

Non-Musical Performances of Bach's Music as Acts of Critical Analysis

Brent Auerbach

Non-musical representations of musical performance – for example, illustrations of music making in painting and sculpture – are nearly as old as recorded history. This talk concerns itself with a distinctly more modern development, the non-musical (i.e., non-sonic) *performance* of music. This substitute mode of musicking has always been available, but in the past was constrained to occur in written and spoken word media such as literature, poetry, and rhetoric. Its purview and influence began growing vastly in the early twentieth century, however, as modern artists – notably those associated with the Bauhaus movement – explored commonalities of concepts such as space and line across multiple arts (Probst 2016). The teaching materials developed by Klee and Kandinsky for this purpose include spatial transcriptions of pieces by Bach and Beethoven. These visual graphics, which closely approximate score notation with occasional expressive flourishes, were intended to model the listening experience.

This paper will first situate these early non-musical performances of Bach's music as well as later ones they no doubt inspired. In this category are included the animated segments from the Disney *Fantasia* films (1940, 2000), a sculpture at Leverkusen depicting stretto polyphony in a fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (Neugeboren, 1970), and the interpretive accounts of Bach offered in Douglas Hofstadter's cognitive-philosophic-aesthetic treatise, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979). Discussion will then focus on interrogating each performance with respect to its selectivity and motivations; is the goal commemoration, interpretation, hagiography, edification, or something else? The insights afforded through this process will enrich our understanding of how a performance of a work, in any medium, constitutes an act of critical analysis.

Bio:

Brent Auerbach is Associate Professor of Music Theory at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His research focuses primarily on extending the concept of the musical motive as it pertains to analysis. Other research interests include the group-mathematic properties of harmonic sequences, pedagogy, and investigation of degrees of material repetition (through “block composition”) across diverse musical genres.

Dr. Auerbach has had articles published in *The Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Theory Online*, *Theory and Practice*, *Intégral*, and in *Pop-Culture Pedagogy in the Music Classroom* (2011). He has presented papers at annual meetings of the Society for Music Theory, the New England Conference of Music Theorists, the Music Theory Society of New York State, the West Coast Conference of Music Theorists, and the Texas Society for Music Theory.