

J. S. Bach and the Two Cultures of Musical Form*

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Leopold Godowsky, the celebrated pianist of the first decades of the twentieth century, left the USA for a tour of the Far East in 1923.¹ During the lengthy boat journeys between different stops on the concert tour, he prepared virtuoso transcriptions of Bach's Cello Suites and Violin Solos, principally because he needed 'warm-up' opening pieces for his concerts. On 12 March, travelling from Java to Hong Kong aboard the passenger steamboat *SS Tjikembang*, he finished his version of the Sarabande of the C-minor cello suite, which he dedicated to Pablo Casals (Example 1).

The original piece is in binary form, characteristic of eighteenth-century dance suites. The first part modulates from C minor to the relative E-flat major; the second part finds its way back from E-flat major to the tonic after a short detour in F minor. In Bach's composition, the first part consists of eight bars, the second twelve bars. In Godowsky's transcription, however, the second part is extended by four additional bars. From bar 17, the first four bars of the piece return note for note. Accordingly, the form becomes three-part in a symmetric arrangement: the first eight bars that modulate from tonic to the relative major are followed by eight bars that modulate from the relative major to the fourth degree, and these are followed by another eight bars of the return of the beginning. When the transcriptions were published by Carl Fischer in New York in 1924, Godowsky gave the following explanation as to why he changed Bach's form:

On several occasions I have been tempted to slightly modify the architectural design in order to give the structural outline a more harmonious form. Thus, when the return to the first subject of a movement seemed imperative, I have interpolated a part of the main idea before the close of that movement. I wish to make clear that I have never introduced any themes, motives, or counter-melodies which were not a logical outgrowth of the inherent musical content.²

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¹ Only one biography has been written on Godowsky so far: Jeremy Nicholas, *Godowsky: The Pianist's Pianist* (Northumberland: Appian, 1989).

² Preface in *Sonatas & Suites for Violin Solo & Violoncello Solo (unaccompanied); Suite in C minor (No. 5, violoncello) / Johann Sebastian Bach*. Freely transcribed & adapted for the Pianoforte by Leopold Godowsky (New York: Carl Fischer, 1924), Pl.-Nr. 22936-33.

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The image displays a musical score for a 'Sarabande' (continued) in G minor, BWV 912. It consists of four systems of piano and bass staves. The score includes various performance markings: 'cresc.' (crescendo), 'rall.' (rallentando), 'poco cresc.' (poco crescendo), and 'dim. e rit.' (diminuendo e ritardando). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a star symbol (*). Below the score, the number '22936-33' is printed on the left, and the text 'March 12th, 1923, S.S. Tjikembang, from Java to Hongkong' is printed on the right.

Example 1: 'Sarabande' (cont.)

Godowsky was not a man of theories, but his choice of words reflects the more than hundred-year-old tradition of German musical aesthetics, spanning the creators of the concept of absolute music in the early nineteenth century (Forkel, Rochlitz, E. T. A. Hoffman, et al.), Eduard Hanslick, who published the basic book of musical formalism in 1854, and the early twentieth-century German theorists who raised absolute music to almost religious heights.³

The latter group included August Halm, who published his work *Von zwei Kulturen der Musik* in 1913.⁴ For Halm the two central categories of music were theme and form – which he took over from Hanslick⁵ – and he approached these as each other's antitheses, in line with Hegel's dialectics. In Halm's system, Bach's fugues represented 'the culture of theme' and Beethoven's sonatas 'the culture of form'. In Bach's fugues, Halm said the 'commanding and active' theme rules over form. In the Beethoven sonatas, by direct contrast, it is the form that rules over the 'servile, suffering and even needy' theme.⁶ The harmonic order of a movement is secondary in Bach; in Beethoven every tonal adventure has significance. In Bach's case, 'the voices live, but the form does not – it has no soul and no will, it does not yearn, hope or rejoice'.⁷ In Beethoven's music every arrival at a new important key is 'an event that is awaited, desired, the fulfilment of a yearning that we may ultimately ascribe not only to us, but to musical form'.⁸

In the Sarabande of Bach's cello suite in C minor, the new keys are reached unnoticeably, whereas in Godowsky's version the return to C minor is striking. Godowsky's performing instructions and harmonisation yield a dramatic character to the piece which is completely alien to Bach. In short, by transforming the binary form of the Sarabande into something like sonata form, Godowsky has – according to Halm's theory – shifted the piece from Bach's culture to Beethoven's.

Halm's theory reloaded

Nearly a hundred years after Halm, the theory of the two cultures of musical form seem to have been revived, albeit in a more refined and somewhat altered form. In his illuminating 2007 book *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, Karol Berger contrasted Mozart's and Bach's approach to form. His primary interest is the temporal aspect of music and, more precisely, the transformation during which 'at some point between early and late eighteenth century, between Bach and Mozart, musical form became primarily temporal, and the centre of attention for

³ See chapter 2 ('The History of the Term and its Vicissitudes') of Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 19–42; and chapter 7 ('Disclosiveness') of Mark Evan Bond, *Absolute Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112–26.

⁴ August Halm, *Von zwei Kulturen der Musik* (Munich: Müller, 1913).

⁵ See chapter 7 ('Content and Form in Music') of Eduard Hanslick, *The Musically Beautiful*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1986), 77–85, esp. 81.

⁶ Halm, *Zwei Kulturen*, 116. The English translation is taken from Laura Lynn Kelly, 'August Halm's *Von zwei Kulturen der Musik*: A Translation and Introductory Essay', PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2008, 128.

⁷ Halm, *Zwei Kulturen*, 12; Kelly, 'August Halm', 57.

⁸ Ibid.

musicians—composers, performers, and listeners alike—shifted toward the temporal disposition of events'.⁹

The two paradigmatic figures of Berger's theory embody two different approaches to time. Bach's music represents cyclic time, while Mozart's music represents linear time. It is no surprise that Bach fugues play an important role in Berger's book. According to Berger, 'the focus of interest in a fugue is the subject and what is being done with it contrapuntally';¹⁰ while the harmonic plan—the temporal succession of decisive musical events—plays only a secondary role. Contrapuntal processes applied to a theme 'have to be presented in some temporal order, of course, but there is nothing essential or necessary about the particular order'.¹¹

Berger does not use the expression 'mechanism', but it is one of the central categories in the analytic method of Laurence Dreyfus, who was the primary source of inspiration for his Bach analysis.¹² For Dreyfus—and indeed Berger—Bach was not a genius in the romantic sense, creating an organic whole from a seed of thought. Dreyfus considers him more as an inventive experimenter who researched the inherent possibilities of musical themes or thematic complexes. According to this model, a Bach composition is nothing more than the application of the inherent possibilities of the themes on various compositional mechanisms. The musical form, that is the temporal plan of any given movement, is only secondary compared with the procedures that Bach executed on the themes. These mechanical procedures were typical not only in Bach's fugues but also, as Berger and Dreyfus both pointed out, in his concerto or da capo movements based on the ritornello principle.¹³ For Berger—as for Halm a hundred years earlier and for mainstream Bach scholarship today—it is not the disposition of the musical material that matters in Bach's music but the theme and the polyphonic mechanisms with which it is treated; or to use the vocabulary of eighteenth-century rhetoric, *inventio* played a more prominent role in the compositional process than *dispositio*.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, at the dawn of theoretical thinking on abstract musical forms, pieces of music were not approached as lifeless mechanisms but as organic wholes that had their own life. 'Since the composition follows formal laws of beauty, it does not improvise itself in haphazard ramblings but develops itself in organically distinct gradations, like sumptuous blossoming from a bud', said Eduard Hanslick about musical form in 1854.¹⁴ The organic model applied to works of art had a decisive influence on the theory of

⁹ Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹² See Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), and his study summarising his analytical method, 'Bachian inventions and its mechanisms', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 171–92. For Berger's reference to Dreyfus, see *Bach's Cycle*, 99.

¹³ See Dreyfus' analysis of Bach's concertos (*Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, 59–102) and Berger's interpretation of the opening movement of St Matthew Passion (*Bach's Cycle*, 45–59).

¹⁴ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 81.

musical form until the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁵ In Hugo Riemann's *Dictionary of Music*, originally published in 1882, the beginning of the entry 'Form' reads as follows:

In art there must be form, which is merely a placing together of the parts of a work of art so as to form a uniform whole; but such placing together is only possible if the various elements are intimately related one to another. If this condition be not fulfilled, the result is merely proximity, juxtaposition.¹⁶

Riemann considered movements based on the sonata principle as the highest level of realisation of musical form in general. He therefore continued the same entry by stating that the first condition for form is 'unity; yet this can only fully unfold its aesthetic effect by means of antithesis, as contrast, and as contradiction (conflict)'.¹⁷ In pieces based on the sonata principle, the conflict between the themes and keys introduced in the first section of the movement (the exposition) is resolved in the closing section (the recapitulation). According to Riemann, musical compositions without contrast and those that do not include substantial relations between their different sections are without form, that is, they are formless—just like Bach's fugues, according to August Halm's interpretation.

Music theory in our age has apparently moved far away from the nineteenth-century organic model, which seemed to have all but lost its appeal by the end of the twentieth century.¹⁸ Yet Karol Berger's concept of form hardly deviates from Riemann's or Hanslick's. The essence of musical form in his case also lies in the question of whether the different sections constituting the whole necessarily link together. Since all musical compositions are built from successive sections, in order to be able to talk about musical form, Berger writes, 'earlier phrases must not only precede but also in some way cause the appearance of later ones, and these for their part must not only succeed but also follow from the earlier ones—one-after-another must become one-because-of-the-other'.¹⁹ Just like his nineteenth-century predecessors, Berger bases his theory of form on late eighteenth-century sonata principle.²⁰ This is how he can make his music history model work, and how he can prove that musical form had no bearing on the compositional process in the first half of the eighteenth century. However, the question remains: do we really need to talk about opposition and contrast and a causal relationship between musical phrases (whatever 'causal' in this context may mean) in order to talk about musical form?

¹⁵ David L. Montgomery, 'The Myth of Organicism: From Bad Science to Great Art', *The Musical Quarterly*, 76/1 (1992), 17–66. For the description of this process, see Kevin Korsyn, 'Schenker's Organicism Reexamined', *Intégral*, 7 (1993), 82–118, and Marva Duerksen 'Schenker's Organicism Revisited', *Intégral*, 22 (2008), 1–58, esp. 7–10.

¹⁶ Hugo Riemann, *Musical Dictionary*, trans. John South Shedlock (London: Augener, 1902), 245.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ruth Solie, 'The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis', *19th-Century Music*, 4/2 (1980), 147–56.

¹⁹ Berger, *Bach's Arrow*, 179–80.

²⁰ Besides Berger's Mozart-interpretation, see his analysis of Chopin, 'The Form of Chopin's Ballade, Op. 23', *19th-Century Music*, 20/1 (1996), 46–71.

In the following I will examine two pieces by J. S. Bach: the C-major prelude (BWV 870 / BWV 870a) from Book II of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the opening movement of the E-major violin concerto (BWV 1042). Through analysis of these two pieces I hope to reveal what they tell us about the role of musical form in the compositional process, and to what extent they reflect the concept of the 'two cultures of form'.

Different versions, different form concepts

According to Johann Mattheson, preludes and pieces in the related genres (toccata, capriccio, fantasia) 'appear to be improvised but are, nevertheless, committed to paper. They keep within few limitations, however, and have so little order that one can hardly call them anything other than good ideas.'²¹ Dating from around 1720, Bach's prelude in C major (BWV 870a/1) perfectly matches Mattheson's description: it gives the impression of an improvised work and is not characterised by any rule or order (Example 2). Hermann Keller treats the piece as an offspring of the seventeenth-century extravagant keyboard repertoire from Naples,²² that is, he puts it in the tradition represented by composers like Girolamo Frescobaldi, Giovanni Maria Trabaci, Giovanni Salvatore,²³ and by a characteristic subgenre, the *toccata di durezze e ligature*. As the name suggests, the most important feature of these toccatas is the intensive use of dissonances and tied notes. In the words of Margaret Murata, a specialist of the repertoire, these pieces are typically marked by 'a continuous lack of resolution [of dissonances] which aggravates a sense of formlessness'.²⁴ Basically, this is the tool which contributes to a seamless, unbroken flow of the musical material.

In his essay on the genesis of Bach's C-major prelude, James Brokaw emphasises that 'in the C-major prelude, Bach of course achieves the sense of "formless improvisation" by means better suited to the more highly developed tonal style of the eighteenth century'.²⁵ I will argue that although the prelude BWV 870a cannot be broken down into distinct sections along the lines of music governed by the late eighteenth-century sonata principle – it is free of all kinds of contrast (textural, rhythmic or thematic) – the tonality of C major and the clear constitution of the harmonic plan gives the piece some form.

²¹ 'Ob nun gleich diese alle das Ansehen haben wollen, als spielte man sie aus dem Stegreife daher, so werden sie doch mehrentheils ordentlich zu Papier gebracht; halten aber so wenig Schrancken und Ordnung, daß man sie schwerlich mit einem andern allgemeinen Nahmen, als guter Einfälle belegen kan. Daher auch ihr Abzeichen die Einbildung ist.' Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg: Christian Herold, 1739), 232.

²² Hermann Keller, *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier von J. S. Bach* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1965), 136–7.

²³ See the second part of John Caldwell's entry 'Toccata' ('Early and middle Baroque: Italy, south Germany, Austria') in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. 25, 535–536.

²⁴ Margaret Murata, 'Extravagant Harmony and Dissonance in Early Seicento Keyboard Music: Stravaganza and Durreze e ligature', Unpublished MA thesis, University of Chicago, 1971, 66, cited by James A. Brokaw II, 'The genesis of the Prelude in C Major, BWV 870', in Don. O. Franklin (ed.), *Bach Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 225–39, at 228.

²⁵ Ibid.

Example 2: J. S. Bach: Prelude in C major (BWV 870a/1)

The first four-and-a-half bars are about confirming the tonic: three bars of tonic pedal are followed by the IV-V-I cadential formula in a richly elaborated form (bars 4-5), and the migration between different keys starts afterwards. According to the conventions of the era, the first target is the dominant, while the G-major chord struck on the first beat of bar 7 appears only as a temporary stop. In bar 8 we are already in D minor, but the musical material immediately moves towards A minor (the new key is supported by the E-pedal). In bar 10, however, the

soprano part moves from *a'* to *g'* instead of the expected *g#'*, so we return to D minor at the end of the bar, and then to the home key of C major.

The unity of the movement—if unity is what we need—is guaranteed not only by a clear harmonic plan, but also by a motif of three semiquavers played first by the right hand at the start of the piece to serve as an embellishment of the resolution of tied dissonances. Using the metaphor of an organism, one could say that this motif permeates the movement like a kind of cell. Although the musical form, that is—the arrangement of key areas—was not preconceived according to a prior compositional design, the sequence of musical events comes together as a meaningful whole.

Of course, musical form is not only about key areas: the plan of the juxtaposition of thematic material is equally important. This can be seen in the C-major prelude (BWV 870/1) of Book II of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, a piece that is traditionally discussed by the Bach literature as a more mature and elaborate version of the prelude analysed before.²⁶ BWV 870 is unique among the Bach preludes in that it has survived in five different states. The 17-bar early version (BWV 870a/1) was copied in around 1720 by Johann Peter Kellner,²⁷ a student of Bach, but we also have a later copy of this version with added ornamentation and fingering written down by another Bach student, Johann Caspar Vogler.²⁸ Similarly, we have the 34-bar later version in three different states: London autograph of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* version (BWV 870b/1) from around 1742,²⁹ a slightly developed version in the hand of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach,³⁰ and a later more ornamented copy by Bach's student and later son-in-law Johann Christoph Altnickol (BWV 870/1).³¹ The last is widely regarded as the final version of the composition. In this study I am more interested in the degree to which the earlier and later versions differ from the point of view of form, and less in the stages through which the 17-bar piece evolved into the 34-bar final shape generally known today. Thus the different versions will be treated as separate compositions. For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to the earlier piece (BWV 870a/1) by the name of Johann Peter Kellner, and use the name of Johann Christoph Altnickol for the one included in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (BWV 870/1).³²

Altnickol's and Kellner's versions are essentially the same in the first 14 bars. With Altnickol the parts are more elaborately ornamented (in the first bar we already have the later recurring *roulades*, moving in demisemiquavers) and the part-writing more chromatic (see, for example, the soprano part in the second

²⁶ Since the score of BWV 870 is easily accessible, I dispensed with putting it as an example in this article.

²⁷ D-B, Mus. ms. Bach P 804, Faszikel 38, f. 2r. See *NBA KB V/6.2*, 342–3.

²⁸ D-B, Mus. ms. Bach P 1089, f. 4v. See *NBA KB V/6.2*, 344–6.

²⁹ GB-Lbl, Add. MS 35021, f. 1r. For the dating, see Yoshitake Kobayashi, 'Zur Chronologie der Spätwerke Johann Sebastian Bachs. Kompositions- und Aufführungstätigkeit von 1736 bis 1750', *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 74 (1988), 7–72 at 46.

³⁰ I-BolC, DD 70. See *NBA KB V/6.2*, 98.

³¹ D-B, Mus. ms. Bach P 430, ff. 2v–3r.

³² For a description of the differences between the versions and of the compositional history of BWV 870 see Brokaw, 'The Genesis of the Prelude'.

half of bar 11, or the tenor in the first part of bar 12). But what really sets the two pieces apart is the disposition of the musical material, that is, the musical form.

In Altnickol's version, from bar 15 the harmonic course is led by a popular tool of improvised preludes, the descending bass-line.³³ The bass descends gradually half a bar at a time, moving from b to F (the clear structure of the descent is blurred by the winding movement of the bass part). Meanwhile, the other three parts move forward in a buoyant polyphony fit for the character of the movement, and the musical material shifts through G minor, F major and D minor through chromatic lines all the way to bar 20. At this point something extraordinary happens, at least in terms of the conventions of the genre. As James Brokaw puts it: 'Beneath this guise of formless improvisation, the composer introduced a feature basic to closed musical form: the literal return.'³⁴ In bars 20–29 the section from the second half of bar 5 to bar 14 is repeated note for note in transposition.³⁵ The two bars right after the 'literal' return in Altnickol's version (bars 30–31) are again identical to Kellner's version (bars 15–16),³⁶ then two bars of tonic pedal take us to the closing C-major chord.

Regarding form, the difference between the two pieces is not simply that in one a longer section is repeated in its entirety while in the other the musical process moves forward continuously without structural repeats. In the Altnickol version the corresponding two nine-and-a-half-bar sections (bars 5–14 and 20–29) were arranged by Bach in a symmetrical way (see Figure 1). The movement is introduced by a four-and-a-half-bar tonic section and is closed with a tonic section of the same length. At the centre of the piece lies a five-bar transition built on the descending bass, which is not included in the Kellner version. It is this transition that is flanked on two sides by the 'literally' repeated musical units.

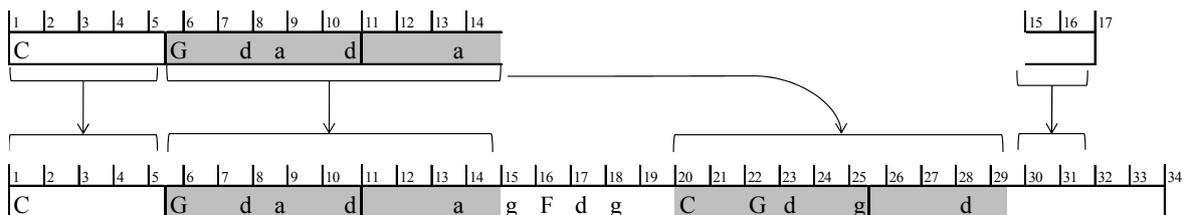


Figure 1: Connections between the musical material of BWV 870a/1 (above) and BWV 870/1 (below). Letters refer to keys, vertical lines refer to cadences.

³³ On the dominant role of descending bass lines in baroque preludes see Joel Lester, 'J. S. Bach Teaches Us How to Compose: Four Pattern Preludes of the Well-Tempered Clavier', *College Music Symposium*, 38 (1998), 33–46.

³⁴ Brokaw, 'The Genesis of the Prelude', 229.

³⁵ The two sections differ only in one small detail: on the third beat of bar 22 there should be a G-minor chord and not a G-major chord. However, this small harmonic colouring does not change the formal function of the repetition. I am grateful to Yo Tomita who drew my attention to the fact that Bach initially wrote the G-minor chord, but subsequently decided to remove the flats from the bs . See Yo Tomita, *J. S. Bach's 'Das Wohltemperierte Clavier II': A Critical Commentary. Vol. I: Autograph Manuscripts* (Leeds: Household World, 1993), 22 and *NBA KB V/6.2*, 36.

³⁶ Bars 30–31 in the Altnickol version differ only in the movements of the inner parts and in the more ornamented bass part from bars 15–16 in Kellner, while the higher part is the same note for note.

It is not by chance that when writing about the genre of the prelude, Mattheson used the word 'idea' (*Einfall*) rather than 'invention' (*Erfindung*). This is because in eighteenth-century compositional practice *inventio*, as Laurence Dreyfus so convincingly argues,³⁷ meant more than a mere musical theme: rather it was a complexity of musical ideas with inherent correspondences. Moreover, in the earlier Kellner version of the prelude, one cannot speak of *inventio* or even *dispositio*. A brainstorm of musical motifs flows about in a polyphony without any conceivable design, moving through various keys, and playing out its own path from C major to C major. This is the reason why Altnickol's version is so exciting, although in terms of musical ideas it is no different from Kellner's version. The difference lies in the well-considered disposition of the musical material, which points to the fact that sometimes in a compositional process the temporal order of musical ideas – that is, musical form – can also play an important part. In the case of the C-major prelude of Book II of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the part it plays is much more important than the role of *inventio*.³⁸

We have seen two different ways of formal thinking in two Bach preludes (or, more specifically, in two versions of the same prelude). Let us now turn our attention to a concerto movement where the two approaches can be detected in different sections of the same composition.

Different sections, different form concepts

One of the most important features of an early eighteenth-century Vivaldi-type concerto movement is that its form emerges from the alternation of harmonically stable and unstable sections. The stable tonal islands, called *ritornelli*, typically belong to the orchestral tutti; these islands are connected by the freely constructed monologues of the soloist. In the last chapter of their book on the Italian solo concerto repertoire of the period between 1700 and 1760, Simon McVeigh and Jehoash Hirshberg draw the following conclusion: 'The very idea that the *ritornelli* provide static pillars of the formal architecture around modulatory solos is problematic. [...] A *ritornello*-form movement should be a dynamic experience moving onward through time.'³⁹ The static design of the *da capo* form with its two sections, the first automatically repeated without structural alteration, is considered by McVeigh and Hirshberg entirely alien to the *ritornello* principle: in the 800 Italian concerto movements they examined, not a single one used *da capo* form.⁴⁰

³⁷ See the chapter 'What Is an Invention?' in Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, 1–32.

³⁸ BWV 870 is not the only piece that reveals the question of *dispositio* having played an important role in Bach's musical thinking during the reworking of existing music: compare, for example, the early and final versions of the C-major (BWV 846) or E-minor preludes (BWV 855) from the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. It is also worth mentioning that the pseudo-improvisatory style of Bach's early preludes and free fantasias is increasingly modified by structural constraints in later pieces of this kind: compare the monumental Leipzig organ preludes (B minor, BWV 544; E minor, BWV 548, etc.) with preludes composed in Weimar.

³⁹ Simon McVeigh and Jehoash Hirshberg, *The Italian Solo Concerto 1700–1760* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 301.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

J. S. Bach used the da capo form in several of his concertos,⁴¹ and his use of that very formal device of eighteenth-century operas and oratorios might be considered odd if we were unaware of his inclination to transgress the normal boundaries of style and genre. His predilection for using a 'vocal form' in an instrumental genre echoes his use of concerto ritornello form in some of his arias.⁴² Both point toward the important role *dispositio* played in Bach's compositional process. If we take a closer look at the opening movement of the E-major violin concerto (BWV 1042), written in da capo form, we can learn a great deal about Bach's distinctive formal thinking.⁴³

The opening ritornello is played by the orchestral tutti, and its syntax follows the tripartite design Wilhelm Fischer described at the beginning of the twentieth century with the German terms *Vordersatz*, *Fortspinnung* and *Epilog*:⁴⁴ an initial statement in bars 1–3, a 'spinning out' in bars 4–8, and an ending phrase in bars 9–11 (these three melodic-harmonic segments are the most important building blocks in the movement). It is hard to imagine a more conventional start for an early eighteenth-century concerto movement. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the formal construction of the whole movement is ample compensation for the lack of originality in the ritornello. As we have seen, the fact that it is written in the da capo form is remarkable in itself, but it is the difference between the structures of the two sections that makes the movement sound extremely complex. It is hardly surprising that several twentieth-century interpreters failed in their depiction of its formal construction.

First of all, it is worth setting apart the two sections of the da capo form. Since the B-section is more conventional in that it follows the ritornello principle, we should start by examining this first. A lengthy solo begins the B-section. The ritornello segments do not have any role in the solo, but nonetheless it has a very important function: the modulation to the sixth degree (C-sharp minor). After landing on the new tonality in bar 70, the first segment of the ritornello appears in the orchestra, but this is then interrupted by the solo that makes the music proceed through B minor to the *Vordersatz* and *Fortspinnung* of the ritornello in A major. From bar 81 a new kind of solo figuration takes on the musical argument further in the direction of F-sharp minor: after a few tutti bars the soloist, supported only by the continuo, starts to play double stops and seems to turn

⁴¹ See the last movement of Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 (BWV 1050) and No. 6 (BWV 1051), the first and third movement of the E-major harpsichord concerto (BWV 1053), the opening movement of Cantata 42 ('Am Abend aber desselbigen Sabbats'), originally written probably as an oboe concerto, or the concerto-like opening movements of five English Suites (A minor, G minor, F major, E minor and D minor).

⁴² The 'concerto-aria form', or 'recapitulation form', or 'modified da capo form' – the mixture of concerto-ritornello and da capo aria elements – seems to be Bach's own invention. See Miriam K. Whaples, 'Bach's Recapitulation Forms', *Journal of Musicology*, 14 (1996), 475–513, and Daniel E. Freeman, 'J. S. Bach's "Concerto" Arias: A Study in the Amalgamation of Eighteenth-Century Genres', *Studi musicali*, 27 (1998), 123–62.

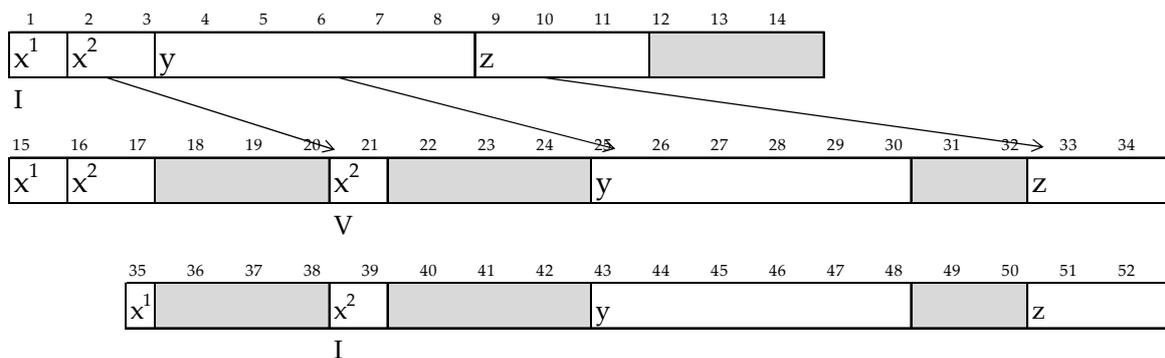
⁴³ Since the score of BWV 1042 is easily accessible, I dispensed with putting it as an example in this article.

⁴⁴ Wilhelm Fischer, 'Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Wiener klassischen Stils', *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft*, 3 (1915), 24–84.

back to the tonic (from bar 95). But when the musical material of the *Epilog* appears in the orchestra, suddenly the soloist pushes the music in the direction of G-sharp minor, and the B-section ends there on the third degree in bar 122.

Due to its conventional formal construction, its soloist-driven modulations, and the 'dynamic experience' of its music, the B-section is more closely aligned with the tradition of the Italian concerto of the era than the A-section with its seemingly ambiguous design. In the preface to the 1929 Peters' edition of the work Arnold Schering wrote about the 'somewhat disjointed construction' of the A-section.⁴⁵ Schering was not the only scholar for whom the design of the first section seemed to be somewhat mysterious. Writing on the form of the movement in their huge volume on Bach's orchestral music, Siegbert Rampe and Dominik Sackmann state that 'in only 174 measures the movement contains the unparalleled number of altogether 24 ritornelli and 20 episodes (da capo included)!'.⁴⁶

The exclamation mark at the end of this sentence—a rare phenomenon in German musicology—indicates the authors' apparent bewilderment about the unusual construction of the movement. Indeed, if we consider only the tutti-solo alternation, the logic of the movement seems unfathomably complex. But if the functions of the tutti-segments in between the solos are also taken into account, the structure of the first 52 bars of the movement immediately becomes clear. By looking at Figure 2, it becomes evident that the main event in the A-section is the threefold repetition of the ritornello material. At the beginning it is played by the orchestral tutti. After a few bars of solo it comes back from bar 15. In this instance the ritornello segments and the two elements of the *Vordersatz*, the *Fortspinnung* and the *Epilog* are interpolated with solo entries. After the closure in B major in bar 34 the whole musical material of bars 15–34 is repeated, that is, the ritornello with the solo commentaries, this time in the tonic.



x = Vordersatz, y = Fortspinnung, z = Epilog. White cells represent orchestral tutti, grey cells represent instrumental solos. Arrows show the connection between the opening ritornello and the ritornello-segments interpolated between solos.

Figure 2: The construction of the A-section of the opening movement of the E-major violin concerto (BWV 1042)

⁴⁵ 'Preface' in Arnold Schering (ed.), *Konzert für Violine und Streicherorchester, E-dur / Johann Sebastian Bach*, Eulenburgs kleine Partitur-Ausgabe, 712 (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1929), vi.

⁴⁶ 'Der Satz bei nur 174 Taktten die beispiellose Anzahl von insgesamt 24 Ritornellen und 20 Episoden (inklusive Da capo) enthält!' Siegbert Rampe and Dominik Sackmann, *Bachs Orchestermusik. Entstehung, Klangwelt, Interpretation* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2000), 212.

Such a close connection between episode and ritornello and so rational a design of the disposition of the musical material are features far removed from the unforced and spontaneous nature of the Italian-type concerto, or this ‘thrillingly unpredictable drama’, as Richard Jones put it.⁴⁷ The trademark of the Vivaldian concerto is not only spontaneity but improvisation in the broadest sense (from composition to performance). The relationship between and juxtaposition of ritornelli and episodes is malleable: musical form is not the result of pre-compositional thinking. Philology confirms this statement. As Paul Everett wrote about the op. 8 concerti by Vivaldi:

His manuscripts show that he (like many composers of his day) typically writes a movement from beginning to end, fluently and quickly, without the aid of sketches. When composing a solo episode, he usually devises new material in a process of more or less constant invention; the type and scope of the figurations themselves tend to dictate both the point when a modulation will occur and the key that might be reached. An episode can thus end up in a new key almost by chance, rather than be directed towards it from the outset. The kind of tonal scheme we are considering cannot therefore be regarded as a pre-formed mould in which ritornello form is cast.⁴⁸

As Everett intimates, Vivaldi was not alone among his contemporaries with his compositional method that produced pieces following the ‘more or less constant invention’, pieces in which new keys were reached ‘almost by chance’. Bach also used this model in several of his works, or at least in sections of his works, for example, in the middle section of the E-major violin concerto. However, in other compositions he represented another culture of musical form in which he used a preconceived musical design that—on a conceptual level—can be detached from the musical material. McVeigh and Hirschberg are undoubtedly correct when they say that the notion of ritornelli as ‘static pillars of the formal architecture’ is alien to the genre of the concerto. Nevertheless, we should not forget that alongside rhetoric the ruling metaphor in music theoretical texts of the first half of the eighteenth century is architecture. Mattheson’s famous description of *dispositio* as a plan for a building is just one example of this tradition.⁴⁹ Spatial analogies may seem constrained and alien to the nature of the musical material if used in connection with a Vivaldi concerto movement or the C-major prelude in Kellner’s version. But in musical structures shaped by such an engineering exactitude, as in the case of the first section of the E-major violin concerto or the C-major prelude of Book II of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, we can rightly talk about architectural forms. We must conclude that in some cases *dispositio* was as important for Bach as *inventio*, and the two types of formal thinking—whether they are thought of as ‘cultures of music’ or representations of different time concepts—may be found in Bach’s music.

⁴⁷ Richard D. P. Jones, *The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach, Volume I: 1695–1717. Music to Delight the Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 136.

⁴⁸ Paul Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons and other Concertos, op.8.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39.

⁴⁹ Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 235. Mattheson’s metaphor was further developed by Meinrad Spiess in his *Tractatus musicus compositorio-practicus* (Augsburg: Johann Jacob Lotter, 1745), 134–5. Another example can be found in Johann Gottfried Walther’s *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Leipzig: Wolfgang Deer, 1732), 455, where he compares the ‘Ouverture’ to a door of a building.