

Abstract: A Theory of Prolonged Anticipations

Theories of tonal (~18th-century) counterpoint seem to default in their derivation of non-harmonic tones towards a reconciliation with previously-sounding harmonies or pitches. The appoggiatura and anticipation are examples of exceptions to this default derivation, yet these terms traditionally only explain the source of a single dissonant note. In many examples from Baroque literature, however, dissonances can only be adequately explained by invoking the notion of a prolonged or embellished anticipation. Moreover, these prolonged anticipations result from not only contrapuntal but also harmonic processes.

Once the existence of prolonged anticipations is recognized, the default derivation of other non-harmonic tones comes into question. Tones that may have been previously viewed as one sort of dissonance, such as an accented passing note within a prevailing harmony, can rather be seen as prolonged consonant anticipations of a future harmony. In essence, a more "goal-oriented" approach to counterpoint can be developed. The net effect is a simplification in how dissonances are both perceived and conceived.

This "goal-oriented" approach further affects how we view contrapuntal textures. With this vantage, individual lines have more independence and less need to be coordinated with one another on a note-by-note basis. Instead, contrapuntal lines in tonal settings can be seen as shifting in and out of phase within the harmonic framework. Considering the ostensibly improvisatory foundation of compositional practice, an approach that recognizes the ability of the improviser to anticipate and delay harmonies in certain voices (particularly the melodic or upper voice) would appear more faithful to the art of improvisation itself and suggest pedagogical benefits as well.