have limited himself to finding well-chosen varieties within self-

3 Employing the interchange at the tenth at the same time as at the octave produces doubling in thirds. Interchange at the octave is of course always possible.

4 Certainly it is not easy to find an example of this kind, as Richard Stöhr comments. See Richard Stöhr, *Musikalische Formenlehre*, 4th edn. (Leipzig: Siegel, 1921), p. 46. I am very grateful to Nobuaki Ebata for pointing this out. As will be discussed later (see note 25), Mattheson apparently took the same view.

5 Compositionally speaking, the interchange at the twelfth is not as difficult as that at the tenth because as long as two voices move in parallel thirds, the interchange at the twelfth results in parallel thirds as well. I am again grateful to Nobuaki Ebata for the same.

6 The exposition of the Fugue in A minor of WTC I, for example, demonstrates how the idea of interchange at octave and twelfth is treated in a limited way in comparison with the examples found in WTC II. There are also other, less prominent examples in WTC I: Fugue in A♭ major (in episode only, bb. 11, 14 and 19) and Prelude in E♭ major (bb. 46 f.).

7 This theory is supported by the watermark evidence, namely that Bach's autograph manuscript of *The Art of Fugue* (D-B, Mus. ms. P 200) uses the same paper as the two movements of WTC II that Bach completed last in c. 1742 (viz. the preludes and fugues in C and A♭ major).

imposed restrictions – in other words, as might an expert in any other field, he set himself a more difficult problem to solve. In fact, the rules of WTC were already tight: a prelude-fugue pair must fill the twenty-four slots covering all twelve major and twelve minor keys, and the chosen pieces must be arranged in ascending order on a chromatic scale from C major to B minor, possibly in a sequence of movements that has some (as yet unrevealed) meaning.[8] Thus the lack of variety in the number of voices in fugues could well be seen as another layer of restriction rather than compromise. This is compensated amply by the variety in other respects, which I believe are fugal techniques and procedures. Some have very loose but logically processed procedures (e.g. Fugue in D♯ minor), while others have a very rigid external framework of premeditated artifice (e.g. Fugues in F♯ minor and B♭ minor).

The latter is of particular interest here, as the rigid procedural framework must have been carefully worked out as one of the fundamental ideas of the movement with which to achieve the compositional objective. Examples of this meticulously pre-planned architecture discussed below are the Fugue in F♯ minor, which exploits two subsidiary subjects with their own expositions, and the Fugue in B♭ minor which exploits inversion and stretto.

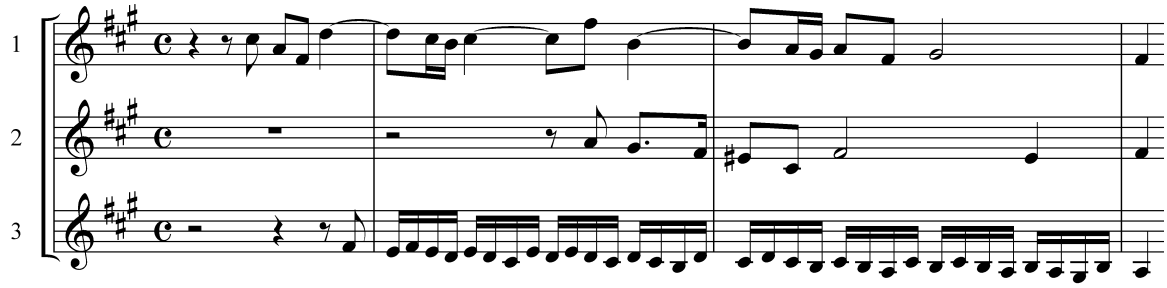
Fugue in F♯ minor (BWV 883/2)

The Fugue in F♯ minor is the most properly constructed triple fugue Bach wrote, that is, each of the three subjects is introduced by its own exposition, and all three are combined in the final section.[9] (The closest to this is the Fugue in C♯ minor of WTC I, the construction of which is not as neat and methodical as this example in WTC II; another example is the 'St Anne' fugue of *Clavierübung* III (BWV 552/2), although this does not present the three subjects simultaneously, hence is more properly called a double fugue with three distinct subjects.)

To compose this kind of fugue, the composer needs to conceive all three subjects in advance and test the combination before embarking on writing the fugue properly. For this piece, Bach used three distinct melodies as subjects as shown in Example 5:

[8] See, for example, Hans Nissen, 'Der Sinn des "Wohltemperierten Klavier II. Teil"', *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 39 (1951–52), 54–80. Problems with his approach are discussed in Yo Tomita, 'Psalm and *The Well-Tempered Clavier* II: Revisiting the Old Question of Bach's Source of Inspiration', *Bach*, 32/1 (2001), 17–43.

[9] It should be noted that Mattheson calls this type of fugue 'double fugue with three subjects' (Doppelfugen mit dreien Subjecten). See Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister, das ist gründliche Anzeige aller derjenigen Sachen, die einer wissen, können und vollkommen inne haben muss, der einer Capelle mit Ehren und Nutzen vorstehen will* (Hamburg: Christian Herold, 1739), p. 441.



1. the subject (or first subject) is long and melodious, containing nearly all the expressive possibilities explored in the fugue
2. the first subsidiary subject[10] (or second subject), starting on the second note of the opening triad (*a*′), is a short and poignantly characterised descending figure which includes dotted rhythm (perhaps representing the second person of the Trinity, Jesus?)
3. the second subsidiary subject (or third subject), starting on the third note of the opening triad (*f*♯′), is a floating semiquaver passage. In the episode, the motif explores freedom in a modulating context (perhaps representing the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost?).

Example 5: Three subjects of the Fugue in F♯ minor

It is worth noting that similar patterns of three subjects can be found in the triple fugues mentioned above.

In all probability, Bach then designed the fugal procedures, as seen in the version we know today:

1. **exposition** (bb. 1–11) with an episode (bb. 11–16) and a redundant entry (bb. 16–19), ending in the relative major
2. introduction of **the first subsidiary subject and its exposition** (bb. 21–4) with two redundant entries (bb. 23–8)
3. **combination of the two subjects** (bb. 28–37) with a short episode in the middle
4. introduction of the second subsidiary subject and its exposition (bb. 36–9), followed by an extensive episode (bb. 39–51)
5. the subject returns in bar 51 in the subdominant (key), but the next entry in the tonic (key) in bar 54 is the expected **entry of the subject with two subsidiary subjects together**, which is repeated twice (bb. 60f and 65f) and resolved in the tonic 'note' rather than chord, as if to express the unity of the Trinity.

Why did Bach write this fugue in this way? Was it simply to write a proper triple fugue as clearly as possible, or did he have a specific motive for doing so? Was it

[10] The 'subsidiary subject' is the term preferred to the more commonly used term (the second subject, etc.) used by Joseph Groocock in his *Fugal Composition: A Guide to the Study of Bach's "48"* (Westport: Greenwood, 2003). It is a more precise term to describe the nature of the device in the context of fugal discourse.

somehow related to the trinitarian symbolism expressed in the key-signature, F♯ minor with its three sharps,[11] or to Butler's claim that the final triple fugue of the *Clavierübung* III was Bach's response to Mattheson's public invitation to write 'double fugues with three subjects'?[12] Do the 70 bars of musical text have anything to do with the fact that this fugue was no. 14 of the collection?[13] These questions are unconnected but new evidence may reveal that one or more is an important piece of the jigsaw. In any event, having produced a perfect example of the triple fugue in WTC II, Bach's next challenge was to write a great quadruple fugue, which he did in *The Art of Fugue*.

Fugue in B♭ minor (BWV 881/2)

Moving on to the next example, Fugue in B♭ minor of WTC II is also structured clearly and methodically but in a different way from the F♯-minor fugue examined above. The primary techniques used in this fugue are inversion and stretto, and on this occasion, Bach decided to use these techniques as the main ideas for devising six logically sequenced sections, as follows:

1. exposition of direct subject (bb. 1–20)
2. stretto of direct subject (bb. 27–36)
3. exposition of inverted subject (bb. 42–61)
4. stretto of inverted subject (bb. 67–76)
5. stretto of direct and inverted subject (bb. 80–94)
6. stretto of direct and inverted subject, with added thirds and sixths (bb. 96–100).

The most striking, of course, is the last section where the entries of the subjects are fortified in thirds and sixths, creating a huge dramatic effect, as shown in Example 2b. Actually this technical possibility is partially visible in the stretto sections, but who could have predicted such an ending?

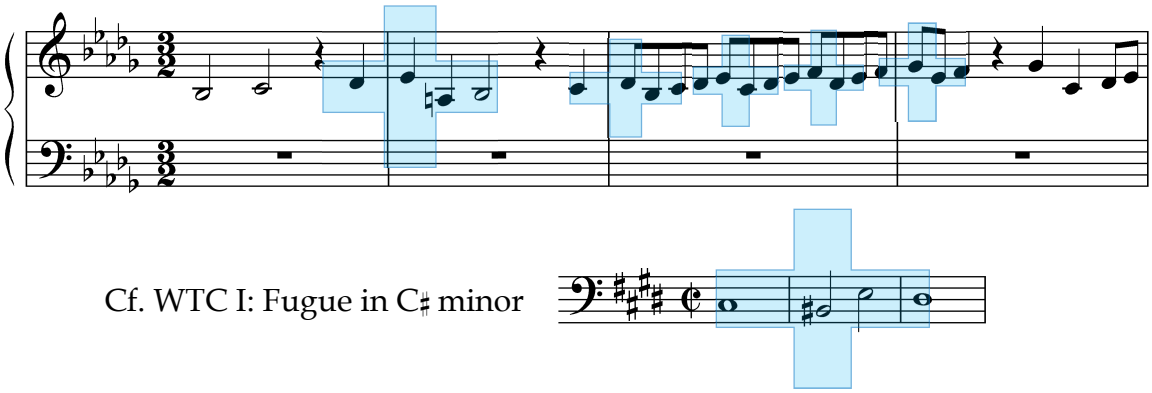
The head of the subject is the cross figure with the diminished fifth interval in its core, which is reminiscent of the subject of the C♯-minor fugue of WTC I (see

[11] Three flats in the key-signature of E♭ major have previously been considered to have the Trinitarian association when discussing the *Clavierübung* III. See, for example, Peter Williams, 'The Musical Aims of J.S. Bach's "Clavierübung III"', Ian Bent (ed.), *Source materials and interpretation of music: a memorial volume to Thurston Dart* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1981), pp. 259–78, at p. 262.

[12] See Gregory Butler, '*Der vollkommene Capellmeister* as a stimulus to J.S. Bach's late fugal writing', George J. Buelow and Hans Joachim Marx (eds.), *New Mattheson Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 293–305. See also David Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-tempered Clavier: The 48 Preludes and Fugues* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 96 and 355. Certainly Johann Krieger's fugue which Mattheson quotes in his *Der vollkommene Capellmeister,* p.442, as his 'good example' (*artiges Exempel*) contains fewer varieties than Bach's F♯ minor fugue.

[13] Number symbolism enthusiasts will immediately notice that 14 is the number alphabet for 'BACH' (2+1+3+8), and 70 is that for either 'JOH. SEB. BACH' or 'JESUS'. See, for example, Harry Hahn, *Symbol und Glaube im I.Teil des Wohltemperierten Klaviers von Joh. Seb. Bach. Beitrag zu einer Bedeutungskunde* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1973), pp. 37–8.

Example 6). The countersubject (bb. 5–8) likewise contains similar vocabularies to express bitterness – a fall of diminished fourth initially, followed by an ascending chromatic scale (see Example 2a).



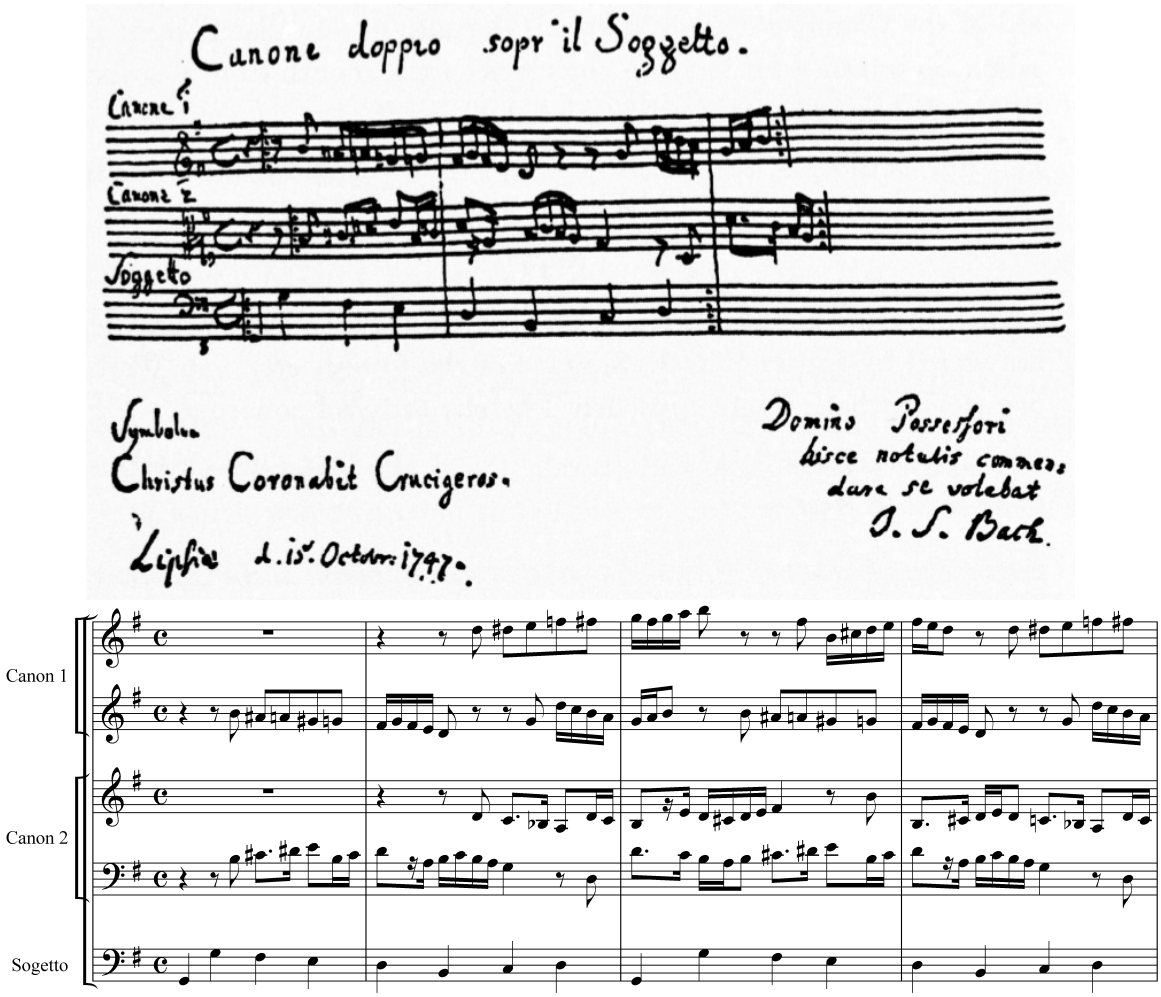
Example 6: Subject of Fugue in B♭ minor – consisting of χ motifs

In this context the riddle canon, BWV 1077, known through a copy which Bach presented to a theology student Johann Gottlieb Fulde on 15 October 1747 (Example 7) may be considered.[14] The similarity between this canon and the Fugue in B♭ minor becomes obvious when the solution of this canon is worked out (i.e. the voices are inverted). With the inscription *Symbolum: Christus Coronabit Crucigeros* (Christ will crown cross-bearers), Bach appears to be saying that 'any theologian worth his salt will understand that the solution to this little musical puzzle lies in turning the tunes upside down'.[15] The combination of the chromatic-scale motif and the inversion technique produces the symbolic meaning of χ (Chi). Can we also assume that Christ's crucifixion is implied in this fugue in WTC II? If the number 22 symbolises anything here, the reference to Psalm 22 is perhaps something which Bach may have had in mind.[16]

[14] While Elise Crean considers the draft of this canon (and indeed all the fourteen canons, BWV 1078) were written after the composition of the *Musical Offering*, it is also worth considering that the early draft of this canon actually originated around the time when this fugue was written, i.e. 1740 when the *Goldberg Variations* were also being compiled. See Elise Crean, 'The Fourteen Canons (BWV 1087): Foundation or Culmination? A re-evaluation of their position among Bach's late works', *Understanding Bach* 5 (2010), 67–75 at 75.

[15] Mel Unger, 'Chiastic Reflection in the B-minor Mass: Lament's Paradoxical Mirror', *International Symposium: Understanding Bach's B-minor Mass. Discussion Book 1*. Full Papers by the Speakers at the Symposium on 2, 3 and 4 November 2007, ed. Y. Tomita, E. Crean and I. Mills (Belfast: School of Music and Sonic Arts, Queen's University Belfast, 2007), pp. 93–115 at 107–8.

[16] See Tomita, 'Psalm and *The Well-Tempered Clavier* II'. In it the number symbolism of '22' is discussed in conjunction with the opening theme of the Prelude in B♭ minor of WTC II which resembles closely with the tune in movement 61a of *St Matthew Passion* sung by Jesus 'Eli, Eli lama asabthani' referring to Psalm 22. The key of that passage is also in B♭ minor.



Example 7: The 'Fulde' canon (BWV 1077) and its realisation (first four bars only)

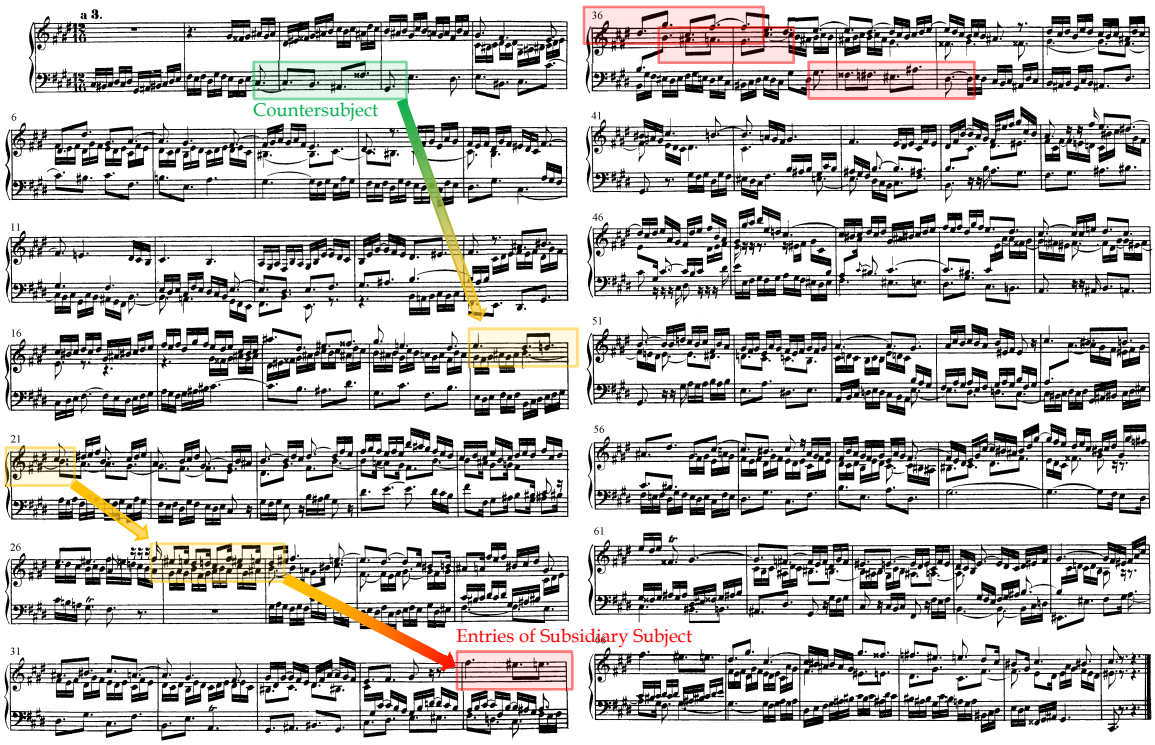
From the way these fugues were composed, it seems reasonable to infer that the procedural planning was completed before the fugues were written out. Not only is the sequence of sections logical, the effect of the actual fugues is also powerfully dramatic. The most interesting thing these examples show is that the methodical structuring of these fugues may be connected to the deep-rooted purpose of writing them – a secret which is yet to be decoded.

The 'metamorphosis' fugues

My next examples are those fugues which employ the subsidiary subject from halfway through, the appearance of which is gradually revealed in the fugal discourse. An attentive listener will notice that the appearance of the new subject is a logical necessity, revealing an important agenda in the composition. Three fugues in WTC II can be considered to belong to this type, Fugues in C♯ minor, G♯ minor and B major.

Fugue in C♯ minor (BWV 873/2)

The subsidiary subject (chromatic fall) first appears prominently in bar 35 in the soprano, which is followed by the alto in the following bar and followed again in the bass, the section being seen effectively as the exposition of this new subject (see Example 8). It is first combined with the subject at bar 48. In hindsight, its appearance was forecast in bar 20 as a modified form of the countersubject first heard in bars 2–4 in the bass.[17] An advanced state of metamorphosis may be seen in the soprano in bars 26–28, which is actually the countersubject (albeit heavily distorted at this point) for the inverted subject but also seen retrospectively as the fragmented diminution of the new subject. Thus, in essence, the new subject is a metamorphosis of the old countersubject.

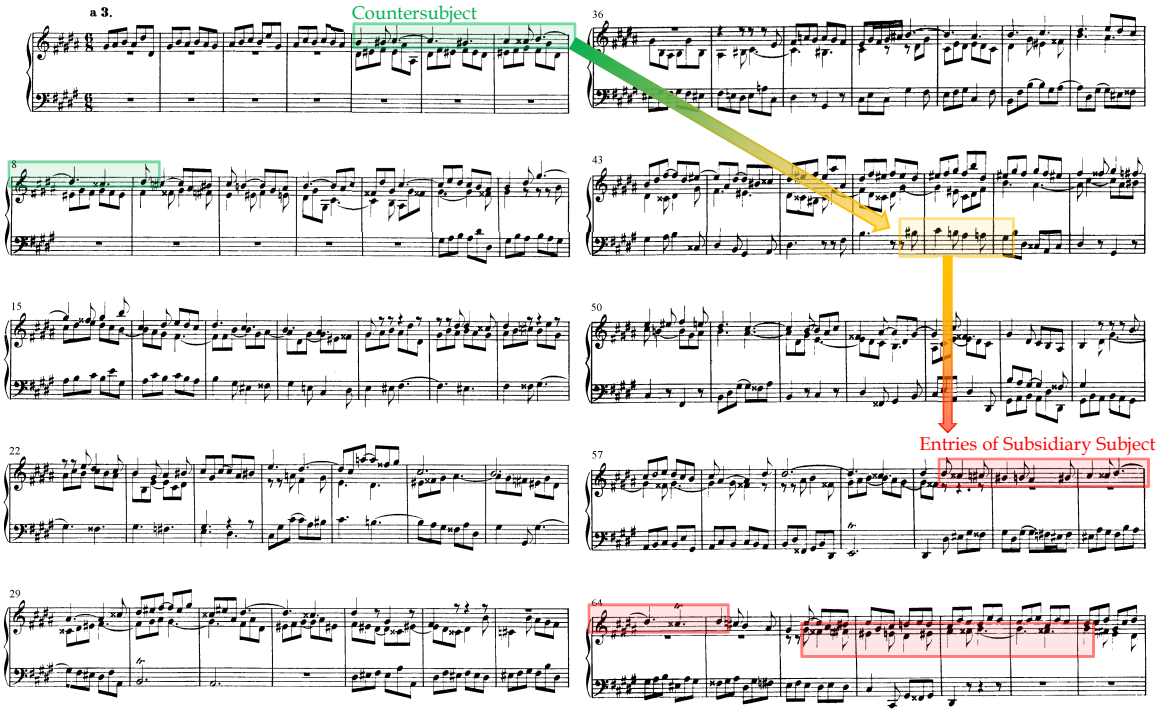


Example 8: Fugue in C♯ minor, indicating the stages of metamorphosis

Fugue in G♯ minor (BWV 887/2)

The subsidiary subject (chromatic fall then rise) first appears in bar 61 in the soprano (with its countersubject in the bass – see Example 9). As in the previous example, this entry marks the start of the exposition of the subsidiary subject, which continues until it appears together with the subject in bar 97. The announcement of the subsidiary subject in bar 61 is treated in such a way that it sounds fresh, as if to start exploring new territory; but the new subject is again based on the countersubject first heard in bars 5-7 and a glimpse of metamorphosis is spotted in bar 47.

[17] Charles Stewart MacPherson observes the same in *A Commentary on Book II of the 48 Preludes and Fugues of Johann Sebastian Bach* (London: Novello & Co., 1937), p. 13.



Example 9: Fugue in G♯ minor, first half, indicating the stages of metamorphosis

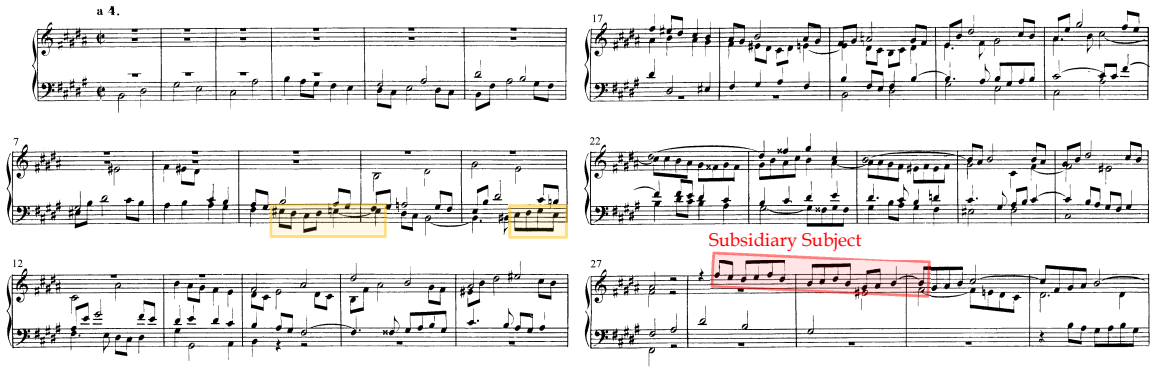
It is interesting that the subsidiary subject in these two minor-mode three-part fugues is based on a chromatic scale, although not surprising given that their subjects are made up of similar melodic and rhythmic profiles (i.e. each has a melody made up of diatonic scale with occasional leaps, set in plain and regular rhythm).[18] In terms of motivic shape, the subsidiary subjects are based on the countersubjects which are angular and less well-defined. This can be explained by the way they are introduced in the first instance, to assume the role of accompanying the main subject so as to provide harmonic support. The metamorphosis of the device from the countersubject to the subsidiary subject can thus be seen as a refinement of melodic material, i.e. to introduce an equally well-defined melody to the counterpoint. The fugal procedures are also similar: both fugues have expansive opening sections featuring counter-exposition before the subsidiary subject is introduced. They are also written in rare and related keys (with four and five sharps in their respective key-signatures), and were perhaps composed around the same time.[19] Everything indicates that Bach was experimenting with a specific model of fugal procedure at the time.

[18] The use of chromatic passage in the counter-theme in double fugues is discussed by Mattheson, p. 434, as device which gives 'the greatest contrast' (*grosten Unterschied*).

[19] Both movements were composed around 1740, but because the autograph of Prelude and Fugue in C♯ minor is lost, it is difficult to engage with source-critical discussion to establish a more precise chronology. See Yo Tomita, 'J.S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II: A Study of its Aim, Historical Significance and Compiling Process', PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1990, pp. 46 f, and Richard Jones, 'Stages in the development of Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier II"', *The Musical Times*, 132/1783 (Sep. 1991), 441–6.

Fugue in B major (BWV 892/2)

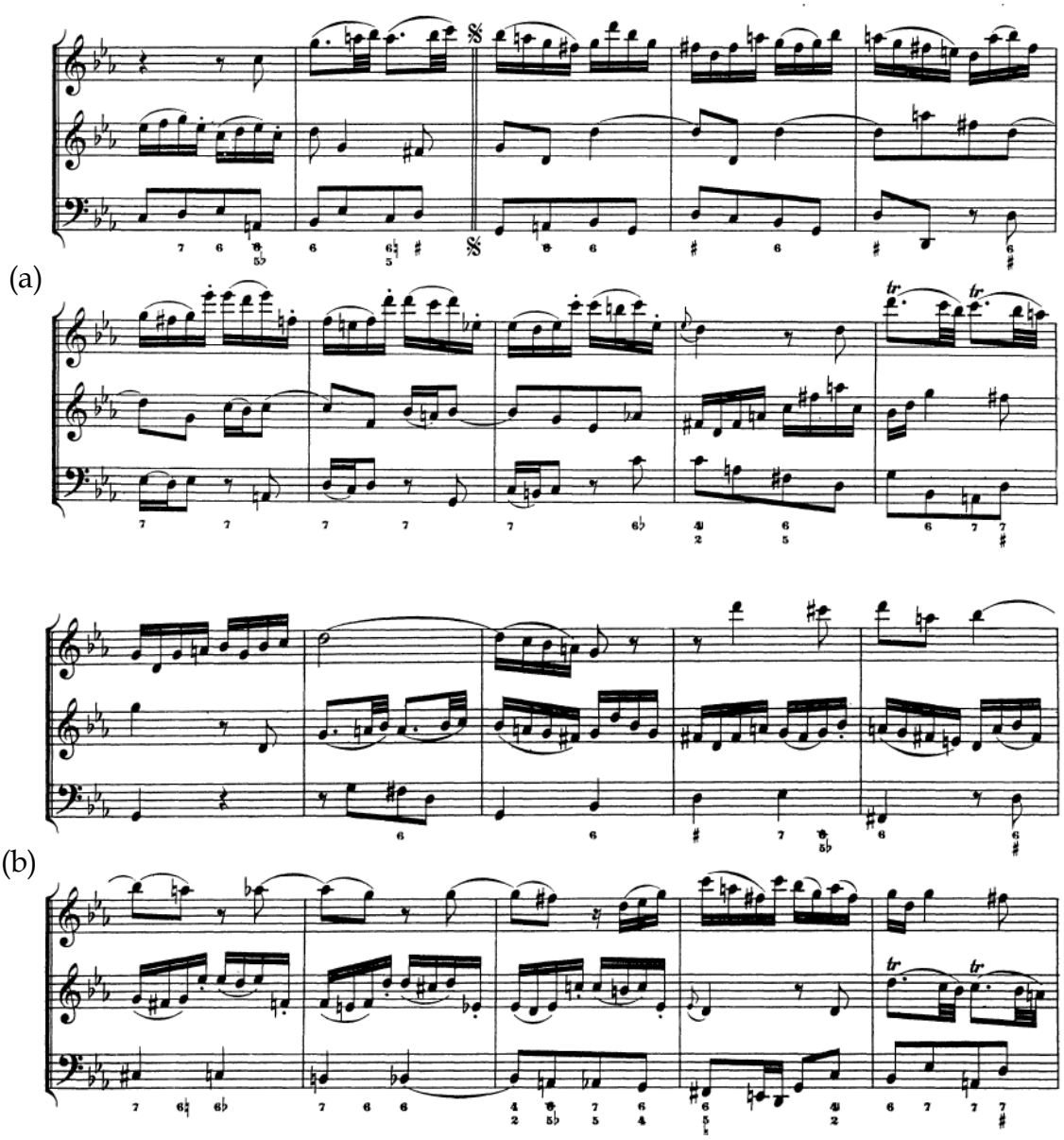
The subsidiary subject (floating quavers) first appears in bar 28 in the soprano as a freshly introduced subject. In terms of material, however, it effectively replaces two countersubjects used in the exposition, as it can be traced to the codetta figure in bar 9 and part of the second countersubject in bar 11, both of which are repeated in the rest of the exposition. Thus the subsidiary subject is again seen as a metamorphosis of the earlier material of lesser prominence.



Example 10: Fugue in B major, opening section, indicating the signs of metamorphosis

The fugal procedure is quite different from the preceding examples in a number of respects. First, this is a four-part rather than three-part fugue. This usually means that the exposition takes longer to complete, although, interestingly, this is not the case here as we shall see below. Secondly, the melodic ideas employed in the subject and subsidiary subject are very different: in the B-major fugue, the subject is slow-moving in leaping minims, while the subsidiary subject is based on a diatonic rather than chromatic scale, and explores an interchange at the twelfth with the main subject. Thirdly, the new subject emerges from the synthesis of two countersubjects rather than the gradual metamorphosis of one countersubject. Fourthly, the metamorphosis takes place very swiftly at a quarter of the way through the fugue (bar 27 of the total of 104 bars = 25 per cent), in contrast to the slow-processing metamorphosis which is finally accomplished almost halfway through the three-part fugues (Fugue in C♯ minor (bar 35 of the total of 71 bars = 49 per cent) and Fugue in G♯ minor (bar 61 of the total of 143 bars = 43 per cent)). Fifthly and finally, when introduced for the first time at bar 28, the new subject of the B-major fugue does not have its own exposition but appears as the countersubject of the subject. The effect of the last two points is one of resetting and restarting the fugal procedure. For these reasons, the fugal procedure for the B-major fugue needs to be distinguished from the preceding examples, although the basic principle of 'metamorphosis' is still present. Yet it seems significant that in all three examples discussed above, the 'metamorphosis' theme appears in the accomplished form for the first time in the soprano, as if being ceremoniously revealed. There may be a particular reason for this compositional choice, such as a female voice that played a divine role in

the theological convention of Bach's time.[20] It is worth noting that a similar 'metamorphosis' idea is also found in the second movement of the Trio Sonata in *Musical Offering* (BWV 1079). The chromatically-coloured new subject with expressive 'sigh motif' is first pronounced in the flute part (top part of the texture) in bar 48, which has evolved from a rather plain countersubject heard in the exposition (bars 11 f), as shown in Example 11.[21]



Example 11: Extracts from *Allegro* from the 'Trio Sonata' in *Musical Offering* (BWV 1079): (a) bars 10–19; (b) bars 45–54

[20] I am grateful to Professor Ruth HaCohen for pointing out this possibility. The subject of sacred femininity was explored by Wendy Heller in her paper 'Mary Sings: searching for the Feminine in Bach's World' read at the Fifth Dialogue Meeting in Edinburgh on 13 August 2011, which will appear in *Understanding Bach*, 7 (2012).

[21] In 'Exploring the Limits: the Tonal, the Gestural, and the Allegorical in Bach's Musical Offering', *Understanding Bach*, 1 (2006), 19–38 at 37–8, Ruth HaCohen relates the significance of the flute part of this movement to a political game Bach was playing with Frederick the Great.

Assessment

What then was Bach trying to achieve with the metamorphosis idea? From a structural perspective, these fugues are dissimilar to the methodically constructed fugues examined earlier. The metamorphosis is such a subtle idea that it cannot have been fully pre-planned; it is more likely that Bach had only a vague idea of how he might be writing the 'metamorphosis' fugues. The loose but lucid and logical flow of these fugues seems like a masterly act of improvisation.[22] The sheer expressive power of Bach's fugal style thus appears to be the result of a marriage between meticulously well-organised ideas and free improvisation, which somehow helped Bach to write more dramatic, more profound fugues for WTC II. It seems significant, therefore, that a similar pattern of 'free' and 'strict' is also found in the two surviving Lute works (BWV 997 and 998), which incidentally are contemporary with WTC II.[23] Is it merely a coincidence that these foreshadow the two contrasting Ricercars of *Musical Offering* to be composed a few years later?

How did Bach come to acquire these new fugal techniques and procedures? What motivated him to adopt these new compositional approaches?

Bach and rhetoric

In his article 'Fugue and Rhetoric', Gregory Butler explores how the principle behind the composition of fugues is governed by rhetoric. According to Butler, the *confutatio* or *refutatio*, a middle section in which the opposition to the *propositio* is to be presented and resolved, is particularly important in the rhetorical *dispositio* scheme. In his *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* of 1739, Mattheson refers to this aspect as an important area of musical interest that involves such devices as dissonances, syncopations, thematic fragmentation, and inversion, when discussing the *confutatio*:

> The *confutatio* is a resolution of the objections and may be expressed in music either through suspensions or also through the introduction and refutation of strange-seeming passages. For it is just by means of these elements of opposition, provided that they are deliberately rendered prominent, that the delight of the ear is strengthened and everything in the nature of dissonances and syncopations which may strike the ear is settled and resolved.[24]

[22] Michael Marissen observes the same technique being used in Bach's early vocal works, giving the three-part fugal chorus 'Es ist der alte Bund' of BWV 106 as an example: here the countersubject 'Mensch, du mußt sterben' gradually metamorphoses, in the end, into the shape of the opening motif from the chorale 'Herzlich tut mich verlangen', a melodic shape also adopted from the outset by the non-fugal soprano line for 'Ja komm, Herr Jesu, komm' in this same movement. While this metamorphosis technique may not be entirely new to Bach at the time of WTC II, it is still a noteworthy features of keyboard fugues of WTC II, as it was never being used in WTC I. I am grateful to Professor Marissen for this valuable feedback given at the Dialogue Meeting in August 2011.

[23] See David Ledbetter, 'Improvisation, da capos and palindromes in BWV 997 and 998', *Understanding Bach*, 6 (2011), 19–34.

[24] Mattheson, p. 236. Trans. by Butler, p. 85.

What we have found in the G-minor Fugue – the clashing dissonance resulting from suspension figures, and the use of secondary seventh chords on the strong beat, which was introduced by the voice interchange at tenth and twelfth, creating a succession of nervous moments – fits this scene beautifully. The tactful use of inversions found in the B♭-minor fugue also belongs to this category.

It is worth adding that in the same work Mattheson also discusses the invertible counterpoint at octave, tenth and twelfth, the middle of which is described 'most difficult' (*allerschwersten*):

> Because the composition of counterpoint at the tenth tends to be most difficult, I want to place yet one more illustration here, and at the same time show how it looks **when the third voice goes with one of the others in like steps**. Why it again is generally so difficult to use suspensions here is easy to judge from the fact that according to the above numerical ordering of intervals, no single dissonance can be resolved naturally on inversion: unless one perhaps were to permit the second to go to the third, afterwards in the evolution the ninth and octave come out of it.[25]

Moving closer to the final section of the fugue, there is also a specific issue in the rhetorical *dispositio* scheme. Butler observes this to be 'stretto',[26] the piling up of entries of the theme, which has close parallels with the procedure adopted by rhetoricians in *confirmatio*. Again it has already been observed in the B♭-minor as well as the fugue in G minor (quasi stretto found in bb. 67-72) that Bach regularly resorts to using strettos to increase musical tension. In fact, the simultaneous appearance of the subject can be seen as a more powerful version of the device that can be used in *confirmatio*.

In his excellent monograph on the WTC published by Yale University Press in 2002, Ledbetter observes that there are a number of fugue subjects in WTC II which closely resemble Mattheson's examples of rhythms, namely 'spondee' (two long syllables – a Greek term meaning 'libation, or solemn offering'; cf. Fugue in B major),[27] 'tribach' (three short syllables) (Fugues in C♯ minor /G♯ minor) and 'bacchius' (a short and two longs; cf. Fugue in G minor),[28] incidentally all the fugues I have specifically chosen for this paper (see Example 12).

What do these examples show? If these rhythms are deliberate, what did Bach want to achieve? To me this is yet another example of Bach responding to his contemporaries' theoretical writings on how to compose excellent fugues, which closely reflect the rhetorical principles of musical composition discussed most recently by Mattheson, one of the most powerful and progressive writers of the time. Marpurg's extensive citing of the WTC II in his *Abhandlung von der Fuge* (1753–54) appears to testify that Bach was writing the exemplary fugues of his

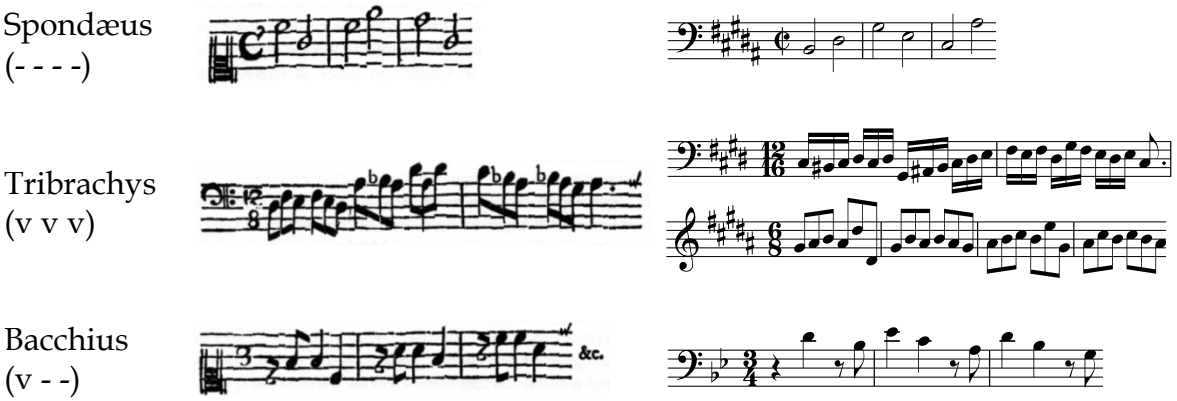
[25] Mattheson, p. 424. Trans. Ernest C. Harriss, *Johann Mattheson's Der vollkommene Capellmeister: A Revised Translation with Critical Commentary* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 779. Emphasis is in the original.

[26] Butler, pp. 94–7.

[27] Mattheson, p. 164; Ledbetter, p. 82.

[28] Mattheson, p. 166; Ledbetter, p. 83.

age, which suggests that he was aware of and responding to contemporary theoretical discussions.



Example 12: Mattheson's examples (1739) of rhythms possibly taken by Bach for the subjects of WTC II fugues

Bach explored new ideas in writing fugues against a turbulent background of achievement and despair. The oft-cited infamous attack of Scheibe, describing Bach as a composer with no sympathy for 'amenity' (*Annehmlichkeit*) who takes away the 'natural element in his pieces by giving them a turgid (*schwülstig*) and confused style',[29] seems particularly relevant here. To me the 'metamorphosis' fugues can be seen as Bach's response, demonstrating his ability to write lucid and powerful fugues.

Doubtless many other contemporary references which could teach us about Bach's approach to WTC II have so far escaped our notice. Let us continue to engage closely with Bach's contemporaries, in particular Mattheson, Scheibe, and Mizler, so as to gain further knowledge of Bach's mastery of fugal writing.

[29] NBR, p. 338.