

Typologies of Latent Polyphony illustrated in the Bachian Monody

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Abstract: Works for solo instruments belonging to the representatives of the Baroque - music era which requires, *par excellence*, a solo melodic style - announces writing for two and more voices, through specific techniques. In the creation of an outstanding representative of the Baroque - J. S. Bach - new musical syntaxes contribute to the elucidation and clarifying harmonic content, while also enhancing the complexity of the melodic writing by borrowing methods from the arsenal of actual polyphony. Unlike the latent harmony included in the melodic, which should not be mistaken for it, latent polyphony acquires specific aspects of expression, systematized in typologies that are related to contrapuntal and imitative relationships and certain planes targeting a complex melodic flow.

Key-words: JS Bach, monody, latent harmony, latent polyphony

1. Introduction

The term of *latent polyphony*, known in relation to actual polyphony, makes reference to a hidden, un-manifested characteristic of this procedure. Commentators such as Ernst Kurth, called it *apparent polyphony* ("Scheinpolyphonie").

A number of definitions belong to it, highlighting one or another of the facets of the phenomenon, compared with the traditional syntactic categories (Niculescu 1980):

- Writing technique belonging to monody, which gives spaciousness;
- The resulting capacity of a voice division into two or more melodic planes;
- Melodic multileveling derived from latent harmony and resulting from the motif integration of its elements.

Reconsidering the Bachian monody in the light of its possible multileveling, composer Dan Voiculescu launches the following observation: "The latent polyphony in the melodic discourse links two or more linear [...], melodic planes that our hearing distinguishes in different ways" (Voiculescu, 1975, 61) [in

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Romanian, in the original]. In the same registry of bloated monodic syntax, Max Eisikovits notes that "Bach's musical thinking [...] was so highly imbued with the polyphonic spirit par excellence, that this character feels, penetrates even the monodic creation"[in Romanian, in the original] (Eisikovits 1973, 66).

2. Features

The reduced polyphonic potential of the monodic instrument took Bach to a different approach, within which the harmonic integrity is stylized, and the conduct of the voices is suggested by means of latent polyphony.

For example, the twelve solo works by Bach (six sonatas / partitas for solo violin and solo cello) lack the harmonic support of the bass. The virtual party of *continuo*, as well as the harmonic complement, is included in the line of the solo instrument, thus eliminating the need for accompaniment. In using the latent polyphony procedure, Bach suggests the conduct of two or even more voices. "Among the important attributes of Composition melody is its ability to suggest two or more voices moving in counterpoint each other; such melody is no longer confined to the horizontal dimension but contains important vertical implications"(Salzer and Schachter 1989, 153).

Latent polyphony occurs both in the works for melodic instruments, and in the polyphonic ones proper, increasing the number of latent voices. Regardless of the number of real voices, the thickening tint is highlighted by:

- Increasing the density, and depth of the monodic musical discourse;
- Intrication of the melodic structure in ways belonging to polyphony;
- Concentrating actual polyphony in the melodic;
- Mimicking traditional movements of superposed voices: direct, parallel, contrary, oblique;
- Creating a writing dialogue (antiphon) by entering alleged new voices;
- Elucidating the harmonic content.

Achievement of a latent polyphonic texture is based on two conditions (Figure 1):

- Severance of the melodic line through interval jumps;
- Double interval jump inauguration with harmonic and melodic virtues.



Fig. 1. *Latent polyphony with two voices (ribattuta)*

In this respect, latent polyphony must not be taken for either melodic latency, resulted from the reductions of monody (Schenker, 1987) by means of that “x-ray photography” with which “it separates the figurativeness that apparels it (a process also known as *colouring - decolouring*)” (Voiculescu 2000, 35) [in Romanian, in the original]. Melodic latencies hide intonations of the *makam* type, like the bounced back tetrachord, and the major hexachord terminated on a third (see Figure 2) or diminished seventh (*Saltus duriusculus*) circumscribed (Toduță 1973, 94).



Fig. 2. *Hexachordal pillars* (The Well-Tempered Clavier – Fugue II/10, Theme)

On a harmonic plane, through successive crossing (zigzag) of the voices incorporated, several open planes are created by leap, and on a melodic plane, there occurs an individualization of distinct levels, as a result of horizontal continuity. Considering the apparent zigzag appearance, given by the vertically-harmonic coordinate, the real perception is reached, of linear aspect, given by the horizontally-melodic coordinate (see Fig. 3).

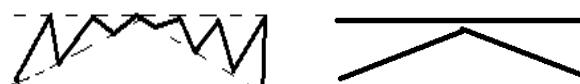


Fig. 3. *Apparent aspect versus real perception* (Voiculescu 1975, 61)

Latent polyphony embryonic elements are found in the latent harmonic structure. In terms of harmonic figuration, voices find their correspondence and continuity between them. In Figure 4, the following texture is shown: voice 1 - quasi-melodized profile; voice 2 - harmonic completeness function; voice 3 - harmonic foundation.



Fig. 4. *Latent harmony* (Sonata I – Fugue, m. 69)

3. Stages of intrication

An analysis applied to the study of the six *Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin* by Bach refers to the intrication of the movement by passing from the primary stage, of harmonic spelling, to the final stage of actual polyphony, with the voices movement and their motif integration.

Gliding from latent harmony to latent polyphony follows stages of intrication. These steps consist in configuring the motion relations of the voices that range from confronting figures created equal (Figure 5), to confronting unequally constituted figures (Figure 6).



Fig. 5. *Confrontation of equal constituted figures* (Sonata I – Fugue, m. 9)



Fig. 6. *Confrontation of unequal constituted figures* (Sonata I – Fugue, m. 8)

A particular variant of confronting unequally constituted figures is that of the melodic-harmonic contrast emerged from the chordic concatenations of latent polyphonic planes (Figure 7).

Fig. 7. *Accord concatenations* (Sonata II – Grave, m. 12)

In order to stabilize and recognize latent planes in the construction of a complex monody, it is often customary to use typical processes, such as melodic and rhythmic sequences (Figure 8). In one of the renowned Baroque polyphony treaties, it is stated: „A typical phenomenon of the late Baroque is *compound melody*. Here the line is broken up into fragments, which suggest two (or more) individual melodic strands. This technique of *melodic unfolding* is best illustrated with sequences, where the implied two-voice patterns are restarted several times” (Gauldin 1995, 28).

Fig. 8. *Latent polyphony with sequences* (Partita II – Ciaccona, m. 224)

The number of planes suggested by the stereo monody (Figures 9, 10) is also an attribute of the complexity of writing. To this, one can add the character of the concurrent songs: „a compound melody consists of two (or more) concurrent linear motions, each of which functions according to the essential nature of line” (Thakar 1990, 143).

Fig. 9. *Latent polyphony with two contrapuntal voices* (Partita III – Preludiu, m. 93)



Fig. 10. *Latent polyphony with three contrapuntal voices* (Sonata I – Fugue, m. 10)

4. Latent polyphonic types

Latent polyphony typologies encountered in the Bachian monody relate to the following criteria:

- Ratio of competing voices;
- Types of movements of voices;
- Polyphonic techniques taken from the arsenal of actual polyphony.

4.1. The (motivic) rapport of voices

Two situations are highlighted: Opposition / contrast and motif derivation. As noted by Dan Voiculescu, "contrast between the planes is the first element to sustain attention; it can be register related, rhythmic, melodic, or dynamic. Between these coordinates the most different joints are achieved "[in Romanian, in the original] (Voiculescu, 1975, 61).

The register contrast appears as a prerequisite (see previous musical examples). The contrast is also remarkable at the level of melodic, rhythmic parameters, or in combinations thereof. The melodic contrast may interest the direction of melodic slopes, in the case of contrary motion (Figure 11).



Fig. 11. *Ascending-descending contrast* (Sonata I – Presto, m. 36)

The rhythmically-melodic contrast aims at the opposition *static-dynamic* – between a moved plane and another one with a pedal configuration – (Figure 12), or the opposition *diatonic - chromatic* (Figure 13), as illustrated by the ratio of the diatonic and chromatic countersubject (in figure *passus duriusculus* in the fugue of Sonata III).



Fig. 12. *Static-dynamic contrast* (Partita III – Courante, m. 17)



Fig. 13. *Diatonic-chromatic contrast* (Sonata III – Fugue, m. 171)

The motif derivation is the consequence of applying variation across different morphological units. In Figure 14, the background is a fragmented reversal of the first plane.

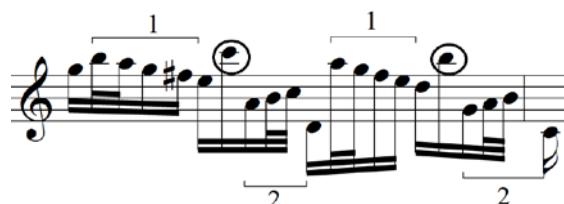


Fig. 14. *Motivic variation* (Sonata II – Allegro, m. 14)

4.2. Types of movements

To understand the phenomenon, it is mandatory to review the relationship of the movement between concurrent voices, which outlines a specific contour of the melodic flow. Transposing the ratios of subsequence, latent polyphony mimics basic types of simultaneous plurivocal developments:

- Direct / parallel movement (see figures 16 and 17)
- Contrary movement (see Figure 11)
- Oblique movement (see Figure 15)



Fig. 15. *Latent polyphony with figurative pedal* (Sonata I – Presto, m. 25)

4.3. Polyphonic techniques illustrated

Aspects that are revealed by latent Bach polyphony, with special reference to *Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin*, circumscribe a diverse typological area that might relate to the actual polyphonic writing techniques. The same Dan Voiculescu states: "latent polyphony variants imposed by the Bachian literature [...] aim the entire range of polyphonic methods from simple to complex, characterizing the actual polyphonic writing" [in Romanian, in the original] (Voiculescu, 1975, 62). The author alludes to the three entrenched polyphonic processes:

- Counterpointing;
- Imitation;
- Double counterpoint.

Counterpointing is a case of heterogeneous polyphony that covers the contrasting joints of voices, up to the higher phase of opposition between theme and countersubject of a fugue (see figure 13).

Rigorous imitation often develops sequentially, on the harmonic pattern of downward dominance relationships (Figure 16).

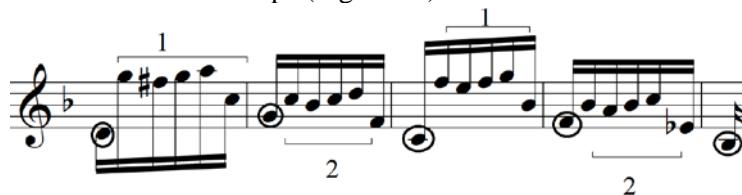


Fig. 16. *Latent polyphony with sequential imitation* (Sonata I – Presto, m. 12)

Suggestions of a *stretto* imitation appear in Figure 17, in which the first response sounds are missing, but they can be easily inferred.

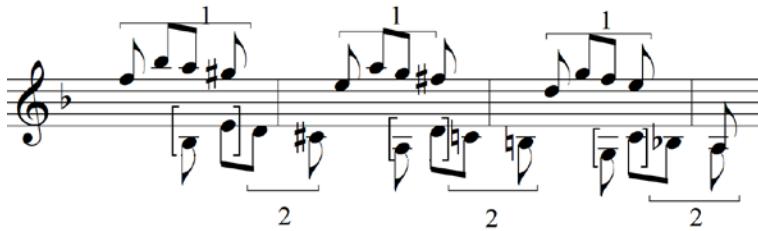


Fig. 17. *Latent polyphony with imitation in stretto* (Ciaccona, m. 32)

In a move higher, in decrypting the extremely complex texture, analysis through evolution and motivic variation is useful, as it is revealed in the following passage that reproduces both direct imitation and imitation in inversion (Figure 18).

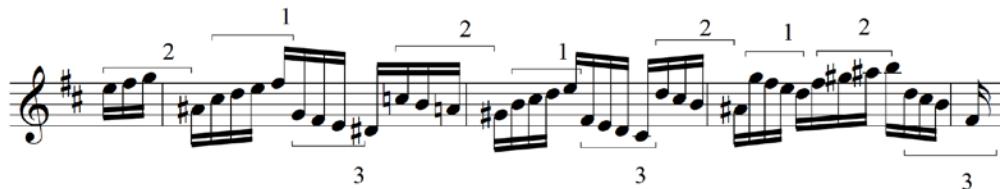


Fig. 18. *Latent polyphony with imitation in inversion* (Partita I – Double, m. 7)

Previous examples revealed the third process, the double counterpoint. From the particular case where two voices depicting the same number of intersecting planes (Fig. 12), the way to monody intrication led to borrowings in the arsenal of the fugue: reversals applied to the theme and the countersubject, as well as the mediated upheaval in time of the two components (Figure 19).

Fig. 19. *Latent polyphony with double counterpoint*
(Sonata III – Fugue, m. 171-175 and 255-259)

5. Conclusions

A genuine kaleidoscope of latent polyphonic hypostases, *the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin* by JS Bach (Carl Flesch, ed.) involve polyphonic writing within the monody, realizing a perfect fusion between its techniques and those of actual polyphony. In essence, "it is about the polyphony performed by monodic means" [in Romanian, in the original] (Voiculescu 1975, 69). Thus, the latent polyphony finds a special, well-defined place, under the main categories of musical syntax.

6. References

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