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The Beginning of the Middle: Initiation and Reinitiation in Bach's Binary-form Keyboard Works

Abstract

This article borrows from William Caplin's theory of formal functions, adapting these concepts to music from Bach's keyboard dance suites. It begins with a description of how Caplinian phrase functions such as "initiation" and "continuation" can be applied to this music. A novel "reinitiation" function is then proposed to identify a phrase function that Bach uses following non-final cadences. Reinitiation is similar to Caplin's initiating phrase functions, with the crucial difference that it occurs in an unstable harmonic context. This combination of harmonic instability with otherwise initiating features allows reinitiation to succinctly express both a local "beginning" and a higher-level "middle." Bach most often achieves the harmonic instability characteristic of reinitiation function by means of a technique this article calls "de-tonicization": the immediate tonal destabilization of a point of cadential arrival by reinterpreting it as a non-tonic harmony in another key. These ideas help illuminate how each moment of Bach's music "expresses [its] own location within musical time" (Caplin 2010).

Keywords

Johann Sebastian Bach, William Caplin, Form, Baroque Music, Keyboard Music

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The Beginning of the Middle: Initiation and Reinitiation in Bach's Binary-form Keyboard Works

Malcolm Sailor

Form in the music of the late Baroque is inexhaustibly flexible. True, most works of this era outwardly follow well-worn patterns such as binary-form dances, ritornello-based concerto movements, and tripartite arias. But upon inspection, these seemingly well-worn patterns show abundant variety, and upon closer inspection, yet more variety. In this respect, the music of J. S. Bach is surely no exception. Such variety makes it difficult to generalize, and this difficulty is likely at least part of the reason why, despite Bach's central place in the Western canon, his music has no tradition of formal analysis comparable to that which has flourished for Classical-era works since the time of A. B. Marx. Nevertheless, this article borrows from an analytic apparatus developed for such Classical works—William Caplin's theory of formal functions—and adapts these borrowings to Bach's binary-form keyboard music, concentrating on what Christopher Brody calls Bach's "hypermetrically irregular" dances: principally allemandes, courantes, and gigues.[1] We thereby gain a useful lens through which we can better understand Bach's supple and compelling formal procedures. In particular, formal functions help illuminate how each moment of Bach's music "expresses [its] own location within musical time," as Caplin describes the role of formal functions.[2]

Caplin's concepts can thus offer us a more secure grasp on the mechanisms empowering Bach's mastery of the ebb and flow of musical time. Specifically, this article introduces the following insights into this well-known music:

- Reinitiation. Following non-final cadences, a piece composed by Bach will often return to the opening's melodic-motivic material. The general pace of musical activity—harmonic, melodic, rhythmic—will likewise tend to return to that of the opening. In these respects, the music we hear after the cadence will be similar to

1 Christopher Brody, "Teaching Bach's Binary Forms," *Bach* 49/2 (2018), 282–83, https://doi.org/10.22513/bach.49.2.0281.

2 William E. Caplin, "What Are Formal Functions?" in Pieter Bergé (ed.), *Musical Forms, Form, & Formenlehre: Three Methodological Reflections* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qf01v.5), 23.

the outset of the piece. In another respect, however, the new music will be crucially different from the outset: it will typically occur in an *unstable*, rather than stable, harmonic context. By means of this juxtaposition of features, the passage succinctly expresses a "beginning of the middle"—or, in other words, both a local "beginning" and, at the same time, a higher-level "middle." Within the Caplinian framework adopted here, this "beginning of the middle" can be considered a new phrase function, which I term *reinitiation*.

- De-tonicization. The harmonic instability characteristic of reinitiation function is most often achieved by means of a technique I call *de-tonicization*: the immediate tonal destabilization of a point of cadential arrival by reinterpreting it as a non-tonic harmony in some other key. Although this device is ubiquitous in Bach's music, I have not found it remarked upon in the English-language music-theoretic literature.

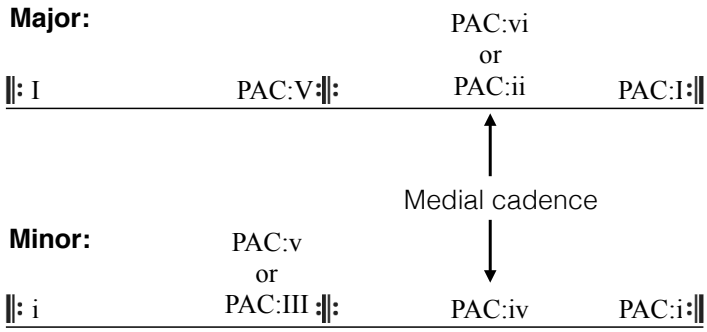
Together, reinitiation function and the associated procedure of de-tonicization contribute significantly to the compelling formal momentum with which Bach's music sweeps us along from beginning to end. In order to discuss these procedures in greater detail, however, I will first need to review the defining features of several *phrase functions* and discuss how they apply to Bach. This discussion is the task of Section 1. Section 2 then introduces the paired ideas of reinitiation function and de-tonicization. Finally, Section 3 provides some concluding remarks.

Before proceeding further, I will outline the typical formal plan of Bach's binary forms (Figure 1), to the extent that any such "typical" plan exists. By definition, a binary form has two reprises. As is well known, in major keys, the first reprise closes on V with a perfect authentic cadence in the dominant or, occasionally, a half cadence in the tonic. In minor, it may close with either a PAC in III, a PAC in v, or a half cadence in the tonic. In both major and minor keys, the second reprise obviously then closes with a PAC in the home key. But the two-part structure provided by the repeat signs often conceals a *three*-part tonal plan: in the preponderance of cases, what Christopher Brody has termed a *medial PAC* is found approximately midway through the second reprise.[3] This medial PAC is in

3 Christopher Brody, "The Interaction of Thematic Design and Tonal Structure in the Keyboard Suites of J. S. Bach" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2013). See also Christopher Brody, "Teaching Bach's Binary Forms," 281–310. Brody writes that "if gigues are excluded, whose second-reprise tonal structure frequently provides a less hospitable environment for non-tonic PACs than that of other movements, the prevalence of the non-tonic PAC [i.e., medial PAC] rises to well over 90%" of Bach's keyboard-suite binary forms (184). Gigues in the keyboard suites tend to be fugal in style, and the demands of fugue tend to impose different formal designs upon a movement. Gigues thus often represent formal exceptions, and so it is reasonable to expect them to defy generalizations that we might make about the other dance movements in suites.

a non-tonic key different from the key in which the first reprise closed: usually ii or vi in major, often iv in minor.[4] (Note that these possibilities mirror the typical "development keys" of Classical repertoire.)[5]

Figure 1: Plan of a Typical Bach Binary Form (The most typical keys for the medial PAC are shown; other keys are also possible.)



It is worth noting explicitly that the medial PAC does not necessarily precede a return of the opening thematic material, and as a rule does not precede a tonic-key recapitulation. For this reason, Bach's binary forms should not be confused with the rounded binary or (as Caplin calls it) small ternary form. Yes, both of these forms feature two repeated sections, with the second section divided into two harmonic units by a cadence. However, the tonic-key recapitulation that characterizes the small ternary is not typically found in Bach.[6] Moreover, the "contrasting middle" that begins the second reprise of the small ternary form generally begins with a standing on the dominant and ends on a tonic-key half cadence, neither of which are likely in Bach's music. Finally, the small ternary form

4 In minor, another possibility is for the medial PAC to be in the key that the first reprise could otherwise have cadenced in, but did not. If the first reprise cadences in the dominant, then this key is III (e.g., BWV 827 Allemande); if the first reprise cadences in III, then this key is the dominant (e.g., BWV 813 Sarabande, BWV 813 Air).

5 Binary forms are by no means the only movements by Bach that feature this three-cadence structure, which seems to be typical, though by no means obligatory, for brief instrumental movements. Among the two-part inventions, for example, those in C major, D minor, E minor, G minor, A minor, and B minor all exhibit this structure (as does the E-major invention, which is in binary form).

6 In the works under consideration in the present article, the only "double-return" tonic-key recapitulation featuring an exact repetition of the opening is found in the Sarabande from the D-major Partita, BWV 828, and it only occurs eight measures after the medial PAC, these eight measures constituting nearly one-third of the 26-measure second reprise. (If we allow modified repetitions, we could also include such passages as, in order of increasing degree of modification, BWV 830 Corrente m. 79, BWV 813 Sarabande m. 17, and BWV 813 Air m. 13. None of these examples coincide with a medial PAC.) A double return coordinated with a medial PAC *does* occur in the E-major two-part invention, BWV 777, which is therefore a rare Bach work that can be said to be in rounded binary form, although it still does not conform to the typical plan of the Classical small ternary, with its standing-on-the-dominant and medial half cadence.

certainly does not include a medial PAC in a development key, as is found in the large majority of Bach's binary forms.

I will make one more preliminary observation before we embark on the main journey of this article. The dynamics of Bach's forms differ importantly from those of late eighteenth-century works. In these later works, we frequently encounter rhetorically emphasized "new beginnings": think of the hush of the medial caesura and the appreciable "re-launch" of the subordinate theme that follows, or of the commotion that may accompany the onset of the recapitulation. In Bach, by contrast, only *endings* typically receive such emphasis. If we borrow the "metaphor of a journey towards a goal" that L. Poundie Burstein has discerned in the writings on form of later eighteenth-century musicians, we can vividly express this difference as follows.[7] In Classical-era forms, we might describe our musical journey as comprising many important arrivals at noted landmarks (i.e., the various sections and themes of sonata form). By comparison, Bach's binary forms, though not without landmarks (i.e., cadences), proceed more in the manner of a relay race: no sooner have we arrived at one destination than we are hurrying along to the next. This article is in part an attempt to account for how Bach achieves this relay-race character.

1. PHRASE FUNCTIONS

Caplin defines a formal function as "[t]he specific way a musical passage expresses a more general temporal quality, such as beginning, being-in-the-middle, [or] ending."[8] Phrase functions, in turn, are those formal functions that serve as "constituent functions of a theme,"[9] where a "theme" is understood to be a passage of music that begins with an initiating function, such as presentation, and ends with a cadence. Caplin defines a variety of theme types, including the sentence, the period, the small ternary, and various hybrids and compounds. Here, we will be principally concerned with themes that are broadly sentence-like in organization. In the repertoire under consideration, such sentential themes are especially characteristic of Bach's hypermetrically irregular dance movements—allemandes, courantes, and gigues. Within a sentence, three phrase functions—*presentation*, *continuation*, and *cadential*—respectively express the generic functions of "beginning," "middle," and "end." These are the phrase functions with which this paper will be principally concerned, with the exception of presentation, which we do not consider in favor of a more general "initiation" function described below.

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7 L. Poundie Burstein, "Expositional Journeys and Resting Points," *Composition as a Problem 7* (2016), 5–16.
8 William E. Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 707.
9 Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*, 710.

In comparison to phrase functions, I consider *thematic* functions to be less relevant to Bach's music.[10] Examples of thematic functions include *main themes* or *transitions.* (I do, however, devote some attention to a comparison of continuation and transition functions in Section 1.2 below.)

Some aspects of my argument were anticipated independently in an excellent article by Caleb Mutch, which also presents a form-functional approach to Bach's phrase functions.[11] Mutch's particular focus is on describing a novel "spinning-out" phrase function inspired by Wilhelm Fischer's famous concept of *Fortspinnung*.

1.1. Initiation function

In his work, Caplin defines three main "initiating" phrase functions: presentation (associated with the sentence theme type), antecedent (associated with the period theme type), and compound basic idea. Each of these can be found on occasion in Bach's music, but in general, I do not find application of such granular labels to his initiating passages to be productive. In the first place, the initiatory music is very often continuous in texture, in contrast to the sharply sectional organization characteristic of Classical initiating functions (for instance, the repeated basic idea of presentation function). Second, his initiating passages are so varied that it does not seem helpful to describe them in terms of a few prototypes such as presentation and antecedent, which then undergo a panoply of variations. Such "prototypes" would not be any more prototypical than their manifold supposed variations.

For these reasons, I prefer to speak of *initiation function* in Bach's music, by which I mean a very general type of beginning phrase function, with presentation, antecedent, and compound basic idea among its more specific subtypes. For readers familiar with Caplin's work, given that the model of thematic organization employed throughout this paper is basically sentential, it may be intuitive to think of initiation function as analogous to presentation function, but with two important provisos. First, the harmony does not need to be tonic-prolongational, but can also end on the dominant. And second, the passage need not be structured as a two-bar basic idea and its repetition, or in any other specific way.

Overall, initiation function is defined by the following three features. First, it features a clear statement of the melodic-motivic material upon which the movement will be based. Indeed, Bach's dance movements often consist largely or entirely of elaborations

10 In his earlier work, Caplin used the terms *intrathematic function* and *interthematic function* in place of *phrase function* and *thematic function*, respectively.

11 Caleb Mutch, "The Formal Function of *Fortspinnung*," *Theory and Practice* 43 (2018), 1–32.

or variations of the material introduced in the opening measures. In this case, all the important motives of the piece will be contained in the first initiation-function passage.

Second, in initiation function, musical events occur at a relatively slow pace, establishing a baseline from which subsequent fragmentation and acceleration can depart. By "musical events" here, I mean any aspect of the music that unfolds in time, such as grouping structure, harmonic rhythm, or surface rhythm. The pace is "relatively" slow in the sense that, whatever it happens to be, the following music will tend to accelerate from it. Establishing a relatively slow pace of events is not explicitly listed as a defining feature of any of the initiating functions described by Caplin, perhaps because of the different repertoire under investigation there. Nevertheless, it is arguably implicit in Caplin's ideas, since (as we shall see below) continuation function is characterized by various accelerations, and accelerations must logically depart from a relatively slower baseline.

Third, initiation function occurs in a "stable harmonic-tonal environment," to paraphrase Caplin's definition of presentation function.[12] This might mean establishing the home key by prolonging tonic harmony with subordinate chords.[13] In Bach's music, however, the opening measures sometimes also close on a dominant harmony. Insofar as this chord "defines the tonic chord in reference to its dominant," in Laurence Dreyfus's phrase, such a dominant close also fulfills the task of establishing a stable harmonic-tonal environment.[14] This dominant harmony may return to the tonic before progressing to other key regions, but it is not required to do so.[15]

Example 1, mm. 1–4 can serve to illustrate each of the three defining features of initiation function. First, it begins directly with the main motive of the piece, a sixteenth-note arpeggiation with a lower-neighbor on the fourth eighth note. Second, a moderate one-measure pace is established along multiple dimensions of musical activity, namely grouping (the repetition of the main motive on each downbeat), surface rhythm (the left-hand bass notes), and harmonic rhythm (each new measure brings a change of harmony).[16] And finally, a clear prolongation of tonic harmony establishes the B♭-major tonality.

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12 Ibid, 46.

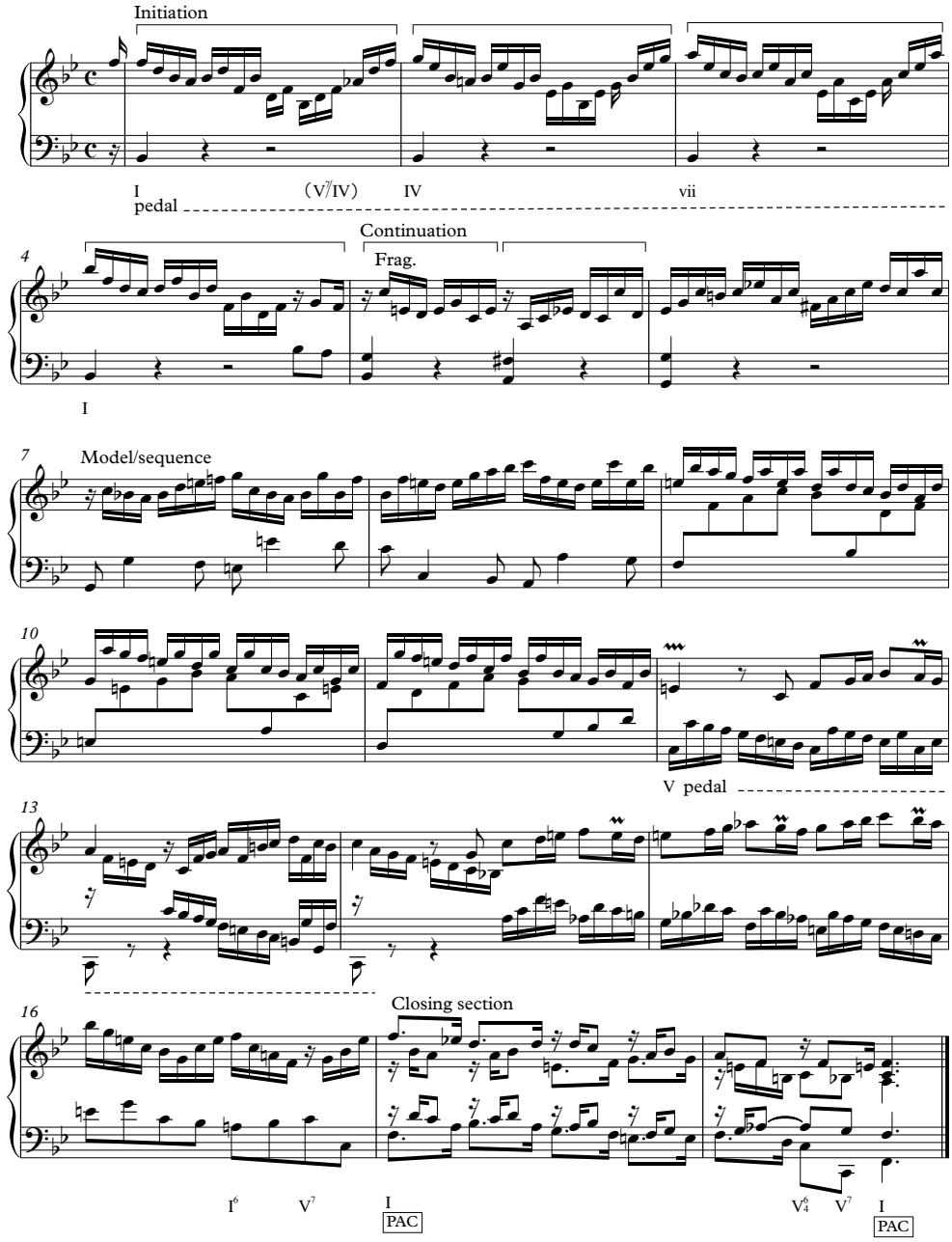
13 In this case, *initiation* in Bach's music corresponds to what Joel Lester has called a *frame* (not to be confused with Caplinian *framing functions*). Joel Lester, "Bach Teaches Us How to Compose: Four Pattern Preludes of the Well-Tempered Clavier," *College Music Symposium* 38 (1998), 34.

14 Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9ws5), 61. Arguably, Dreyfus should have written "defines the tonic *key*" rather than "defines the tonic *chord*."

15 An example that returns to the tonic before proceeding elsewhere is the BWV 813 Courante; an example that does not do so is the BWV 829 Allemande.

16 True, the A♭ at the end of m. 1 implies a change of harmony from I to V7 of IV. But it would be to miss the forest for the trees to let this enchanting harmonic detail distract us from the general sense of harmonic changes on the downbeats in the opening four measures, especially since V7 of IV, being a superset of the tonic harmony, does not "contradict" the initial triad by replacing any of its pitch-classes, but merely adds a seventh to them.

Example 1: Partita No. 1 in B♭ Major, BWV 825, Allemande, mm. 1–18.



An important aspect of Bach's use of initiation function in his dance suites is that he generally reserves it for the beginning of movements. As we will see below in the discussion of *reinitiation* function, other apparently initiating passages, such as those found at the outset of the second reprise, lack the stable harmonic context that characterizes initiation function. A noteworthy result is that initiation function in Bach expresses not only a local "beginning" but also a global "beginning of the beginning," whereas later passages may concisely express a "beginning of the middle." In other words, initiation function communicates not only "we are now at the beginning of a section" but also "we are now at the beginning of the section that begins the movement," whereas reinitiation function, as we will see later, conveys "we are now at the beginning of a section in the middle of the movement."

1.2. Continuation function

I define *continuation* function in Bach with reference to the same procedures that Caplin describes for Classical forms. These are phrase-structural fragmentation, accelerating harmonic change, increase in surface rhythmic activity, and sequential harmonic progressions and/or model-sequence technique.[17] Each of these processes is illustrated in the measures that follow the opening initiation-function passage of the B♭ Allemande, BWV 825 in Example 1:

- PHRASE-STRUCTURAL FRAGMENTATION: at the onset of continuation function in m. 5, the one-measure grouping rhythm established in the opening measures is immediately fragmented into half-measure segments.[18]
- ACCELERATING HARMONIC RHYTHM: in step with the grouping fragmentation described just above, the harmonic rhythm likewise accelerates at m. 5.
- INCREASE IN SURFACE RHYTHMIC ACTIVITY: the rhythmic texture of the piece is readily divided into two layers. The first layer consists of *moto perpetuo* sixteenth notes, which begin in the performer's right hand; the second, of more varied note-values, which begin in the left hand. These layers are later exchanged between the hands several times, for instance at m. 12 (where the sixteenth notes

17 Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*, 36.

18 In his discussion of "S-O" ("spinning-out") or *Fortspinnung* function, which as we will see below is broadly similar to continuation function, Caleb Mutch describes fragmentation as the "least relevant" of the characteristics defining continuation, but I must disagree. It is true that the preceding initiations sometimes establish no "hypermetrical norm," in the sense that they can present a continuous texture without obvious subgroupings. In such cases, however, the regular grouping structure that emerges in the continuation strikes me as a clear fragmentation of the previously unbroken structure. For example, in the Allemande from the E-major French Suite, BWV 817, which serves as Mutch's Example 1, the free-flowing, continuous melodic line of the first four measures is immediately fragmented into clear one-measure units in m. 5. Mutch, "The Formal Function of *Fortspinnung*," 11.

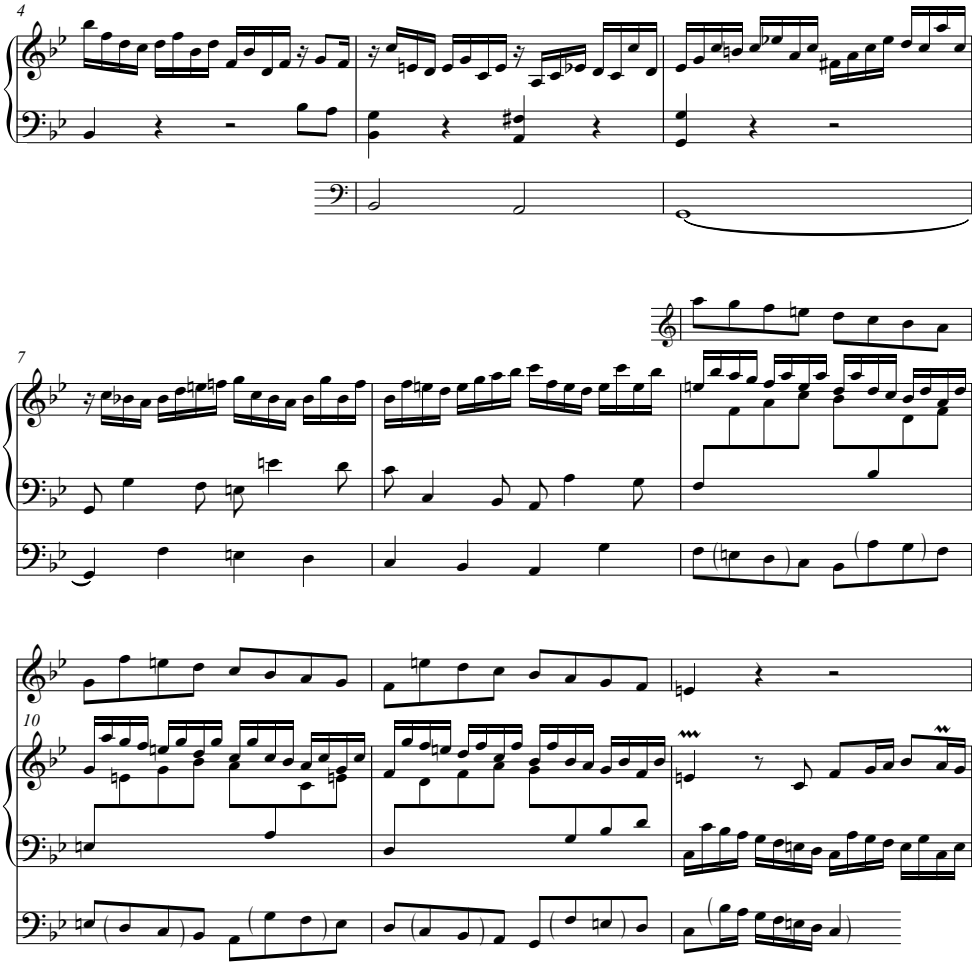
move into the left hand) and m. 16 (where they return to the right hand). Although the *moto perpetuo* layer is not itself amenable to rhythmic acceleration, Bach nevertheless achieves the effect of an acceleration by steadily decreasing the note values in the *other* layer throughout the reprise. The left hand first accelerates in m. 5, and then again in m. 7 and m. 9. In m. 12, when the *moto perpetuo* sixteenth notes pass into the left hand, the right hand further accelerates the accompanying rhythmic layer, introducing sixteenth notes where before there had been only eighth notes. This right-hand figure continues to accelerate, first through an accumulation of sixteenths in m. 13, and then by eliminating the rests found in mm. 12–13 to create the breathless phrase of mm. 14–15. This acceleration leads all the way to m. 16, where the sixteenths burst impetuously back into the right hand. As the final step in this acceleration, the brief closing section in mm. 17–18 presents constant sixteenth-note activity in both hands.

- SEQUENCE: model-sequence technique appears in mm. 7–8 and again in mm. 9–11.

Each of these four procedures can be seen as a specific manifestation of two more general processes, namely *accelerating pace of activity* and *harmonic instability*. On the journey through a Bach movement, both of these general processes help convey motion along the path toward our goal. Moreover, it can be advantageous, when analyzing Bach's music, to view continuation function at this more general level because it permits us to observe other subtle manifestations of the function. For instance, there is a harmonic acceleration built into the succession of sequences in mm. 7–11: whereas the root progression of the first sequence in mm. 7–8 falls a fifth every measure, that of the second, in mm. 9–11, falls a fifth every *half* measure, therefore carrying us twice as quickly around the circle of fifths as before. Another example of an underlying acceleration in this passage is the scale that can be traced throughout it, as I attempt to show in Example 2. This scale descends smoothly all the way from the onset of continuation function at m. 5 through to the dominant pedal at m. 12, and as it descends, it accelerates, first from mixed whole and half notes then to quarter notes (m. 7), and finally to eighth notes (m. 9). One could even claim, somewhat fancifully, that this accelerating descent continues into the sixteenth-note scale in the left hand in m. 12. It is by no means a new observation that the bass motions of Bach's harmonies often trace a descending scale; this has been discussed, for example, by Joel Lester, who in turn refers back to C. P. E. Bach's remarks on the use of descending scales to structure keyboard improvisation.[19] Nevertheless, the scalar descent in this Allemande seems to me exceptional in its systematic acceleration.

19 Joel Lester, "Bach Teaches Us How to Compose," 33–46.

Example 2: Partita No. 1 in B♭ Major, BWV 825, Allemande, mm. 4–12 (An accelerating scale underlying the passage is shown in added clefs above and below.)



At times, Bach's continuations culminate in a dominant pedal in the key of the upcoming cadence, as occurs in m. 12 of Example 1.[20] It may not be obvious whether it is better to group such a dominant pedal with the preceding continuation function, or instead with the ensuing cadential function. I favor the former choice because these pedals typically continue the characteristic processes of continuation function. First, as seen in Example 1, they often maintain the surface-rhythm acceleration of the preceding measures. Second, although dominant pedals involve a literally "stable" (insofar as unchanging) bass, they

20 Other examples include the BWV 825 Corrente and the BWV 830 Corrente (m. 28 and m. 47, respectively).

nevertheless imply a peak of harmonic instability, if instability is understood as "need for resolution." To invoke a metaphor Bach could not have recognized, dominant pedals resemble the game Jenga, in which a taller and taller structure is supported by a less and less stable foundation, as our anticipation for the inevitable collapse mounts higher and higher. Another reason for not assigning Bach's dominant pedals to cadential function is that they do not necessarily lead directly to cadences, as indeed the pedal in Example 1 does not. Often, in fact, they do not even lead to a root-position tonic, instead "backtracking" to an inverted tonic that leads, perhaps after considerable intervening material, to a cadential progression that stands out both motivically and texturally from the preceding dominant pedal.[21] And yet, from another perspective, dominant pedals can be seen as standing apart from the rest of the continuation because they signal an impending cadence; thus, returning to a less anachronistic metaphor, they constitute a point in our journey at which our next destination comes clearly into view.

The fact that long dominant pedals can be followed by a good deal of other material before finally proceeding to a cadence is emblematic of another notable trait of Bach's continuation-function passages: their large proportions, which can far exceed those of typical Classical-era continuations. If, in the journey metaphor of form, continuation function represents the path from one place to another, then in Bach's music we spend more time in transit than we do preparing to leave or enjoying our destination. Indeed, in its role as the function that takes up the greatest proportion of time, continuation might be considered the "main" or perhaps "most characteristic" phrase function of Bach's music. As an illustration, in the case of Example 1, the continuation-function passage lasts a full eleven measures, very nearly two-thirds of the eighteen-measure reprise.

There is also an important tonal difference between Bach's continuation-function passages and those of Classical composers. The paradigmatic Classical continuation, as it occurs in the sentence theme type, leads to a cadence or half-cadence in the same key as the preceding presentation phrase. Bach's continuations, in contrast, are tonally open, typically preparing a cadential arrival in a key other than that in which they began. In the terms of our journey metaphor, whereas the classical continuation is a brief expedition that remains within the boundaries of the territory where it began, Bach's continuations stride directly off toward new tonal regions.

The "spinning-out" or *Fortspinnung* function described by Caleb Mutch is similar in many respects to continuation function as I have described it here.[22] The biggest differ-

21 A remarkable example is the BWV 828 Allemande, mm. 32–40, where the cadence in vi is delayed until six measures after the dominant pedal, by which point the music has passed through an extended tonicization of ii and a lengthy Neapolitan chord.

22 Mutch, "The Formal Function of *Fortspinnung*."

ence is that spinning-out function is constrained to be strictly sequential. Because of this restriction, Mutch also defines a separate "cadential preparation" function that extends from wherever the sequential material ends until the onset of cadential function. Continuation function, as I am using the term here, is more general, subsuming the conjunction of Mutch's spinning-out and cadential-preparation functions, while also including continuational passages that do not begin with a sequence.

1.3. Cadential function

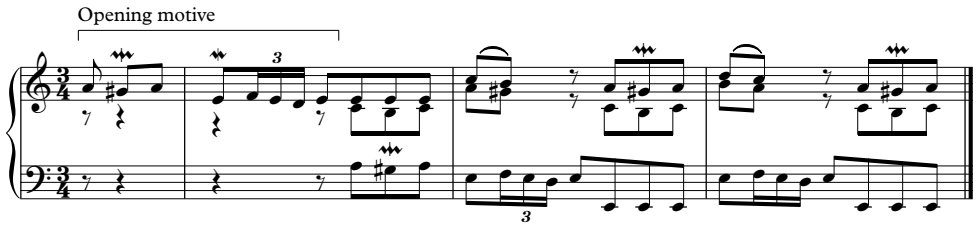
Caplin describes cadential function as "the idea or phrase [...] that communicates to the listener that 'the cadence' is forthcoming."[23] More specifically, for Caplin, cadential function liquidates the characteristic motivic material of a piece in favor of conventional formulae. In his forthcoming volume on cadence, Caplin comments that "even more so than with Classical practice, the Baroque perfect authentic cadence is a highly conventionalized, relatively compact harmonic-melodic formula."[24] Indeed, in some Baroque works, such as the sonatas of Corelli, cadences are sufficiently generic that they might readily be interchanged between different pieces of similar tempo and time signature. (I hasten to add that this observation is in no way intended to disparage these works. Insofar as cadences were occasions for improvised virtuoso display in performance, their fungibility probably served an important practical end.) But if it is indeed true that, as Caplin claims, late-Baroque cadences are typically generic, rather than characteristic of the particular work, I would argue that Bach's cadences—or, at least, those in the keyboard suites presently under consideration—represent an exception to the rule. At times, his cadences possess distinct motivic and harmonic features and are set in relief against the preceding music through sudden changes of texture and rhythm. In other cases, they are seamlessly integrated into the surrounding material. In this latter case, the extent to which they effect motivic liquidation is questionable. Indeed, sometimes Bach's cadences can even be heard as derived from the principal motives of a piece, as in the BWV 827 Sarabande, mm. 11–12 (compare Examples 3A and 3B) and mm. 27–28 or the BWV 813 Courante, mm. 23–24.

But regardless of whether Bach's cadences are texturally distinct or integrated, or motivically derived or liquidated, they most often seem designed to match the individual character of the piece in question, as opposed to being generic realizations of a cadential formula. (According to his contemporary critics, Bach's music was uncongenial to or-

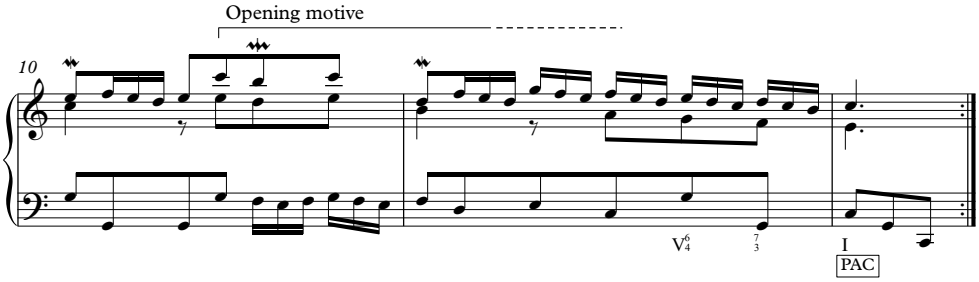
23 Ibid., 56–59.
24 William E. Caplin, *Cadence: A Study of Closure in Tonal Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

namentation.[25] One potential reason for this was that his cadences were not sufficiently generic and were thus less amenable to a performer's usual improvisational routines.) Such individuality seems especially typical of his reprise-ending cadences, as compared with his medial PACs,[26] and this is perhaps one way in which the reprise-ending cadences achieve greater rhetorical emphasis.[27] This emphasis is often amplified by means of "rhyming cadences," which are usually reserved for the end of the reprise.

Example 3A: Partita No. 3 in A Minor, BWV 827, Sarabande, mm. 1–3



Example 3B: Partita No. 3 in A Minor, BWV 827, Sarabande, mm. 10–12 (The cadence occurs as part of an elaboration/extension of the opening motive from Example 3A.)



25 See Johann Adophe Scheibe's 1737 remarks about Bach and the ensuing controversy in Hans T. David, Arthur Mendel, and Christoph Wolff, *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 337–53.

26 In the C-minor Allemande, BWV 826, for instance, compare the medial PAC in m. 22 to the final cadence in m. 32.

27 I invite readers to survey this specificity for themselves by taking the score of the Partitas from the shelf, choosing a dance type, and then comparing the final cadences of each example of this type. By contrast, cadences in the earlier English Suites appear somewhat more generic. The more differentiated cadences found in Bach's later suites may reflect his compositional maturity.

1.4. Framing functions

In addition to phrase functions such as presentation, continuation, and cadential, Caplin also describes phrase-level *framing functions*. For Caplin, framing functions are those functions that precede or follow a theme.[28] Phrase-level "before the beginning" functions, which Caplin calls "thematic introductions," generally play a minor role in Bach's music, and are completely absent from his binary-form keyboard music.[29] (Above, I argued that Bach's openings are *tonally* efficient; insofar as they make no use of "thematic introductions," they might also be said to be *thematically* efficient.) More important to Bach's style are "after the end" functions in the form of brief *closing sections*—that is, passages that follow upon and confirm a cadence (see, for instance, Example 4).[30] However, such passages themselves typically conclude with another cadence (as indeed they do in both of these examples). In such cases, I hear the first cadence as structurally stronger, but some listeners may disagree, giving priority to the second cadence. Those who do so might be inclined to argue in favor of hearing this sort of passage as an essential part of the preceding theme, rather than as a separate closing section.[31] A good candidate for such an interpretation would surely be Example 4, in which the first cadence at m. 24 is clearly rhetorically weaker than the second cadence at m. 28, which features a long dominant chord and trill. But I prefer to draw attention to the distinctive tonal structure of these passages, a structure that I feel still favors a "closing section" reading. This distinctiveness resides in the fact that these are the only passages in this repertoire in which a cadentially confirmed root-position tonic chord (as in m. 24) is followed shortly thereafter by a cadence in the same key. Indeed, they are more or less the only passages in which the music following a cadence does not immediately destabilize the cadenced-upon key. (Section 2 below, on de-tonicization, considers such destabilization in greater detail). This unique stability announces an impending formal close and helps lend these passages their characteristic "flavor" within Bach's forms, a flavor that is aptly described by the term "closing section." But in advocating for this terminology, I do not intend to imply anything about the relative rhetorical strength of the cadences. In particular, I do not mean to suggest that the cadence of a closing section should be somehow weaker than the cadence of the preceding theme. On the contrary, I believe the second cadence ordinarily receives *more*

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28 Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form,* 133–35.

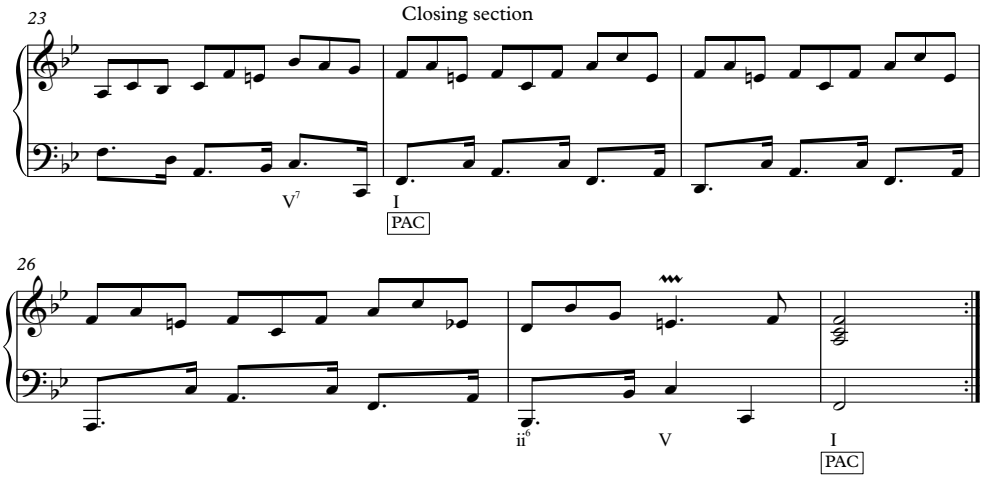
29 Examples of thematic introductions in Bach's keyboard music include the Italian Concerto, BWV 971/ii, or, arguably, from the *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1*, Prelude No. 8 in E♭ minor, BWV 853.

30 Note that, for Caplin, a "closing section" is altogether different from a "coda." The former is a phrase function like presentation or continuation; the latter is "on a hierarchical level comparable to that of an exposition, development, and recapitulation." Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*, 520.

31 This issue recalls the debates between Caplin and James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy about "essential exponential closure" in sonata forms.

emphasis, in marked contrast to the typically recessive dynamic of Classical-era closing sections. Thus, a journey-metaphor reading of Bach's closing sections could be "we've arrived, and now it's time for a brief and exuberant confirmation of our arrival before we set off again anew." For typical Classical closing sections, in contrast, the sentiment might be "we've arrived, and now it's time to bed down for the night."

Example 4: Partita No. 1 in B♭ Major, BWV 825, Courante, mm. 23–18



2. THE REINITIATION FUNCTION AND DE-TONICIZATION

I have already observed that, in Bach's forms, the points of formal emphasis are endings, or more concretely, cadences. But although every cadence is an ending at the local level, an entire piece can only end once; obviously, following any non-final cadence, the music must by definition continue. To do so persuasively, the music must accomplish two formal tasks. First, the characteristic melodic-motivic material of the movement must be reintroduced. Second, the composer must re-establish a relatively slower baseline pace of activity. This second task is necessary because, as we have seen, cadences typically mark the denouement of a cascade of accelerations in the preceding continuation function: the acceleration of grouping fragmentation, of surface rhythm, and of harmonic rhythm. Therefore, in order to permit the accelerations that will animate new continuation-function passages, we must return to the slower baseline.

These two tasks—introducing melodic-motivic content and re-establishing a relatively slow pace of activity—replicate only two of the three major tasks of initiation function that I outlined above. The third major task of initiation function, which is to provide

a stable harmonic-tonal environment, is more problematic for Bach's formal aesthetic. If Bach were to follow his cadences with the harmonic stability of "true" initiation function, this would create an undue formal emphasis upon the new beginning. Our journey would have stopped momentarily, which would be contrary to the relay-race dynamic of Bach's forms. In order to avoid such a standstill, therefore, Bach often re-establishes the melodic-motivic content and pace of activity in an *unstable*, rather than a stable, harmonic context. By an "unstable" harmonic context, I mean not only that Bach avoids a key-establishing progression here, but that by the first change of harmony, or perhaps even sooner, it will be clear that we are on the way to a new tonal region.

Thus, to maintain momentum after a cadence, Bach's music often features passages that behave much like initiation function, except for their unstable harmonies. We can hardly call such passages "initiations," because harmonic stability is definitional of initiation function. Destabilizing a previously established harmonic context is instead a primary goal of continuation function. Hence, the passages in question combine aspects of initiation (the re-establishment of melodic-motivic content and general pacing) with aspects of continuation (unstable harmony). This combination is highly characteristic of Bach's music, found following virtually all non-final cadences in his binary forms, such as those in Examples 5 and 6. By analogy to initiation function, I call it *reinitiation* function. Whereas the stability of initiation function is reserved for the beginning of each movement ("at the beginning of the beginning"), the intrinsic features of reinitiation succinctly express its position at two levels of the formal hierarchy at once. The return of the motives and pacing of initiation function tells us that we are at a local beginning; the unstable harmonies tell us we are in the global middle. We are, in short, at a beginning in the middle.[32]

Caplin has not described anything resembling reinitiation function, which is to be expected, since it occurs rarely, if at all, in Classical forms. He does describe "omission of initiating function," which he states is typically associated with "sequential harmonic progressions, usually in connection with model-sequence technique."[33] However, although sequence is one way in which Bach realizes reinitiation function (especially after medial PACs), it is by no means required or even typical (for example, neither Example 5 or Example 6 contains a sequence or even sequential harmonies). But a more important reason for distinguishing reinitiation function from the simple omission of initiating function is that reinitiation not only *omits* one feature of the initiating function, but also *maintains* the other two.

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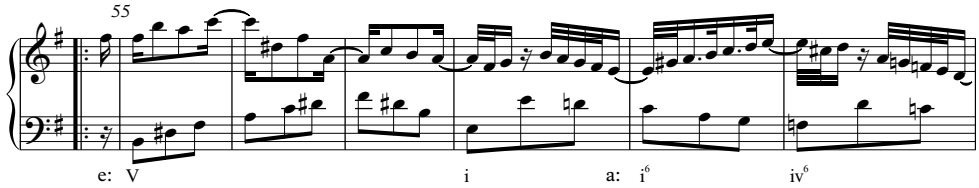
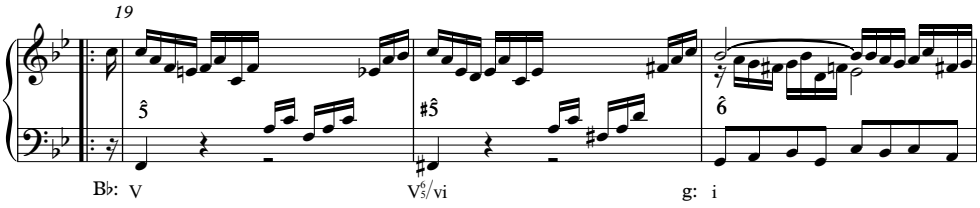
32 Mutch, "The Formal Function of *Fortspinnung*," 24, independently describes reinitiation function, or, as he calls it, "reinitiating" function, but only briefly, in connection with the beginning of the second reprise. He does not describe reinitiation's use elsewhere in Bach's works, in particular following medial PACs, nor does he describe the technique of de-tonicization (see below) typically used to effect reinitiation.

33 Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*, 391.

Example 5: Partita No. 6 in E Minor, BWV 830, Courante, mm. 55–59 (The second reprise begins with an active dominant harmony. This passage realizes Brody's "V–I" schema.)



Example 6: Partita No. 1 in B♭ Major, BWV 825, Allemande, mm. 19–20. (The second reprise begins with an active dominant harmony. This passage realizes Brody's "V–vi" schema.)



A prototypical example of reinitiation function is the *V–I schema* described by Christopher Brody (Example 5 gives an instance of this schema). As Brody explains, "classic textbooks on musical form" convey the "erroneous impression" that "after the first reprise modulates to the dominant, the second reprise then occupies itself with modulating back from dominant to tonic."[34] But in reality, the second reprise rarely begins in the key of the dominant. On the contrary, as in Example 5, it ordinarily begins with a dominant harmony in the main key—an "active" dominant, as Hepokoski and Darcy would say.[35] This dominant harmony needs resolution, and this need for resolution immediately initiates a chain of tonal motion that motivates the musical activity of the second reprise. In the case of Brody's V–I schema, this motion passes directly yet momentarily through the tonic, which is itself a merely a stepping stone on the path toward an eventual medial PAC

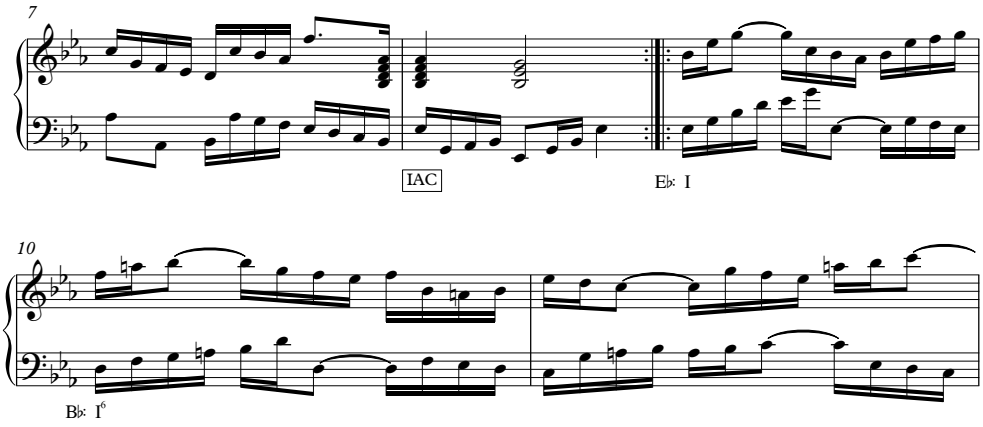
34 Christopher Brody, "The Second-Reprise V–I Schema in Bach's Binary Dances and a New Subject Category for Fugal Gigues," presented at the Society for Music Theory Annual Meeting, 2011. According to Brody, the V–I schema occurs in about 70% of "eligible" movements—eligible movements being binary-form movements in which the first reprise ends on the dominant, whether with a PAC or a half-cadence in the main key. As examples of such "classic textbooks," Brody mentions Wallace Berry, *Form in Music: An Examination of Traditional Techniques of Musical Form and Their Applications in Historical and Contemporary Styles*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), and Douglass M. Green, *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979).

35 James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195146400.001.0001), xxv.

in some other key. Another related possibility in major keys is what Brody calls the "V–vi schema" (Example 6).[36] In this case, V does not move to I, but instead proceeds directly to vi by means of its dominant, often by means of the voice-leading $\hat{5}$–$\#\hat{5}$–$\hat{6}$. Here too, "V" is not a local tonic, but rather a dominant harmony whose characteristic powers of propulsion have been re-activated. Indeed, since both the V–I and V–vi schemas begin with an active dominant harmony, we can view them as variants of another, more elementary procedure that we might call the "re-activated dominant" schema. In this schema, the second reprise does not begin with V-as-key, but with V-as-dominant-harmony: the V has undergone *de-tonicization*.[37]

By de-tonicization, I mean the procedure of taking a cadentially confirmed local tonic harmony and immediately reinterpreting it as a non-tonic harmony in some other key, which in the above case is V in the main key. De-tonicization is closely intertwined with reinitiation function because de-tonicization is the principal technique for achieving the harmonic instability that defines reinitiation. Both of Brody's schemas represent methods for achieving de-tonicization in movements in which the first reprise ends on the dominant, but de-tonicization can also take place after the first reprise of a minor-key movement that has ended in III, as in Example 7. Here, the III chord that begins the second reprise is de-tonicized through an immediate reinterpretation as the pivot chord in a modulation to VII.

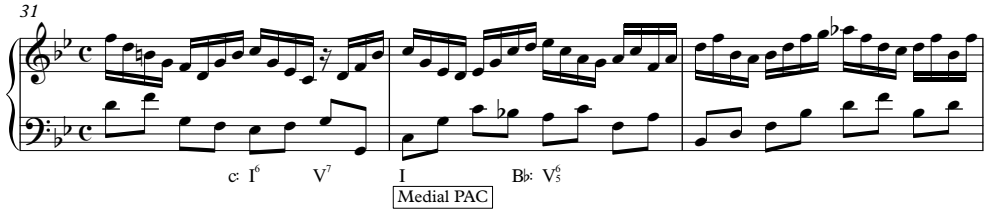
Example 7: Partita No. 2 in C Minor, BWV 826, Sarabande, mm. 7–12 (At the outset of the second reprise, E♭ major is "de-tonicized": at the first change of harmony, in m. 10, it is reinterpreted as IV in B♭ major.)



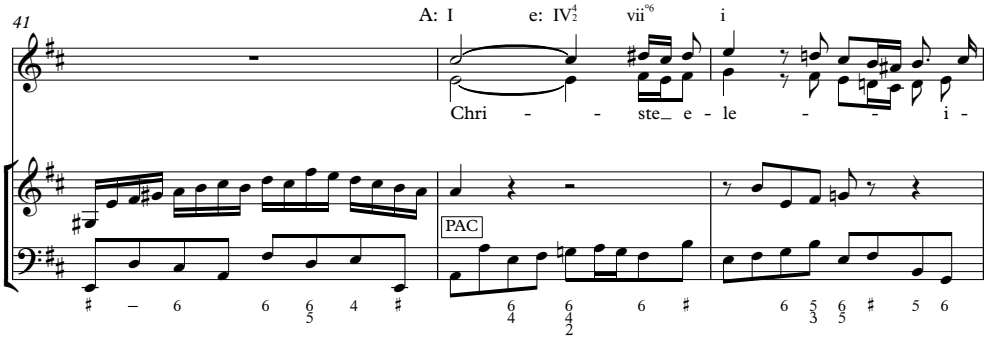
36 Brody, "Thematic Design and Tonal Structure in the Keyboard Suites of J. S. Bach," 155.

37 There is, however, a wrinkle here: the V–I or V–vi schemas can also be used in the (less common) case in which the first reprise has ended with a half cadence. In such cases, the V does not need to be de-tonicized, nor can it be, because it never was tonicized.

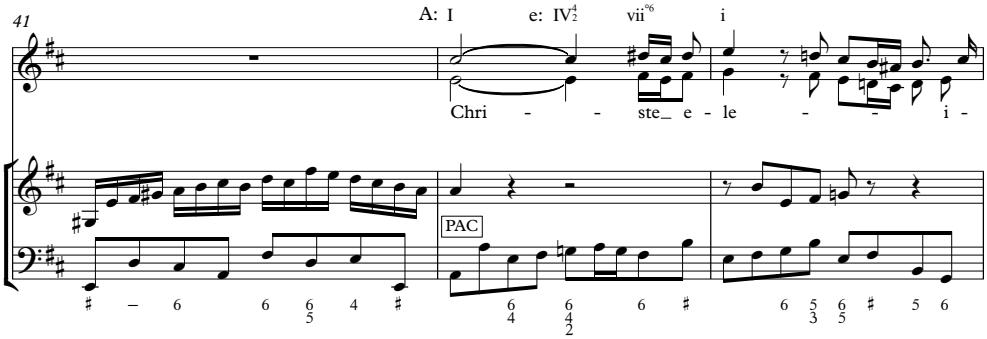
Example 8: Partita No. 1 in B♭ Major, BWV 825, Allemande, mm. 31–33 (De-tonicization following a medial PAC.)



Example 9A: Mass in B Minor, BWV 232, Christe Eleison, mm. 32–34 (After the vocal cadence in m. 33, the ritornello opens with a prolongation of A major.)



Example 9B: Mass in B Minor, BWV 232, Christe Eleison, mm. 41–43 (At the conclusion of the ritornello in m. 42, the cadenced upon A-major harmony is "de-tonicized" *en route* to E minor.)

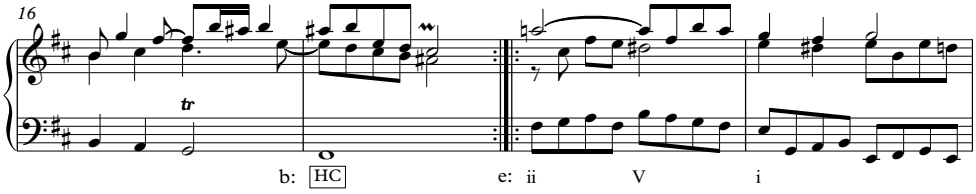


Although the examples I have given thus far have all been drawn from the opening of the second reprise, de-tonicization is not confined to this particular point in the form. In fact, it is, if anything, even more common after second-reprise medial PACs. The great majority of Bach's binary forms can furnish an example. To list only those occurring in the first Partita, BWV 825: Allemande mm. 32 (see Example 8), Courante mm. 46, Sarabande mm. 21, Menuet 1 mm. 24, Menuet 2 mm. 12, and Giga mm. 28. Furthermore, the use of de-tonicization is not at all confined to Bach's binary forms. It is found throughout his oeuvre—ubiquitous, for instance, in vocal and concerto movements that employ ritornelli. (It is as an avid listener to Bach's sacred vocal music that I first noticed his use of de-tonicization.) The typical sequence of events is illustrated in Examples 9A and 9B. In this representative case, after the first vocal section cadences in A major (m. 33 of Example 9A), the ritornello then re-confirms this key with another cadence (m. 42 of Example 9B). But with the re-entry of the voices following this second cadence, the cadenced-upon A-major harmony is immediately de-tonicized. That is to say, it becomes the pivot chord in a modulation to the new tonal region of E minor. Further examples of de-tonicization in ritornello movements are not difficult to find—for example, the cadence of the subsequent ritornello in the same movement (m. 58) already provides another.

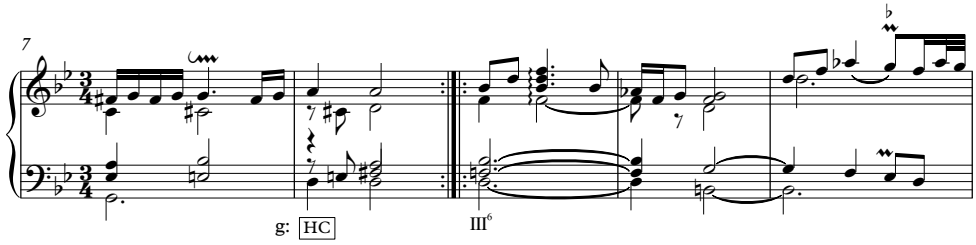
A technique that is related to de-tonicization, though not nearly so ubiquitous, is what we might call *de-dominantization*. This occurs when, following a half-cadence, the dominant chord is immediately altered so as to lose its dominant quality. The natural place to employ this technique is when the first reprise ends with a half cadence in the main key, as occurs in the *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1*, Prelude in B minor, BWV 869, m. 18 (Example 10).[38] The de-dominantization in this example is effected by simply lowering the third of the dominant chord. A more complex example is the BWV 808 Sarabande, m. 9 (Example 11). Here, the third is again lowered, but the fifth is replaced by the minor sixth as well, resulting in a succession of major-third-related major triads (D major and B♭ major 6/3) with a common bass note D. The flexibility of Bach's technique is further illustrated by the BWV 811 Gavotte I (Example 12), where the dominant chord is "de-dominantized" by being transformed into a local minor tonic that is briefly prolonged before moving to other key areas. Thus, in this last example, we have a rare case where the second reprise actually begins *in* the dominant key—and yet, this key was *not* established by the preceding music, which instead ended with a half cadence in the tonic key.

38 I am indebted to Jon Wild for this observation. Another similar instance is the BWV 814 Menuet 2, m. 9.

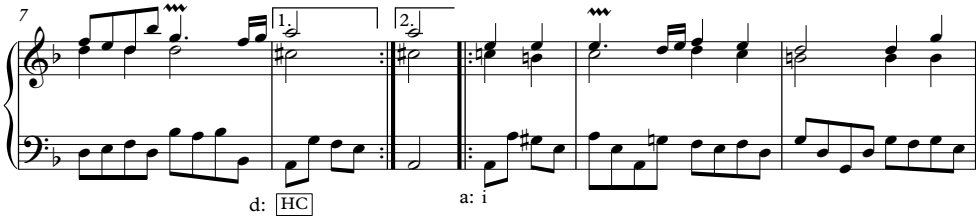
Example 10: *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1,* Prelude No. 24 in B Minor, BWV 869, mm. 16–19 (Following the half cadence that closes the first reprise, at the outset of the second reprise, F♯ is "de-dominantized" *en route* to E minor.)



Example 11: English Suite No. 3 in G Minor, BWV 808, Sarabande, mm. 7–12 (Following the half cadence that closes the first reprise, at the outset of the second reprise, D is "de-dominantized" by becoming the bass of a B♭-major 6/3 chord.)



Example 12: English Suite No. 6 in D Minor, BWV 811, Gavotte I, mm. 6–11 (Following the half cadence that closes the first reprise, A is "de-dominantized" and A minor is briefly tonicized.)



3. CONCLUSION

Listening to Bach's music, I feel an inexorable sense of momentum, a steady drive from beginning to end. Such forward propulsion is surely a large part of what makes Bach's contrapuntal wizardry so mesmerizing. But how did he achieve it? What makes Bach's forms not just "one damned thing after another," but "one thing, which sweeps us along to the next thing, which carries us along still faster to the next"?

This article has applied a form-functional analysis of Bach's binary-form keyboard works to address this question. I have argued that a central technique Bach uses to maintain formal momentum is what I have called the *reinitiation* phrase function. In his binary forms, Bach typically uses this phrase function after each cadence (excluding, of course, the cadence that ends the movement).[39] At such moments, reinitiation re-establishes the piece's baseline pace of activity as well as its characteristic melodic-motivic material, but crucially, it does so in an *unstable* harmonic context. In sum, reinitiation function resembles initiation function in all musical elements—texture, motives, rhythm—except for one: the decisive element of harmony.

I have given the name *de-tonicization* to Bach's usual technique for harmonically destabilizing his reinitiations. This involves the immediate destabilization of a point of cadential arrival such that by the first change of harmony after the cadence, or perhaps even before it, we are audibly on our way to another tonal region. Such de-tonicization is approximately inverse to the process we call "tonicization": rather than bestowing tonic function upon a new harmony, the composer instead takes tonic function away. My hope is therefore that the term "de-tonicization" can be intuitive to music theorists, and that putting a label upon it will facilitate an appreciation of its vital role in Bach's forms. Finally, although in this article I have restricted my scope of study to a small subset of Bach's music, namely his binary-form keyboard suites and, in particular, their hypermetrically regular dances, I believe that my observations are relevant to his works more broadly. Moreover, I believe that reinitiation and de-tonicization can be found in the music of Bach's contemporaries as well, and a survey of their role in a wider body of late Baroque music may well bear further insights.

39 In other forms, the use of reinitiation may be a little more circumscribed. In ritornello forms, for example, it is typically used after the cadences that end ritornelli, but not after the cadences that immediately precede them.

Abstract

This article borrows from William Caplin's theory of formal functions, adapting these concepts to music from Bach's keyboard dance suites. It begins with a description of how Caplinian phrase functions such as "initiation" and "continuation" can be applied to this music. A novel "reinitiation" function is then proposed to identify a phrase function that Bach uses following non-final cadences. Reinitiation is similar to Caplin's initiating phrase functions, with the crucial difference that it occurs in an unstable harmonic context. This combination of harmonic instability with otherwise initiating features allows reinitiation to succinctly express both a local "beginning" and a higher-level "middle." Bach most often achieves the harmonic instability characteristic of reinitiation function by means of a technique this article calls "de-tonicization": the immediate tonal destabilization of a point of cadential arrival by reinterpreting it as a non-tonic harmony in another key. These ideas help illuminate how each moment of Bach's music "expresses [its] own location within musical time" (Caplin 2010).

About the Author

Malcolm Sailor is a Ph.D. candidate in music theory at Yale University. He has given papers on algorithmic analysis of Renaissance dissonance treatment, the modal harmonies of Gabriel Fauré, and the music of Benedetto Marcello. His dissertation research involves the application of deep learning to harmonic analysis. Sailor is also an active composer and jazz pianist.

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