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**“Non-rhetorical” musical-rhetorical figures  
in the treatises of the Baroque era\***

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**Abstract.** The article explores a seemingly non-obvious yet significant component of musical-rhetorical figures, a phenomenon widely discussed in musicology. This component is defined by the compositional and technical aspects of the figures rather than their intonational-semantic or musical-symbolic qualities. The study focuses on the so-called *principal figures* (*figuræ principales* / *figuræ fundamentales*) found in treatises of the 17th and the first half of the 18th century, specifically in the classifications of Johannes Nucius, Joachim Thuringus, Athanasius Kircher, Tomáš Baltazar Janovka (Janowka), Christoph Bernhard, Johann Gottfried Walther, and their successor Johann Adolf Scheibe.

By examining two chronologically disparate lists – the earliest and latest, found in the works of Nucius (*Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus*, Neisse, 1613) and Scheibe (*Critischer Musicus*, Leipzig, 1745) – the author analyzes figures that define the rules for using dissonances on weak and strong beats. In these theoretical descriptions, the figures do not align with the criteria typically used in modern musicology to characterize musical-rhetorical figures (such as deviations from the *stile antico* norms, enhancement of expressive delivery, or the representation of affects and ideas). Instead, the figures *commissura directa* and *commissura cadens* in Nucius’s explanation, as well as *transitus*, *ligatura*, and *syncopatio* in Scheibe’s description, represent the codification of normative, conventional techniques well-known to musicians. Johann Adolf Scheibe labels these techniques as “figures,” he subsequently employs the term “rule” (*Compositionsregeln*, *harmonische Regeln*) when detailing their characteristics. The coexistence of components oriented toward both old and new norms demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of these lists. This circumstance highlights significant contradictions between authentic historical knowledge and the prevalent interpretation of figures in modern musical analysis, while also suggesting new directions for researching the genesis of musical figures – analogous to rhetorical ones – within Baroque treatises.

**Keywords:** musical-rhetorical figures, musical rhetoric, German music theory, history of music theory, doctrine of composition, music treatises, German Baroque music, rules of counterpoint, Johannes Nucius, *Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus*, Johann Adolf Scheibe, *Critischer Musicus*

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Техника  
музыкальной композиции

Научная статья

«Нериторические» музыкально-риторические  
фигуры в трудах эпохи барокко\*

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**Аннотация.** В статье исследуется на первый взгляд неочевидная, но значимая составляющая широко распространенных в музыкознании музыкально-риторических фигур, которая определяется композиционно-техническим, а не интонационно-семантическим и музыкально-символическим качеством этого феномена. Поводом для исследования этого аспекта в статье становятся так называемые *основные фигуры* (*figuræ principales / figuræ fundamentales*) в трудах XVII — первой половины XVIII века, отраженные в классификациях Иоганна Нуция, Иоахима Турингуса, Афанасия Кирхера, Томаша Бальгазара Яновки, Кристофа Бернхарда и Иоганна Вальтера, а также их последователя Иоганна Адольфа Шайбе. На примере двух хронологически самого раннего и самого позднего списков, приведенных в трудах Нуция (*Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus*,

Нейссе, 1613) и Шайбе (*Critischer Musicus*, Лейпциг, 1745), рассматриваются фигуры, определяющие правила применения диссонансов на слабом и сильном времени. В описаниях теоретиков они не ориентированы на те критерии, которые в музыковедческих исследованиях обычно служат для характеристики музыкально-риторических фигур (отступление от норм строгого стиля, усиление выразительности высказывания, выражение аффектов и идей): фигуры *commissura directa* и *commissura cadens* в разъяснении Нуция, а также фигуры *transitus*, *ligatura* и *syncopatio* в описании Шайбе представляют собой фиксацию нормативных, общепринятых и хорошо знакомых музыкантам приемов. Шайбе, хотя и называет эти приемы фигурами, при изложении их особенностей в дальнейшем использует понятие *правило*: *Compositionsregeln*, *harmonische Regeln* (*композиционные правила*, *гармонические правила*). Сосуществование компонентов, ориентированных на старые и новые нормы, демонстрирует гетерогенную природу перечней фигур. Это обстоятельство подчеркивает значительные противоречия, которые возникают при изучении источников и современной музыковедческой литературы, между аутентичным знанием и распространенной трактовкой фигур в музыкальной аналитике, а также определяет перспективность дальнейшего исследования генезиса музыкальных фигур, аналогичных риторическим, в трактатах эпохи барокко.

**Ключевые слова:** музыкально-риторические фигуры, музыкальная риторика, немецкая теория музыки, история теории музыки, учение о композиции, трактаты о музыке, немецкое музыкальное барокко, правила контрапункта, Иоганн Нуций, *Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus*, Иоганн Адольф Шайбе, *Critischer Musicus*

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### Introduction

A comparison between the lists of musical figures recorded in 17th and early 18th-century sources<sup>1</sup> and the widespread analytical model based on their reduced inventory reveals several contradictions between authentic theoretical knowledge and the hermeneutic approach that originated in German musicology in the first half of the 20th century. During this period, the concept of a unified system of figures emerged, later known as *Figurenlehre* (for further details, see [1; 2]). Dietrich Bartel operated within the framework of this *Figurenlehre* concept, synthesizing ideas about figures in his renowned compendium (1985) [3], an expanded version of which was also published in English (1997) [4]. Among the numerous international articles and dissertations from the last quarter of the 20th and early 21st centuries aimed at criticizing and debunking the “myth of *Figurenlehre*,” one should note the article by Janina Klassen (2001) [5], which presents a series of contradictions in a discursive manner, signaling the need for a re-evaluation of this phenomenon. The situation in Russian musicology appears rather complex: the differences in interpretative approaches by Albert Schweitzer [6] — whose work was translated into Russian in 1964 and significantly influenced Soviet music science<sup>2</sup> — Boleslav Yavorsky [7], and Roman E. Berchenko [8] have led to a blending and substitution of the terms “figures” and “Bachian motive-symbols” [9]. Nevertheless, this has produced an effective and widely utilized hermeneutic approach within the realm of musical-semantic analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> These include the works of Joachim Burmeister (*Hypomnematum Musicae Poeticae*, 1599; *Musica αντοσχεδιαστικη*, 1601; *Musica poetica*, 1606), Johannes Nucio (*Musices poeticae*, 1613), Joachim Thuringus (*Opusculum bipartitum*, 1624), Athanasius Kircher (*Musurgia universalis*, 1650), Tomáš Baltazar Janovka (*Clavis ad thesaurum magnae artis musicae*, 1701), Johann Adolf Scheibe (*Critischer Musicus*, 1745), and others.

<sup>2</sup> Schweitzer, A. (1964). *Iogann Sebast'yan Bakh* [Johann Sebastian Bach]. Muzyka. For English translation see Schweitzer, A. (1980). *J. S. Bach* (E. Newman, Trans., 2 Vols.). Paganiniana Publications.

The Figurenlehre functions in contemporary musicology as a form of mythologized knowledge, only partially connected to its historical roots. The doctrine relies on a number of assertions, including, for example, the following:

- there is a system of Baroque musical-rhetorical figures;
- figures are described ‘in treatises on musical rhetoric’ and ‘clearly codified’; figures listed in treatises form a universal vocabulary of intonation-symbols (“musical lexicon of the Baroque era”);
- figures are exclusively deviations from the norms of strict counterpoint used to enhance the expressiveness of an utterance;
- stable meanings of musical-rhetorical figures are given in Baroque treatises;
- there are many figures recorded, but composers use only “the most common” (from ten to twenty figures);
- the doctrine of musical and rhetorical figures belongs to Protestant musical theory [10, p. 101]

When discussing musical-rhetorical figures, researchers emphasize their pronounced affective and expressive nature. In recent studies, we find the following:

Musical-rhetorical figures are specific turns of phrase or sound formulas that have acquired stable meanings for expressing *an emotional movement (affect) or a concept* [emphasis mine. — A. M.]. They constitute the musical “lexicon” of the era [11, p. 125].

Musical-rhetorical figures are stable intonational formulas used by composers (analogous to the figures of oratorical speech) *as emblems of musical symbolism to express a specific affect, concept, or idea in sound* [emphasis mine. — A. M.] [12, p. 102].

The purpose of the article is to examine, through the example of several musical figures included in Baroque treatises, the extent to which the concepts of rhetoricality and expressiveness were attributed to them in theoretical texts. Furthermore, it is essential to consider that “musical-rhetorical figures differed from other linguistic and stylistic elements by their *conscious deviation from the norm* [emphasis mine. — A. M.]” [13, p. 196]. The concept of the linguistic norm, so vital in the art of *eloquentia* (eloquence), will also be a focal point of our study as we examine these lists of figures from the chosen perspective.

*Figuræ principales and minus principales*

Some theorists divide figures into *principales* and *minus principales*. The *principales* figures refer not to musical “liberties” or “excesses,” but to techniques well-known to musicians and conventional for the stile antico (strict counterpoint). In the sources, *principales* figures are designated as follows:

- *figuræ principales* according to Johannes Nucius,<sup>3</sup> Joachim Thuringus,<sup>4</sup> Athanasius Kircher,<sup>5</sup> and Tomáš Baltazar Janovka<sup>6</sup>;
- *figuræ fundamentales* according to Christoph Bernhard<sup>7</sup> and Johann Gottfried Walther.<sup>8</sup>

The line of *principales* figures is continued in the catalogue of Johann Adolf Scheibe,<sup>9</sup> although he does not employ the aforementioned group designations<sup>10</sup> (see *Tables 1* and *2*):

<sup>3</sup> Nucio, J. (1613). *Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus*. Crispini Scharffenbergi, Fol. F4<sup>v</sup>–G2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Thuringus, J. (1624). *Opusculum bipartitum, De primordiis musicis*. II. Georgij Rungij, pp. 97–124.

<sup>5</sup> Kircher, A. (1650). *Musurgia universalis sive Ars magna consoni et dissoni* (Vol. 1). Hæredum Francisci Corbelletti, p. 366. See also Nasonov, R. A. (2009). Muzykal'naya ritorika Afanasiya Kirkhera: k istorii “gotovykh slov” [Athanasius Kircher's *Musical Rhetoric: On the History of “Ready-Made Words”*]. In L. V. Savvina & V. O. Petrov (Eds.), *Muzykal'noe iskusstvo i nauka v XXI veke: istoriya, teoriya, ispolnitel'stvo, pedagogika* [Musical art and science in the 21st century: history, theory, performance, pedagogy]: *Proceedings of the International Conference to the 40th Anniversary of the Astrakhan State Conservatoire*. Astrakhanskii institut povysheniya kvalifikatsii i perepodgotovki, pp. 115–121, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> Janowka, T. B. (1701). *Clavis ad thesaurum magnæ artis musicæ*. Georgij Labaun, pp. 47–51.

<sup>7</sup> Bernhard, Chr. (n.d.) *Ausführlicher Bericht vom Gebrauchen Con- und Dissonantien* [ms.]. [s.l.]: [s.n.], [s.a.]. Bl. 12r–15r; Bernhard, Chr. (1926). *Ausführlicher Bericht vom Gebrauchen Con- und Dissonantien*. In J. M. Müller-Blattau (Ed.), *Die Kompositionslehre Heinrich Schützens in der Fassung seines Schülers Christoph Bernhard*. Breitkopf & Härtel, pp. 144–147. See also Katunyan, M. I. (1985). Uchenie o kompozitsii Genrikha Shyuttsa [Heinrich Schütz's theory of composition]. In T. N. Dubravskaya (Ed.), *Genrikh Shyutts [Heinrich Schütz]: Collected Articles* (pp. 76–118). Muzyka.

<sup>8</sup> Walther, J. G. (1708). *Præcepta der Musicalischen Composition* (Vol. 2) [Manuscript]. [Weimar], pp. 234–265; Walther, J. G. (1955). *Præcepta der Musicalischen Composition* (P. Benary, Ed.). Breitkopf & Härtel, pp. 140–152.

<sup>9</sup> Scheibe, J. A. (1740). *Der critische Musicus* (Vol. 2). Beneke, pp. 383–398. The list of figures is also presented in the edition summarizing both volumes of Scheibe's articles: Scheibe, J. A. (1745). *Critischer Musicus*. Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, pp. 698–699.

<sup>10</sup> For more details on the succession of musical figure lists, see [14].

Table 1. *Figuræ principales* in the treatises of Johannes Nucius, Joachim Thuringus, Athanasius Kircher, and Tomáš Baltazar Janovka

<b>1613, Nucius</b> <i>Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus, Cap. VII</i>	<b>1624, Thuringus</b> <i>Opusculum bipartitum, De primordiis musicis, Part. II, Cap. XV–XVIII</i>	<b>1650, Kircher</b> <i>Musurgia universalis sive Ars magna consoni et dissoni, T. 1, Lib. V, Cap. 19</i>	<b>1701, Janowka</b> <i>Clavis ad thesaurum magnæ artis musicæ, Figuræ Musicæ</i>
<i>Figuræ principales</i>			
<i>commissura</i>	<i>commissura</i>	<i>commissura</i>	<i>commissura</i>
<i>fuga</i>	<i>fuga</i>	<i>syncopatio</i>	<i>syncopatio</i>
<i>repetitio</i>	<i>syncopatio</i>	<i>fuga</i>	<i>fuga</i>

Table 2. *Figuræ fundamentales* in the treatises of Christoph Bernhard, Johann Gottfried Walther, and Johann Adolf Scheibe

<b>[s.a.], Bernhard</b> <i>Ausführlicher Bericht vom Gebrauchen Con- und Dissonantien [ms.], Cap. X–XXII</i>	<b>1708, Walther</b> <i>Præcepta der Musicalischen Composition [ms.], T. 2, Pars 2, Cap. 1, 4</i>	<b>1740, Scheibe</b> <i>Der critische Musicus, Bd. 2, S. 391 Sechs und siebenzigstes Stück</i>
<i>Figuræ fundamentales</i>		
<i>ligatura / syncopatio</i>	<i>syncopatio / ligatura</i>	<i>transitus</i>
<i>transitus</i>	<i>transitus / commissura</i>	<i>ligatura and syncopatio / syncope</i>
—	<i>fuga</i>	—

To illustrate the evolution of the principal figures group, let us examine the rules of dissonance in the works of the chronologically earliest and latest theorists — Nucius and Scheibe. (We deliberately exclude the question of the fugue as a musical figure from this article, despite its frequent mentions in Baroque treatises. This subject is too extensive and warrants separate research.<sup>11</sup>)

### *The Typology of Figures in Nucius's Treatise*

The music theorist and Cistercian monk Johannes Nucius (1556–1620), in his treatise *Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus* (Neisse, 1613<sup>12</sup>), proposes dividing figures into *figurae principales* and *figurae minus principales*.<sup>13</sup> His binary typology, likely reflecting the spirit of the late Renaissance and early Baroque,<sup>14</sup> proved to be in demand in later treatises (see *Table 1* and *Illustration 1*). Nucius explains:

Et si ad Rhetorum imitationem non difficile erat ingentem figurarum Catalogum coacervare, nos tamen brevitatis studio de septem sequentibus tantum agemus, ex quarum collatione, de alijs Harmoniæ ornamentis facile judicabunt discentes. Porro barum figurarum aliæ Principales sunt, ut Commissura, Fuga, Repetitio: Aliæ minus principales, ut Climax Complexio, Homioteleuton, Syncopatio.<sup>15</sup>

Although, in imitation of rhetoricians, it would not be difficult to compile an extensive catalogue of figures, we nonetheless wish, for the sake of brevity, to discuss only the following seven, from the comparison of which students will easily be able to judge the other ornaments of harmony. For figures are either *principales*, such as *Commissura*, *Fuga*, and *Repetitio*, or *minus principales*, such as *Climax*, *Complexio*, *Hemioteleuton*, and *Syncopatio*.

<sup>11</sup> The connection between fugue and rhetoric is discussed, for instance, by Gregory Butler (see Butler, G. G. (1977). Fugue and rhetoric. *Journal of Music Theory*, 21(1), 49–109), Paul Walker (see Walker, P. M. (1987). *Fugue in German theory from Dressler to Mattheson* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. State University of New York at Buffalo), Daniel Harrison (see Harrison, D. (1990). Rhetoric and fugue: an analytical application. *Music Theory Spectrum*, 12(1), 1–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/746145>), and others. I would like to express gratitude to Larisa L. Gerver, Dr. Sci (Arts) and Professor at the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, for the idea of conducting a specialized study of this issue from the perspective of the doctrine of figures.

<sup>12</sup> Nucio, J. (1613). *Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus*. Crispini Scharffenbergi.

<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Nucio's list of figures, see [15].

<sup>14</sup> One might consider, for instance, the self-explanatory title of Vincenzo Galilei's *Dialogo della musica antica et della moderna* (Florence, 1581), as well as the concepts of the *prima* and *seconda pratica*.

<sup>15</sup> Nucio, J., 1613, Fol. F4<sup>v</sup>.

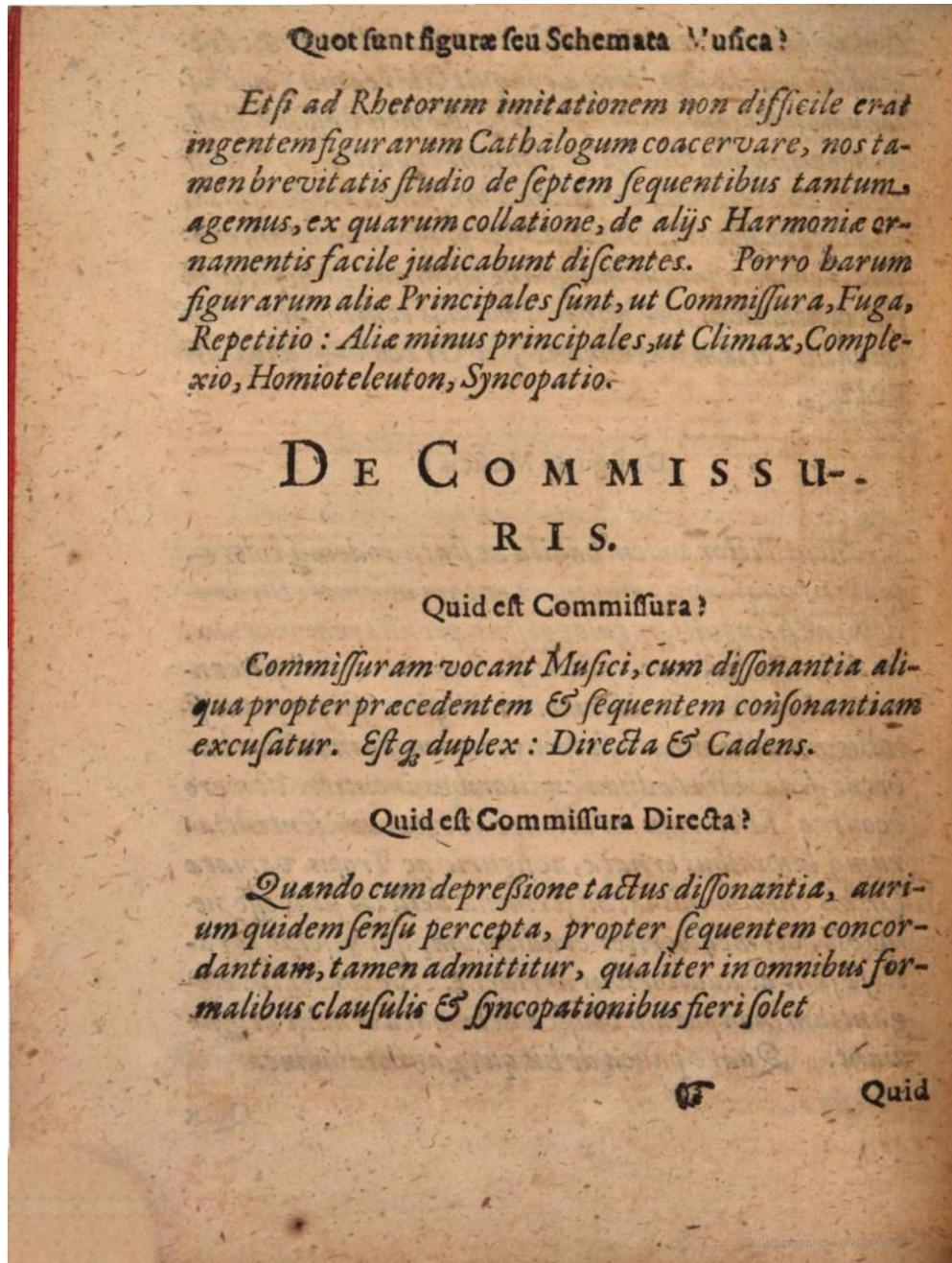


Illustration 1. Description of the *commissura* figure in Johannes Nucius's *Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus* (Nucio, 1613, Fol. F4r)

When examining the *principales* figures, Nucius does not dwell on the criteria for differentiating them from the *figurae minus principales* but proceeds directly to a description of their properties. The first of the *principales* figures, *commissura*, is presented in his treatise in two varieties: *directa* and *cadens* (see *Illustrations 1* and *2*):

Quid est Commissura?

Commissuram vocant Musici, cum dissonantia aliqua propter praecedentem & sequentem consonantiam excusatur. Est que duplex: Directa & Cadens.

Quid est Commissura Directa?

Quando cum depressione tactus dissonantia, aurium quidem sensu percepta. propter sequentem concordantiam, tamen admittatur, qualiter in omnibus formalibus clausulis & syncopationibus fieri solet.<sup>16</sup>

Quid est Commissura Cadens?

Cum prior pars tactus consona est, posterior vero dissonat, qui positus propter sequentem consonantiam tamen admittatur, ac contingit plærunque in gradationibus. Hujus generis Commissurae extra omnem clausularum & syncopationis rationem contingent, & fugis saepe sunt aptissimae. Exempla sunt in Præter rerum seriem Iosquini. In Clementis Jerusalem surge. Huc me sydereo Josquin: Tristis est anima mea Orlandi: à 5. Adesto dolori Jacbes VVertb: Nudus egressus sum. Nucy etc. Porro quiabarum Commissurarum usus, paulo majoris est negoty ideog incipientes circa eas cautious versentur.<sup>17</sup>

What is a *commissura*?

Musicians define *commissura* as a certain dissonance which is excused because of a preceding and following consonance. It is of two kinds: *directa* and *cadens*.

What is a *commissura directa*?

When the ear perceives a dissonance on the downbeat that is nonetheless admitted on account of the following consonance, which usually occurs in all formal cadences and in syncopationes [4, p. 419].

What is a *commissura cadens*?

When the first part of the *tactus* is consonant and the last part is dissonant, which is nonetheless admitted on account of the following consonance. It is often used in a *gradatio*. These kinds of *commissura* occur particularly in all cadences and *syncopationes*, and are especially appropriate in *fugae* [4, p. 419]. Examples include: Josquin's *Præter rerum seriem*, Clemens's *Jerusalem surge*, Josquin's *Huc me sydereo*, Lassus's *Tristis est anima mea* for five voices, Giaches de Wert's *Adesto dolori*, Nucius's *Nudus egressus sum*, etc. Since the use of these *commissurae* entails somewhat greater complexity, beginners should treat them with particular caution.

<sup>16</sup> Nucio, J., 1613, Fol. F4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Nucio, J., 1613, Fol. G1<sup>v</sup>.



Quid est Commissura Cadens?

*Cum prior pars tactus consona est, posterior vero dissonat, qui positus propter sequentem consonantiam, tamen admittitur, ac contingit plerumq; in gradationibus. Hujus generis Commissura extra omnem clausularum & Syncopationis rationem contingunt, & fugis saepe sunt aptissima. Exempla sunt in Præter rerum seriem Iosquini. In Clementis Ierusalem surge. Huc me Sydereo Josquin: Tristis est anima mea Orlandi; à 5. Adesto dolori Jaches Werth: Nudus egressus sum. Nucij &c. Porro quia harum Commissurarum usus, paulo majoris est negocij ideoq; incipientes circa eas cautius versentur.*

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Illustration 2. Description of the commissura figure in Johannes Nucius's treatise *Musices poeticæ sive de compositione cantus* (Nucio, 1613, Fol. G1<sup>v</sup>)

Thus, the musical figure included by Nucius in his list — compiled, as previously mentioned, “ad Rhetorum imitationem” — represents two fundamental rules of strict counterpoint: the use of dissonance on the strong beat (*Commissura Directa*) and on the weak beat (*Commissura Cadens*). The term *commissura* (Lat.—connection, joint), although originating in classical rhetoric, was not used to designate a figure, as far as I know. As Dietrich Bartel points out, referring to the ninth book of the *Institutio Oratoria*, “the term *commissura* appears in classical sources, where it is used not as a figure but rather simply to describe the unpleasant collision of ending and beginning consonants of subsequent words” [4, p. 415].<sup>18</sup>

It is plausible that the idea of designating a dissonance on a strong beat as a “direct connection of sonorities” (*commissura directa*) and a dissonance on a weak beat as a “mediated (indirect) connection of sonorities” (*commissura cadens*) belongs to Nucius himself. However, it should be noted that Burmeister had already recognized the possibility of describing the link between dissonances and consonances in general through the term *commissura*, ultimately preferring its Greek equivalent.

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<sup>18</sup> As Marcus Fabius Quintilianus writes in the *Institutio Oratoria*: “Qua de re utar Ciceronis potissimum verbis. *Habet inquit ille tamquam hiatus et concursus vocalium molle quiddam et quod indicet non ingrati negligentiam de re hominis magis quam de verbis laborantis. Ceterum consonantes quoque, earumque praecipue quae sunt asperiores, in commissura verborum rixantur, ut s ultima cum x proxima, quarum tristior etiam si binae collidantur stridor est, ut ars studiorum.*” (“I cannot do better than quote the words of Cicero on this subject. *Hiatus*, he says, *and the meeting of vowels produce a certain softness of effect, such as to suggest a not unpleasing carelessness on the part of the orator, as though he were more anxious about his matter than his words.* But consonants also are liable to conflict at the juncture of words, more especially those letters which are comparatively harsh in sound; as for instance when the final *s* of one word clashes with *x* at the opening of the next. Still more unpleasing is the hissing sound produced by the collision between a pair of these consonants, as in the phrase *ars studiorum.*”) Quintilian. IX.iv.37: XXXVII. See Quintilian. (1921). *Institutio Oratoria / The institutio oratoria of Quintilian* (Vol. 3, H. E. Butler, Trans.). Harvard University Press; Heinemann, pp. 526–527.

In his *Hypomnematum Musicæ Poeticæ* (1599)<sup>19</sup> and *Musica αυτοσχεδιαστική* (1601),<sup>20</sup> he writes about the figure *symblema sive commissura*, employing the Greek designation alongside the Latin one. In 1601, when presenting his second doctrine of musical figures (containing the classification) immediately following the first, Burmeister excludes the Latin term *commissura*, retaining only the Greek *symblema*.<sup>21</sup> He follows the same approach in his final treatise on the doctrine of musical figures, *Musica poetica* (1606).<sup>22</sup>

### *The Musical Figures of Scheibe*

The inertia of the principal figures remains perceptible even in the mid-18th-century catalogue proposed in the treatise *Critischer Musicus* (Leipzig, 1745<sup>23</sup>) by the Kapellmeister and music critic Johann Adolf Scheibe (1708–1776). At the conclusion of his article on figures — presented as an appendix rather than an independent section — he follows established tradition by listing figures derived from the rules of counterpoint:

Was endlich die Figuren betrifft, die insgemein von den Componisten dafür angesehen werden: so sind solche der Durchgang (*Transitus*) die Bindung, (*Ligatura* und *Syncopatio*, oder *Syncope*) und endlich belegen auch einige noch die Fuge, und den doppelten Contrapunct mit dem Namen der Figuren. Diese Arten der harmonischen Figuren

Finally, as for the figures that composers generally consider such, these include the figures of passing motion [*Durchgang*] (*Transitus*), binding [*Bindung*] (*Ligatura* and *Syncopatio*, or *Syncope*); and, lastly, some even call fugue and double counterpoint “figures.” These varieties of harmonic figures

<sup>19</sup> Burmeister, J. (1599). *Hypomnematum Musicæ Poeticæ a Magistro Ioachimo Burmeistero, ex Isagoge cuius et idem ipse auctor est, ad chorum gubernandum, cantumque componendum conscripta, synopsis*. Myliander, Fol. H2.

<sup>20</sup> Burmeister, J. (1601). *Musica αυτοσχεδιαστική quæ per aliquot accessiones in gratiam philomusorum quorundam ad tractatum de hypomnematibus musicæ poëticæ ejusdem auctoris sporadēn quondam exaratas, in unum corpusculum concrevit, in quâ redditur ratio I. Formandi & componendi harmonias; II. Administrandi & regendi chorum; III. Canendi melodias modô hactenùs non usitatô*. Edita studiô & labore M. Joachimi Burmeisteri Lunæburgensis. Reusnerianis, Fol. H2.

<sup>21</sup> Burmeister, 1601, Fol. K3.

<sup>22</sup> Burmeister, J. (1606). *Musica poetica: Definitionibus et divisionibus breviter delineata, quibus in singulis capitibus sunt hypomnemata præceptionum instar [synoptikôs]*. Myliander, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Scheibe, J. A. (1745). *Critischer Musicus*. Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf.

sind aber den Musikverständigen bekannt genug, daß ich also nicht nöthig habe, mich mit deren Erklärung allhier zu beschäftigen. Außer diesen gehören sie eigentlich zu den allgemeinen und ersten Compositionsregeln, die ich in diesen Blättern zu erläutern nicht gesonnen bin. Ich überlasse vielmehr meinen Lesern obige Anmerkungen von den Figuren zu weiterm Nachdenken, als die den meisten unbekannter seyn werden, als alle übrige harmonische Regeln, welche die gemeine Zusammensetzung der Töne und Intervallen betreffen.<sup>24</sup>

are sufficiently well-known to those proficient in the musical art, so there is no need for me to address their explanation here. Moreover, they actually belong to the commonly known and primary rules of composition [*Compositionsregeln*], which I do not intend to explain on these pages. On the contrary, I shall leave the above remarks on figures for my readers' further reflection, as they will be less familiar to most than all the other harmonic rules [*harmonische Regeln*] concerning the treatment of sounds and intervals.

It is noteworthy that Scheibe adds German equivalents to the universally accepted Ancient Greek and Latin terms, seeking to emphasize the importance of employing national musical terminology. He explains the designations of the figures as follows:

*Transitus*, oder der Durchgang ist, wenn mehr als eine Note neben einander auf- oder absteigend gegen eine in einer andern Stimme befindliche Note zu stehen kommen. Die eine Note ist alsdann als die anschlagende, von der die Zusammenstimmung entsteht, anzusehen; die andere Note hingegen ist die durchgehende. Da aber auch sehr oft von der durchgehenden Note die Harmonie entspringt: so ist annoch zu merken, daß wenn die accentuirte Note, als die anschlagende, die Harmonie machet, solches *Transitus regulatis* genennet wird. Ist aber die unaccentuirte, oder die durchgehende Note der Grund der Harmonie: so heißt solches *Transitus irregularis*. In diesem letztern Falle aber ist die erstere Note, ob sie schon accentuirt ist, doch nur als ein Vorschlag der folgenden Note zu betrachten.<sup>25</sup>

The *Transitus*, or passing note occurs when two or more subsequent, neighboring, ascending or descending notes stand against one note in another voice. The note which forms the harmony is considered the striking [*ansschlagende*] note, while the other is the passing note. However, as the harmony is also frequently derived out of the passing note, the following, moreover, is to be mentioned. When the accented or striking note produces the harmony, it is known as a *transitus regularis*. However, should the unaccented or passing note form the basis of the harmony, it is called a *transitus irregularis*. In this latter case, however, the first note, even if it is accented, is only to be considered as an accentus [*Vorschlag*] to the following note [4, pp. 426–427].

<sup>24</sup> Scheibe, 1745, pp. 698–699.

<sup>25</sup> Scheibe, 1745, p. 698.

*Ligatura* und *Syncopatio*, oder *Syncope*, die Bindung, ist, wenn aus zwo Noten eine gemachet wird, also daß wider die gewöhnliche Beschaffenheit oder Eintheilung des Taktes, eine accentuirte Note an die unaccentuirte Note gebunden ist. Diese Figur dienet der Dissonanzen angenehmer und lieblicher zu machen; wiewohl sie auch sehr oft nur bey den Consonanzen gebraucht wird. Sonst nennet man sie auch eine zierliche Rückung des Taktes. Sie besteht aber insgemein aus drey Noten. Die erste Note ist unaccentuirt, die zweyte Note aber ist accentuirt, und kann also bald eine Consonanz bald auch eine Dissonanz seyn; die dritte Note ist, so wie die erste, unaccentuirt, und wird als die Auflösung der mittlern Note, welche an die erstere gebunden war, angesehen. Ist nun die gebundene Note eine Consonanz gewesen, so kann die Auflösung aufwärts oder springend geschehen; ist sie aber eine Dissonanz gewesen, so muß die Auflösung allemal eine Stufe niedriger, als die vorhergehende Note stehen. Diejenigen Anmerkungen, welche die Kunstverständigen wegen des Unterschiedes der Syncope und Ligatur insbesondere zu machen pflegen, sind allhier nicht nöthig, besonders angeführet zu werden, weil sie einem Liebhaber der Musik nichts helfen können, einem Componisten aber aus den ersten Anfangsgründen bereits bekannt, an sich selbst aber nur Grillenfängereyen sind.<sup>26</sup>

The *ligatura* (*syncopatio* or *syncope*), the tie [*Bindung*], occurs when one note is constructed out of two by tying an accented note to an unaccented one against the normal structure or division of the beat. This figure actually serves to make the use of dissonances more agreeable and pleasant, although it is also often used only with consonances. It is furthermore also called a graceful shifting of the beat [4, pp. 404–405]. As a rule, it consists of three notes. The first note is unaccented, but the second is accented and may thus be either a consonance or a dissonance; the third note, like the first, is unaccented and is considered the resolution of the middle note that was tied to the first. If the tied note was a consonance, the resolution may be made by ascent or by a leap; if, however, it was a dissonance, the resolution must always be one step lower than the preceding note. The remarks that connoisseurs of the art are inclined to make regarding the difference between *syncope* and *ligatura* require no special explanation here, as they would be of no use to the music lover, are already known to the composer from the very beginning, and are, in themselves, mere hair-splitting.

It is no coincidence that Scheibe initially refers to *Durchgang* (passing motion) and *Bindung* (binding/suspension) as “figures,” only to subsequently replace this definition with the term “rules” (*Compositionsregeln*,

<sup>26</sup> Scheibe, 1745, pp. 698–699. In the original text, the last sentence refers to “catching crickets” (*Grillenfängerei*). According to the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the noun *Grillenfängerei* denotes abstruse, unfounded reasoning or whimsical brooding. *Grillenfängerei*. (n.d.). In *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Retrieved November 5, 2025, from <https://www.dwds.de/wb/dwb/grillenfaengerei>.

*harmonische Regeln*). At first glance, such an approach does not seem to fit organically into his Gottschedian, affect-oriented concept of musical figures; however, it was necessitated by the established practice of the time.

### Conclusion

The paradox of the phenomenon under consideration lies in the fact that the musical elements and techniques known in musicology as musical-rhetorical figures represent not only means of enhancing musical expressiveness but also purely compositional-technical devices.<sup>27</sup> They constitute the very foundation of mastering the composer's craft — namely, the norms of counterpoint. It is also evident that when employing dissonances on strong or weak beats, the musicians' primary objective was the observance of rules, rather than the opportunity to convey expression or illustrate specific images and ideas. Such figures — analogous to rhetorical ones and included in the corresponding lists — can, in the words of Siegfried Oechsle, be legitimately viewed as “a kind of terminological buffer for the history of counterpoint” („als eine Art terminologischer Zwischenspeicher der Kontrapunktgeschichte“) [16, p. 10].

In the lists of musical figures, the choice of both terminology and the actual sonic material led to heterogeneity and a rhizomatic structure. As Gottfried Scholz points out, the authors of the treatises „sie alle aber bereiteten durch den rhetorischen Begriffswirrwarr Angriffsflächen für später vor. Durch die wachsende Affektenlehre, durch Systematiken von Athanasius Kircher bis Johann Mattheson erhielt die musikalische Rhetorik..., verhädderte sich aber gleichzeitig in einer wirklichkeitsfremden, ausufernden Terminologie“ [17, S. 36].

Thus, in the process of forming the lists of figures, both old and new techniques of compositional practice were selected. These lists contained not only a “rhetorical” element, signifying a violation of the norm (according to

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<sup>27</sup> Another significant component that the authors of treatises frequently classify as figures analogous to rhetorical ones are the manners (*Manieren*) and diminution techniques derived from performance practice.

Quintilian's definition of a figure<sup>28</sup>), but also a "grammatical" one, intended to codify this norm.<sup>29</sup> In the words of Mikhail L. Gasparov, ever since the Middle Ages "the common denominator between grammar and rhetoric was the study of elocutio, or artistic delivery: long lists of tropes and figures serving to ornament such delivery were equally included in both the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and the grammar of Donatus" [18, p. 60].

The juxtaposition of strict counterpoint rules and their violations within certain lists of figures demonstrates the processes of the "gradual rhetorization of musical language,"<sup>30</sup> establishing a coordinate system where "rhetoricity" is defined by its non-normative nature. At the same time, an examination of the figure inventories by Nucius, Thuringus, Kircher, Bernhard, Janovka, Walther, and Scheibe reveals that not every author ventured to explain "liberties" without first describing the norm.

A detailed study of the genesis of musical-rhetorical figures leads to a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and to a more expansive historical perspective. This perspective should replace the established practice of viewing these figures exclusively from intonational-semantic and symbolic viewpoints. Moving away from such practice is intended to contribute to the demystification of Baroque rhetoric in musicology.

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<sup>28</sup> According to Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, "a *figure*, on the other hand, as is clear from the name itself, is the term employed when we give our language a conformation other than the obvious and ordinary." Quintilian, 1921, p. 351.

<sup>29</sup> During Antiquity, "the goal of rhetoric was the triple skill to 'persuade,' 'delight,' and 'move' the listener. The goal of grammar was the more modest skill of 'writing and speaking correctly,' as well as 'interpreting the poets.'" [18, p. 592].

<sup>30</sup> Pankina, E. V. (2018). *Frottola v kul'ture ital'yanskogo Vozrozhdeniya (1480–1530)* [*The Frottola in the culture of the Italian Renaissance (1480–1530)*] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, p. 345.

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