DIRECTED STUDY

Fugue subjects, like invention themes, come in a variety of lengths and types, but all possess some of the same characteristics. Consider each subject in these terms:

1. Is the tonic key clearly emphasized at the opening? On what scale degree does it begin and end? Does it appear to modulate?
2. How long is it?
3. Is there any feeling of cadence at the end?
4. Are there one or two (or more) distinctive rhythmic or melodic ideas?
5. Is the implicit harmony clear and functional? Is the harmonic rhythm fairly steady?
6. Does it have an overall shape? Can you distinguish a clear structural-pitch line?
7. Does it appear to be in two sections?
8. Does it contain sequences?
9. Where is the first note placed metrically?
10. Try each subject in inversion, augmentation, and diminution. Which sound well in which versions?

DISCUSSION

A good fugue subject will exhibit the features of a good invention theme, just as a fugue is in many ways no more than an elaborate invention. There is, in fact, no clear distinction to be made between an invention theme and a subject (which we will call S) other than to say that most subjects are longer; are more complex in rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic structure; may modulate; may be sequential; and may be in two distinct sections. Subjects vary greatly in length, from one to eight measures or even more (in some organ fugues). Most are two to four measures, and we will concentrate on these.

The following features characterize most fugue subjects:

1. The tonic key and chord are clearly established at the beginning. Important tonic triad notes are emphasized; weak scale degrees, especially the leading tone, are not. Most subjects begin on scale degree one or five, and end on one, three, or five. Some begin on the leading tone, but only as a short anacrusis. Each comes to a cadential point at the end, either an IAC or PAC implication, or very occasionally an HC. The harmony is usually diatonic, except with a chromatic S (Nos. 8, 11, and 12 in Ex. 10–1), when secondary dominants may be implied. The harmonic rhythm is quite regular, and the harmonic progression is functional, strong, and usually simple in vocabulary.

2. The cadence is placed, as always, on a strong beat.
3. There will be one or two, or even three, distinctive features that will enable the subject to be heard clearly in complex passages, and that will suggest to the experienced composer specific manipulations and contrapuntal combinations. Some subjects are designed to work in stretto, inversion, augmentation, or diminution.

4. As with any good line, the shape will be clear, and there may well be a clear structural-pitch line (see especially Nos. 1, 6, 7, 9, and 11 in Ex. 10-1).

5. Many longer subjects are in two distinct sections, a “head” and a “tail” (Nos. 5, 8, and perhaps 7 and 10 in Ex. 10-1). These may modulate to the dominant, and often contain several distinct motivic ideas.

6. The range will normally be kept within an octave, with the usual tonal framework of tonic-to-tonic or dominant-to-dominant. The more voices, the narrower the range of the subject, avoiding crossings and other complications.

7. Subjects may begin on a strong beat, or after a brief rest. In the latter case, the meter may not be fully clear for several beats, or even until the entrance of the second voice.

8. A good subject will have a strong sense of character and individuality. In Bach each fugue is sui generis, a thing in itself, in terms of both subject material and overall structure.

EXERCISES

1. Analyze additional fugue subjects from the Anthology.
2. Critique the following subjects.

![First subject](image1)

![Second subject](image2)

![Third subject](image3)
3. Compose subjects based on these melodic frameworks. Use some eighth and sixteenth notes, and work for a clearcut character, motivic interest, and coherence. Analyze the implied harmony and nonharmonic tones carefully.

a. 

b. 

c. 

d. 

4. Compose subjects based on these chord formats. Consider the use of brief sequences. At least one should be in two sections.

a. $d: \frac{4}{4} \quad i \quad i v \quad i \quad v i i ^ {o r t h} \quad i$

b. $C: \frac{4}{4} \quad I \quad I V / V \quad V \quad V / V \quad V \quad V$ (modulating) 

c. $e: \frac{4}{4} \quad i \quad v i i ^ {o r t h} \quad i \quad V \quad V / V \quad i$

d. $G: \frac{3}{8} \quad i \quad V \quad V / V \quad i$

e. $g: \frac{4}{4} \quad i \quad i v \quad v i i ^ {o r t h} \quad i$

5. Compose your own subjects of from two to four measures. Choose a variety of meters, tempi, and harmonic frameworks. Use both major and minor modes. Be sure each is clearly shaped. Analyze the structural pitches, motifs, and harmony and nonharmonic tones.
The Answer

In the exposition (the opening section) of a fugue, the second voice enters imitating the S at the fifth above (or fourth below) in the dominant key. This version of the subject is called the answer or response. Fugal imitation is virtually always at the dominant level (as distinct from imitation in inventions), the answer using the scale and (to an extent) the harmony of the dominant key. This can be handled analytically as music momentarily in the dominant key, or as secondary dominants in the main key; the first approach is recommended here. At the time of Bach, imitation at the fifth had become standard practice in fugal composition; it emphasizes the tonic-dominant tonal “pillars” of a work, and provides tonal variety in the exposition.

Below (Ex. 10-2) are the answers to several of the subjects given on p. 219. Play the S and then the corresponding answer (A). You will note that one imitates literally at the fifth, but that in the others there are slight intervallic adjustments. Can you determine the pattern by which these adjustments are made? What is the key of each A? Are the harmonies correspondingly the same for both S and A?

Ex. 10-2

1. Theoretical and historical questions raised by the fugal answer are beyond the modest scope of this text to treat exhaustively. Among the several books dealing with these questions, the most solidly based historically is that by Charles Naldin (see Bibliography).
DISCUSSION

In Ex. 10-2, no. 1, the A literally transposes the S up a fifth. The notes of the A are all notes of the scale of the dominant key. This literally transposed response is called a real answer. Observe that each scale degree of the S is answered by the corresponding scale degree (in the dominant key) in the A.

An S normally receives a real A if there is no strong dominant note at or near its beginning, and if it does not modulate. Note in S no. 1 that both these conditions are met. There is a dominant note ($g^1$) in the S, but it is very short and weak, and not at the beginning; nor does this S modulate.

You will have observed that in the other A's there were adjusted notes, such that not all the notes of the answer imitated the S at the fifth. These adjusted responses we call tonal answers. You also noticed that the adjustments involved the tonic or dominant notes of the subject.
Briefly put, in a tonal A a strong dominant pitch at or near the head of the S is answered by the tonic pitch at the corresponding point in the A. And, because the A is at the fifth, tonic notes are automatically answered by dominant.

After the tonal adjustment has been made, the A continues as if it had been real. The readjustment to a real A is made as soon as possible after the tonally adjusted note or notes.

Ex. 10-5

The reasons for the tonal A are to be found in the nature of tonality itself, that is, the necessity for keeping within the tonal framework to preserve the integrity of the tonic key and to avoid modulating endlessly around the circle of fifths.

Ex. 10-6

A tonal A will fit harmonically with the end of the S when it enters in the exposition, and will not require a modulatory link after the S (as will be discussed later).

Ex. 10-7
A few details concerning the answer should be discussed briefly here. A subject head built around scale degrees 1-5, 5-1, or around a tonic triad outline normally requires a tonal A.

Ex. 10-8

A prominent leading tone at or near the head of the S is usually answered by the mediant note. Below, the music analyzed in the S as implying dominant harmony is answered by that implying tonic in the A, an extension of the principle of the tonal A to several notes.

Ex. 10-9

The main consideration in making the tonal A is that it preserve the identity and integrity of the S as much as possible and create no awkwardness of line or harmony. Strong scale degrees (especially tonic and dominant) in the S should, if possible, be answered by the corresponding strong degrees in the A. Tendency tones should also be answered by tendency tones when possible, as in Ex. 10-10 (except in the situation explained in Ex. 10-9). The A should imply the same set of harmonies (in the dominant key, of course) that the S does.
In some cases Bach obviously felt so strongly about the identity of the S that he gave a real A to an S that would normally have required a tonal one. A well-known instance is found in the G minor organ fugue (Ex. 10–11).

The other type of S requiring a tonal A is one that modulates to the dominant (the only modulation possible for an S). Such an S must modulate clearly to require a tonal A. Modulating S’s are often broken down into two sections, and the adjustment often occurs at the break. Ex. 10–12 gives the answer Bach made to S no. 10 in Ex. 10–1.
Ex. 10-12

There are two adjustments here: the usual exchange of dominant for tonic at the very beginning, and the adjustment after the rest, transposing the music that was in dominant (B♭) in the S to tonic (Eb) in the A. The brief rest has the function of obscuring or smoothing over this adjustment. There may alternatively be a large leap at the point of adjustment, for the same reason. The situation can be graphed thus:

S: I (music in tonic) → V (music in dominant)
A: V (music in dominant) → I (music in tonic)

This can be understood as another extension of the tonic-for-dominant exchange that characterizes the tonal A.

One more detail deserves mention. In fugues in minor, the A is in the dominant minor key, as can be seen in the A’s given on p. 224 and elsewhere. If the S ends on the mediant note, the last note of the A may be its mediant note (in the dominant minor key), or may be raised to become the leading tone in tonic and thus return efficiently to the tonic key.

Ex. 10-13

To summarize:

1. The S is answered at the fifth (fourth below), in the dominant key.
2. If the S has a prominent dominant note at or near its beginning, it normally requires a tonal A, in which that dominant note is answered by the tonic note; after this adjustment, the A returns as early as possible to its real A form.
Fugue I

3. A modulating S also requires a tonal A.

It would be possible to spend a great deal more time on what Tovey calls the "vexatious minuitiae" of the answer, but the above discussion covers the vast majority of cases one is likely to encounter.

EXERCISES

1. Investigate the answers to the fugues in the Anthology, including those in more than three voices. Write out each S with the A below it for comparison and discuss any tonal adjustments. Analyze both harmonically.

2. Write answers to the following subjects. Compare and discuss in class. Some should be worked out together at the board. Where variant answers seem feasible, these should be discussed. All except the last eight are by Bach.

3. Write A's to the S's you wrote in Exercises 3, 4, and 5, p. 223.