Seeing and Hearing Music

COMBINING GENRES IN FILM VERSIONS

OF BACH’S SIX SUITES FOR SOLO CELLO

SENIOR THESIS FOR MUSIC

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# Table of Contents

**Table of Contents**  

2

**List of Music Examples**  

3

**List of Video Clips**  

4

**Introducing Bach Suite Films**  

5

**Part I: Diagramming Music: Montage and Showing Musical Forms/Genres**  

7

- Introduction to Montage and Links to Sound Recording  
  7

- Comparing Audio and Visual Methods  
  12

- Montage Case Studies  
  14

**Part II: Generic Crossover: Influences from Other Film Traditions on Bach Suite Montage**  

25

- Documentary Film and Didactic Montage  
  25

- Music Video: Illustrating Both Structure and Gesture  
  28

- Case Studies: Comparing the Influence of Music Video on Two Bach Films  
  35

**Part III: The Historical Bach: Representing Social and Historical Context/Genres**  

41

- Showing and Telling History  
  41

- The Myth of Bach’s Spirituality: A History, and its Influence on Bach Suite Films  
  46

- Cautious Avoidance of Historical Context  
  54

- From Dances to DVDs: Melding New and Old Contexts and Genres  
  55

**Conclusion**  

59

**Works Cited/Bibliography**  

61
Example 1: Bach *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Fugue No. 20 in A minor, exposition
Glenn Gould’s editing

Example 2: Bach *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Fugue No. 20 in A minor, conclusion
Glenn Gould’s editing

Example 3: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Allemande
Pablo Casals and Wen-Sinn Yang’s editing

Example 4: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 3 in C major, Prelude
Mstislav Rostropovich’s editing

Example 5: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Gigue
Anner Bylsma, Mischa Maisky, and Pablo Casals’ editing

Example 6: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 3 in C major, Sarabande
Wen-Sinn Yang’s editing

Example 7: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 6 in D major, Gavotte I & II
*Selections* of Wen-Sinn Yang and Yo-Yo Ma’s editing
CD-ROM: Video Clips

Audio Example 1: Bach *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Fugue No. 20 in A minor
Glenn Gould performance

Example 1: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Allemande
Pablo Casals performance

Example 2: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Allemande
Wen-Sinn Yang performance

Example 3: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 3 in C major, Prelude
Mstislav Rostropovich performance

Example 4: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Gigue
Anner Bylsma performance

Example 5: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Gigue
Mischa Maisky performance

Example 6: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Gigue
Pablo Casals performance

Example 7: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 3 in C major, Sarabande
Wen-Sinn Yang performance

Example 8: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 6 in D major, Gavotte I & II
Wen-Sinn Yang performance

Example 9: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 6 in D major, Gavotte I & II
Yo-Yo Ma performance

Example 10: Acting out Bach’s life. Monologue and Yo-Yo Ma performance of
the Suite No. 6 in D major, Sarabande.

Example 11: Yo-Yo Ma teaches Tamasaburo Bando about fugues.
INTRODUCING BACH SUITE FILMS

Recordings have long been a staple of the classical music world in the 20th and 21st centuries, and though the large majority of the output has been in the form of sound recordings, many performers have also been featured in video recordings. Of these filmed accounts of classical music, there are a strikingly large number of performances of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Six Suites for solo cello, which this essay will refer to as Bach Suite films. Why study these films? Part of the answer lies in their unique qualities compared to other classical music films, providing a particularly unusual context. Many other videos feature one movement of a work, or one short piece. While there are some films of a single Bach movement, many of them feature either a complete Suite, or all six Suites in their entirety. However, the most unusual aspect of Bach Suite films is that they do not depict a live concert where a film crew happened to be present. Rather, they are filmed outside of the concert hall, and are performed using multiple takes, without any live audience (aside from the invisible producers and film crew). In other words, Bach Suite films are some of the few classical videos that were performed and made exclusively and explicitly for film media. They are the closest visual equivalent to an audio recording made in a studio.

A more significant reason to study Bach Suite films is because it is so easy to assume that these films contain nothing to study, that they hold no meaning beyond their surface. A cultural conservative’s reaction might be that Bach Suite films are merely marketing gimmicks, or that they bastardize Bach’s music by taking it out of its rightful place in the concert hall. What this type of view misses is that our current understanding of Bach and the placement of his music in the concert hall is no more authentic or correct
than any filmed version. The primary strength of studying Bach Suite films is that they allow us to appreciate how the Suites have always been an amalgamation of genres. This is true of both an understanding of musical genre in terms of formal traits and in terms of historical and social contexts (Samson 2009: 2). In terms of the formal aspects of the music, the Suites themselves are a bricolage of different stylized dance genres of the 18th century (allemandes, courantes, sarabandes, etc.). In addition, the history of the Suites is defined by frequent changes of social context, from profane dances to a chamber music form, which was in turn translated into music for the public concert hall. Given this history, the transition of the Cello Suites onto film genres is not at all inappropriate.

Bach Suite films interact in a multifaceted manner with this history of genre combinations and transitions, both by referencing earlier understandings of the Suites and by adding a number of new genres to their vocabulary. This essay will therefore require an equally diverse set of tools to understand the films. Some of these are musical tools. Musical analysis provides a way of understanding not only Bach’s works, but also the performer’s interpretation of the works and the filmmaker’s interpretation of the performance. Through musical analysis, we can understand how these films relate to issues of sequences, repetitions, counterpoint, phrasing, and closure. Historical knowledge about the Suites will also prove useful for understanding how these Suites fit into traditions of the time, and how they have been received and performed after Bach’s time. This allows comparison of Bach Suite films not only to baroque practices, but also to practices of the 19th and 20th centuries. In addition to understanding the musicological aspects of the Suites, it is necessary to engage with relevant cinematic theories. The principle of montage is particularly important to understanding how film editors craft
their interpretation, as is the parallelism between montage and the use of tape splicing in sound recording. In addition, filmmakers of Bach Suite videos draw on a number of other cinematic genres in order to visualize the music. The visual languages of standard Hollywood narrative film, Russian formalist cinema (such as the films of Sergei Eisenstein), documentary film, and pop music video all inform the approach taken by Bach Suite films. The huge variety of contexts and analytical approaches that the films reference suggests that they are far from being the mindless performance films we might expect them to be. Each of these approaches can help us see how these films interact with ideas of analysis and structure, references to other film styles, and understandings of the historical settings of the Suites.

PART I: DIAGRAMMING MUSIC: MONTAGE AND SHOWING MUSICAL FORMS/GENRES

Introduction to Montage and Links to Sound Recording

One of the primary ways in which Bach Suite films interact with ideas of musical genre is through their use of montage, that is, their combination of a number of shots or camera angles to form a continuous whole. As we will see, the decision of where to change camera view is hardly arbitrary in these films, but rather reflects particular assumptions about what parts of the music are analytically important. These important points are not natural to the music, but rather reflect a particular interpretation of the work. In essence, the film’s montage creates a diagram of the piece. Furthermore, the analytic assumptions informing the montage also reflect the interpreter’s sense of which musical genre (or genres) the work exhibits.
The notion of assembling pieces of video is not entirely new to film. After all, the ability to splice audio tape provided a similar way of recombining parts of a recording session. Since this audio technique is well known for being applied to music performances, it is useful to use this a departure point from which to understand the lesser-known practice of cutting and editing videos of music performances. Pianist Glenn Gould’s article on audio recording presents a view remarkably similar to the characterization of Bach Suite films above. Gould suggests that a recording may add a layer of interpretation or analysis to a performance, linking this possibility to a fundamental change in how recording technology is understood. As we will see, a significant part of this change of understanding centers on the ability to splice tape. Writing in the 1960s, Gould identifies two traditions of recording, one older and the other more modern, which he maps loosely onto Eastern and Western Europe. The older style claims to authentically reproduce a performance as it would have been heard in concert, while the newer tradition views recording as an interpretive and analytic act.

Earlier recordings, Gould claims, attempted to remain close to the ideals of the concert hall. “Two generations ago, concertgoers preferred that their occasional experience of music be fitted with an acoustic splendor, cavernously reverberant if possible, and pioneer recording ventures attempted to simulate the cathedrallike [sic] sound which the architects of that day tried to capture for the concert hall – the cathedral of the symphony.” (Gould 1966: 333) Similarly, he points out that in Eastern Europe, “for reasons both economic and geographic – traditions of public concertgoing retain a social cachet” that was not found to the same extent in Western Europe or North America at the time. Recordings from Eastern Europe reflect this cachet of the concert hall, Gould
claims. For example, Sviatoslav Richter’s recorded recital in Sofia, Bulgaria is “transcribed by technicians who are determined that their microphones will in no way amplify, dissect, or intrude on the occasion being preserved.” The recording is primarily intended to be “an inconspicuous complement of Richter’s performance.” (Gould 1966: 334) These descriptions of Eastern European styles, rooted in an older concert practices, provide a stance with which modern recordings from Western Europe and North America can be compared.

More modern recordings focused less on documenting performance and more on an idealized sound that could analyze the music and craft interpretations. These interpretations, Gould claims, were impossible using previous technology. “By virtue of this Westernized sound, recording has developed its own conversions, which do not always conform to those traditions that derive from the acoustical limitations of the concert hall. We have, for instance, come to expect a Brünnhilde, blessed with amplification as well as amplitude, who can surmount without struggle the velvet diapason of the Wagnerian orchestra… demands which contravene the acoustical possibilities of the concert hall or opera house.” (Gould 1966: 334) At this point, it is clear that Gould is taking sides: the modern style is characterized as “analytic,” while he claims that the recording engineers in Sofia “sabotaged” Richter’s playing (Gould 1966: 334). Nevertheless, Gould’s point is important, introducing the idea of recording (or other mediated performance) as an interpretation rather than merely a reproduction.

According to Gould, the ability to splice audio plays a key role in this changing view of recording, a change that also has a profound impact on the role of the performer and the editor. The splice, Gould argues, is not merely a cheap tool for covering up
mistakes, but provides a drastically new process for interpreting a work of music, resulting in an otherwise unattainable type of performance. Though some skeptics of audio editing “claim that the common splice sabotages some unified architectural conception which they assume the performer possesses,” Gould suggests the exact opposite. He posits that recordings can actually create a “unified architecture” that was not previously part of the performance (1966: 337). Gould uses the process of his recording of the A minor fugue from Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier as an example. Of his takes in the studio, “two of these at the time were regarded, according to the producer’s notes, as satisfactory” though each was quite different stylistically. One was “solemn, legato, rather pompous” and the other was “prevailing staccato.” While editing, however, Gould decided that neither of these takes played back well on its own. “When takes 6 and 8 were played several times in rapid alternation, it became apparent that both had a defect of which we had been quite unaware in the studio: both were monotonous.” (Gould 1966: 338). By cutting and recombining the two differently articulated takes, Gould and his editor created a performance with a new unified structure based on a legato beginning and ending and a staccato middle section. Exactly how Gould’s example illustrates a particular musical analysis of the fugue will be shown in the next section (also in Music Examples 1 and 2). For now, what is important is the centrality of re-combining audio tape to Gould’s concept of recording as an interpretive act. Gould even suggests that this interpretive editing created “a performance of this particular fugue far superior to anything that we could at the time have done in the studio.” (Gould 1966: 339)
Gould’s enthusiasm somewhat overstates the potential of recordings. After all, Gould’s idea of changing articulation within the fugue could have easily been achieved in a live performance. Gould recognizes this, but simply counters that “the necessity of such diversity is unlikely to become apparent during the studio session, just as it is unlikely to occur to a performer operating under concert conditions.” (Gould 1966: 339) Gould’s evocation of “the necessity” of a diverse style in fact points towards a larger hole in his argument. The monotony of the unedited performances only was perceived after listening to the takes multiple times, a type of listening only possible with a recording. Thus, a problem created by audio recording had to be “fixed” with more recording technology. The key to Gould’s example, therefore, is not that sound recording produces something entirely new, but rather that it can provide its own interpretive gloss on a performance. This gloss may not necessarily be new, but may instead reflect previously existing ways of interpreting music.

In this sense, the interpretation of a piece in a recording becomes collaborative work. The performer is, in this case, not the sole producer of musical meaning, but instead shares this role with others who may add this interpretive gloss. “Inevitably, however, the functions of the performer and the tape editor begin to overlap. Indeed, in regard to decisions such as that taken in the case of the abovementioned A-minor fugue, it would be impossible for the listener to establish at which point the authority of the performer gave way to that of the producer and tape editor.” (Gould 1966: 339) By introducing the authority of these other people into the performance, the process of interpreting a work is changed. Each of these people provides analytical assumptions that
shape the recording at multiple levels, both in the studio material and the editing of this material.

**Comparing Audio and Visual Methods**

Bach Suite films use montage to re-combine materials much as sound recordings do with splicing, providing an analytical gloss of the performance. However, there are also notable differences between audio and visual methods of editing. One of the most notable aspects of Gould’s splicing example is that it is completely inaudible to a listener who has not read his article. While this listener may notice Gould’s different playing styles, he or she does not recognize these as edit points. Rather, the music sounds continuous. It is only once one reads about how Gould has used splicing techniques that one can actually differentiate the two takes. With visual montage, on the other hand, the viewer easily notices when a camera angle has changed. Since montage is such a pervasive element of film and television, the viewer may react only casually to a cut, but they certainly have noticed it, without any need to be told beforehand. In this sense, visual cuts are much sharper and more noticeable than musical ones.¹ Musical analysis through visual montage therefore acts as a code linking filmmakers and viewers, while audio splicing is concealed from listeners.

However, this is not to say that everything is clear in film montage: since visual cutting also involves audio cutting, it can carry over many of the same uncertainties. One

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¹ That is, at least as long as standard music recording methods are used: a cut between two takes with different microphone setups or in different locations, for example, would stand out easily. Similarly, a cut placed too early or late might modify the music’s original rhythm in an audible manner. In popular music, DJs have made this disjuncture a desirable sound. In most classical recordings, Bach videos, and narrative films, however, unobtrusive audio edits are the norm.
cannot always be sure if the sound and image were recorded simultaneously, or if they
were edited together. Dialogue is often re-recorded and sound effects are added in
narrative film, while actors in music videos (a genre discussed extensively later) mime to
an already-recorded song (Buhler et al. 2010: 414; Vernallis 2004: xii). In Bach Suite
films, this tension is avoided: we can be reasonably certain that the sounds we hear were
recorded at the same time as the visuals we see. Microphones are visible in a number of
the films, and Wen-Sinn Yang’s film includes a “making-of” section that clearly
demonstrates that the sound and video were recorded simultaneously. However, this
segment also includes outtakes, showing that multiple takes were made. While the
viewer can be sure that the audio matches the video within one shot, the relationship
between this and the next shot is unclear. The next shot might simply be a change to a
different camera that was recording during the same take (in this case, the visual track
cuts, but the audio remains continuous). On the other hand, the two shots might have
been recorded several hours or days apart, meaning that both the sound and image have
been edited. As before, we are unable to distinguish audio splices, and the visuals reveal
no clues about when they were recorded relative to each other.

This difference between the immediately noticeable visual cut and the concealed
audio splice has been exploited in different ways by different film genres. In narrative
cinema, the illusion of sound continuity is often used to smooth over the sharp visual
cuts, especially in transitions between scenes. This follows “an editing rule of thumb:
image and sound should not be cut at the same point unless a particular effect is called
for. The sound bridge can be understood simply as a longer version of these overlaps,
long enough to reach the immediate consciousness of the viewer.” (Buhler et al. 2010:
This notion that sound and image should not exactly match each other is also at the root of the Russian formalists’ argument for contrapuntal relationships between sound and image, a narrative film concept that will be further explored later (Eisenstein et al. 1928: 81). In these narrative film cases, the focus is on a fragmented visual narrative that relies on sound to provide continuity. Conversely, in Bach Suite films the music is the central subject, and is accompanied by visual language. For these films, the focus on sound might create “too much” continuity, so that the sharp visual cuts divide up the music in a manner that provides analytical clarity. Bach’s solo music is particularly continuous, in the sense that it has so few rests and no changes in instrumentation, so the visual divisions become all the more important in pointing towards an interpretation of the music.

Montage Case Studies

The most common and most noticeable way in which performers and editors have used methods of re-combination (montage and spicing) to divide up music is by illuminating its external form. By making cuts at formally significant points, such as a repeat, a return, or a departure from previous material, a recording can make a diagram of the piece. This is true of both audio and video recordings, as Gould demonstrates. In his example of how he spliced two takes of the A minor fugue in Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier, each of the edit points were chosen for their formal significance. “And so two rudimentary splices were made, one which jumps from take 6 to take 8 in bar 14 and another which at the return to A minor (I forget in which measure, but you are invited to look for it [m. 80]) returns as well to take 6.” (Gould 1966: 339) The first splice Gould
mentions, in measure 14, occurs at the end of the exposition, once all the fugal voices have entered (see Music Example 1). The second splice, at the return to A minor in measure 80, is also marked very clearly in Bach’s text. The preceding material is in D minor, but measure 80 features a fermata on V/V of A minor, leading to a false exposition of the subject with relatively sparse counterpoint outlining a dominant and tonic (see Music Example 2). Therefore, Gould’s splices both occur at structurally significant points in the piece, marking off the opening statement and the return to the original key.

However, fugues do not follow a “pre-ordained plan” of musical events in the way a sonata form does, where exposition and recapitulation are necessarily key events (Dreyfus 1993: 101). Measure 80 is, in fact, one of many modulations back to A minor throughout the piece, though the fermata makes it the most dramatic. Furthermore, the sense of return is undermined in measure 83 by moving to D minor and finishing the fugue in A major. Gould’s splices form a particular interpretation in which departure from and dramatic return to the home key become important points. Considering the ambiguity surrounding measure 80, this would certainly not be the only possible analysis. Rather than merely making a more lively performance, Gould’s combination of takes reveals his analytical assumptions as a performer.

By splicing at these moments, Gould creates a character contrast between sections in A minor and sections that move away from this tonal center. “It was obvious that the somewhat overbearing posture of take 6 was entirely suitable for the opening exposition as well as for the concluding statements of the fugue, while the more effervescent character of take 8 was a welcome relief in the episodic modulations with which the
center portion of the fugue is concerned.” (Gould 1966: 338-339) Without knowing about Gould’s montage, the listener will not hear the splices, but one who is listening for them can perceive the changes in articulation that mark off the fugue’s structure. The listener is therefore free to ignore Gould’s editorial slight of hand, requiring Gould to rely solely on playing style (even if it is an combined style) to show the piece’s form.

On the other hand, in with the addition of a video track in Bach Suite films, the presence of the editing becomes impossible to ignore. While Bach films, like sound recordings, use inconspicuous edits that change playing style on the sound track, they cannot hide the montage on the video track that accompanies these edits. This in fact gives Bach films a wider variety of options regarding how to show structure. They may choose to make some edits unnoticeable (those that were made for playing style, on the sound track), and decide to highlight some by making them visually present. Bach Suite films often use visual splicing to illuminate the music’s external form. At the broadest level of organization, this trend is the most consistent: all the Bach Suite films viewed for this essay make a cut in between every movement. Within the dance movements, most of the films’ montages point out the two-part AABB form that these movements share (the “popular” dances such as minuets, bourrées, and gigues come in pairs, played with a da capo return: AABB CCDD AB; Fuller 2009: 6iii). In Bach Suite films, it is very common to make a cut at the beginning and end of all of these sections, both in the standard dances and in the paired “popular” dances. Pablo Casals’ film of the Allemande from Suite No. 1 in G major demonstrates this structural editing. Casals’ film cuts from one camera to another at each time it arrives at one of the repeat signs, signaling either the repeat of a section, a continuation on to another section, or the end of the movement.
There are only three other cuts in this movement, which are also somewhat structurally significant. One highlights the beginning of the modulation back to G major at the third beat of measure 24. The second time through, the cadential arrival in A minor at the downbeat of the same measure is stressed. The third cut appears somewhat arbitrary, on the third beat of measure 12.

While these cuts have some significance, they are not executed as consistently (why make the cut two beats earlier the second time?) as those based on structures of repetition. This particular type of formal edit point appears to be of primary significance in the montage of the film, with cadential and key change edits taking a somewhat lesser position.

Likewise, we may find a similar emphasis on showing structure in Wen-Sinn Yang’s film of the same movement made almost fifty years later. Though Yang includes a few more splices, the basic pattern of making a cut at each of the repeats and section endings remains consistent (see Music Example 3, Video Example 2). Like Casals’ cut on measure 24, some of Yang’s cuts other than these primary structural ones occur at cadential arrival points. For example, Yang makes the same cut at measure 24, and also creates a break after the cadence in measure 4 (second time only) and at the A minor arrival in measure 22 (second time only). The fact that the Casals film, by far the earliest of the genre, shares this emphasis on showing structure through montage with Yang’s film from 2005 demonstrates how central this technique is to Bach Suite films. This is not a style that is unique to the G major Suite, or to Allemandes: a cut can be found at almost every repeat or section change in any of the Bach Suite films, regardless of
movement, suite number, or performer. Just as hearing and musical analysis were linked in Gould’s recording, so has seeing been linked to analysis in these films.

The collaboration between performers and editors in Bach Suite films is not necessarily limited to pointing out repeats and section changes. Within the dance movements with a pre-determined formal structure, as we have seen, the video editing usually most strongly reflects this external form, by making few cuts aside from those at the repeats and at the beginning of a new section. However, the editing of Bach Suite films can often signpost other aspects of the music. This becomes most visible in the preludes to the suites, which are free-form introductions, not based on any pre-existent formal structure (though they do include a return to the original key). Given this lack of strictly defined form, the films bring out other aspects of the performance.

Mstislav Rostropovich’s film of the Suite No. 3 in C major displays a particularly deft collaboration between the performer and editor in the Prelude. Before the performance, Rostropovich speaks to the camera, describing his vision of the piece: “See how long in this C major Prelude he [Bach] fluctuates around the dominant while events develop over the bass G. I’ll start a bit earlier so you’ll notice where the pedal-point begins.” He plays on the piano beginning at measure 37, then at measure 45 announces “Here’s the pedal-point. [m. 49] Here’s where things start to develop on the pedal-point.” At measure 61, he claims that “the pedal point remains,” and it is only at measure 81 that he says, “At last he returns to the original key. True, musical pedants might say I see the pedal-point as continuing for longer than it does in reality in Bach’s music. They might consider that already from here [plays m. 61] the bass moves through other keys. I feel that the pedal-point continues considerably longer. To my mind, the tension is all the
greater for this.” Rostropovich’s vision of implied pedal-point in measures 61-81 suggests that most of the second half of the Prelude is an extended dominant.

While we may not necessarily pick up on this view of the piece by listening (especially since Rostropovich informs us that not everyone will agree with this analysis), Rostropovich’s video performance conveys this idea through the editing (see Music Example 4, Video Example 3). At measure 45, where the pedal-point begins, the film cuts to a new angle (2:23). Though this close-up camera framing moves between Rostropovich’s hand, head, and bow, the same shot continues throughout the entire pedal-point and implied pedal-point section, finally cutting again just before the resolution to C major in measure 87 (3:58). By continuing the same shot throughout this section, the montage illustrates the unity of this section of the music. In addition, some of the divisions Rostropovich describes within the pedal-point section are highlighted through changes in the moving camera. At measure 49, where “things start to develop on the pedal-point,” the previously stationary camera begins to move upwards from his hand towards his face. At measure 61, where the pedal-point is no longer explicit, but is implied, the camera is already moving, but the type of motion changes slightly from a downward pan to a slow zoom in on the bow. Using montage to set a particular section apart, Rostropovich’s film has conveyed a particular analysis of the piece.

In fact, this analysis is very similar to Gould’s analysis of the Bach fugue. Both pieces are fairly freely structured, and so Gould and Rostropovich treat the final return to the original key as a musically significant moment. They both precede this moment with a very long continuous view or take and then mark the return with a cut. Without a definite structure of repetition, both performers have chosen an analysis based on key
structure. However, it is not clear that they arrived at this analysis in the same manner. While Gould says he arrived at this editing solution through re-listening to his studio session, it is not clear that Rostropovich’s decision was based on listening. Instead, it appears that this interpretation is completely inaudible in Rostropovich’s recording, leaving this gloss entirely up to the visual cutting.

This is not to say, of course, that every musical element of a piece is translated into the video montage. Rather, each video is a limited interpretation, selecting only certain parts of the music to visualize. This said, sometimes elements one might expect to be illustrated in the montage are not included. For example, interpretations of Bach Suites before the baroque performance practice movement favored longer, more romantic phrasing featuring elided bowings, while baroque cellists like Anner Bylsma defend shorter phrases as more historically accurate. In the program notes for his DVD, Bylsma is quoted on his preference for shorter phrases: “We cellists have been brainwashed to think that we must all sing in one big line. To me this isn’t singing, this is more like talking without enunciating the syllables… I prefer clarity […] Bach’s music is about counterpoint. You destroy the sense of counterpoint when you take the various voices and squash them into a single line.” (Rudelt 2000: 4). Given these views, one might think that a performance based on shorter phrases would be matched with a closely-cut montage, while longer phrases would lead to longer camera shots. However, this does not appear to be the case, as Bylsma’s video includes very few cuts of camera outside of the basic formal markers. For example, in the Gigue of the First Suite in G major, Bylsma only makes five cuts (see Music Example 5, Video Example 4). One is between the previous movement and the beginning of the Gigue and the others occur each time
Bylsma arrives at the repeat sign at the end of a section (at the end of m. 12 and m. 34). Despite Bylsma’s preference for short phrases, his film displays the strictest adherence to structural montage, and therefore uses the longest shot durations.

By contrast, though Mischa Maisky favors longer phrasing, the montage of his film does not reflect this view. Jochen Rudelt’s liner notes for Maisky note that “The cellist has prepared his own edition [of the Bach Suites], in which he writes out all the repeats. ‘I believe that there isn’t such a thing as repetition in great music,’ he says, and ‘the unbroken linearity of the music is conveyed better this way.’” (2007: 5) Maisky’s editing, however, points out somewhat shorter and more repetitive phrase structures in the music. His Gigue (also from the G major Suite) makes cuts at the repeat at measure 13, then the second time through at the pickup to measure 9, suggesting an 8-bar and a 4-bar phrase (see Music Example 5, Video Example 5). In addition to making a cut again at measure 13 and at the final repeat, he switches cameras at the pickups to measure 21 (both times) and measure 25 (first time only). Maisky’s editing, therefore, illustrates smaller-scale phrase divisions than Bylsma’s, though their playing styles suggest the opposite. In addition, despite Maisky’s claim that “there isn’t such a thing as repetition” in the Suites, his montage consistently highlights the repeats, suggesting a greater interest in the conventions of the film genre than the particularities of Maisky’s interpretation.

There are several ways to explain this counter-intuitive relationship between Bylsma and Maisky’s montage structures and their philosophies on Bach’s phrase lengths. One way is by looking towards narrative film conventions which sometimes convey a contrapuntal relationship between sound and image. Such devices were especially favored by the early Soviet filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin,
and Grigori Alexandrov, who collaborated on an important theoretical “Statement on Sound” crafted during the late 1920s. For them, sound that is too synchronous undermines the intentions of visual montage. “Mere addition of sound to montage fragments increases their inertia as such and their independent significance; this is undoubtedly detrimental to montage which operates above all not with fragments but through the juxtaposition of fragments. Only the contrapuntal use of sound vis-à-vis the visual fragment of montage will open up new possibilities for the development and perfection of montage.” (Eisenstein et al. 1928: 81) The technique has become a standard part of narrative film sound, especially used to show emotional distance between the sound and image. For example, celebratory music over the image of a distraught person can function to contrast the character’s feelings with another, obliviously happy, character. In this case the sound emphasizes the character’s isolation (Buhler et al. 2010: 106).

Similarly, Maisky and Bylsma’s films divide up the functions of sound and image so that each one contributes independently to the film without being redundant. In Bylsma’s case, the sound of his playing has already divided Bach’s music into shorter phrases, so the image montage provides a counterpoint by showing the larger structure. Maisky’s does the opposite, highlighting a broader sense of structure through the sound (Maisky’s playing), while the montage shows the shorter cadence divisions also present in the music. In this manner, these films are able to show multiple levels of musical structure instead of merely letting the image imitate the sound at the most literal level.

On the other hand, this apparent contradiction between the performers’ and the editors’ interpretations may be because we are looking for meaning in the wrong place.
Perhaps the editors may have simply had a different illustrative goal in mind. While it is not clear why Maisky uses quicker editing even though he favors longer phrases, Pablo Casals’ version of this Gigue exhibits the same apparent contradiction, but is more explainable. In Casals’ case, using faster montage serves a structural purpose by giving the work a dramatic ending. Casals, who was already 77 years old by the time his Bach film was made in 1954, was from the generation before the historical performance practice movement. His interpretation bears certain similarities to Maisky’s, and Maisky’s program booklet mentions Casals’ influence on the younger cellist specifically in terms of his choice of romantic phrasing (Rudelt 2007: 4-5). Montage cuts are sparse in most of Casals’ film, which would appear appropriate for his sense of long phrases, though it probably also reflects technical limitations of the time. Casals’ Gigue, however, is an exception to this pattern, and, like Maisky, this movement features a higher speed of montage than might be expected of such an interpretation (see Music Example 5, Video Example 6). Casals makes cuts at many of the same places that Maisky does (an overview: m. 5 both times, m. 9 both times, repeat/section break, m. 21, m. 28, pickup to m. 33). However, the last time through the second section, Casals’ film becomes quite different from previous examples. There are cuts on every downbeat from m. 28 to m. 31, emphasizing the imitative sequence in the music (1:40-1:55). As the imitative entrances become more frequent (from every measure to every half measure), the montage likewise becomes more frequent, finally slowing down during the cadential figure and marking the final tonic with another cut. This diagramming of the imitative voicing through montage would appear more appropriate to Bylsma’s view of Bach’s phrasing, but here the editor’s purpose is primarily to highlight the ending of the Suite.
The added dynamism of the quick cuts here lends a sense of finality to the ending. Both the slower- and quicker-paced montages in the Casals video demonstrate a macroscopic structure, either of a particular movement (showing the section breaks) or of the entire multi-movement work (showing that the ending is approaching). Viewed in this light, Casals’ use of montage, whether slower or faster, compliments his accordingly macroscopic sense of phrasing. In this sense, Casals’ film, like many of the others, uses montage to make a diagram of the piece, emphasizing not only formal structure, but also ideas such as phrase length or tonal organization of the work.

This diagramming of a piece through montage can allow the performer to visually communicate their interpretation of the music. The choice of cuts can also communicate the generic assumptions behind the interpretation. The interpretations we have considered have identified the Suites with a variety of genres including binary form, contrapuntal types (using techniques such as imitation or pedal point), the finale, and departure and return to a main motive and key. Interestingly, the baroque dance genres of the movement titles (Allemande, Sarabande, etc.) appear to be excluded from these readings of the Suites, a problem that will be confronted again later on. The presence of so many genre associations within the montage, as well as the absence of other genres, speaks to the multifaceted nature of both this visual technique and also of the received understanding of the Suites.

PART II: GENERIC CROSSOVER: INFLUENCES FROM OTHER FILM TRADITIONS ON BACH SUITE MONTAGE
Documentary Film and Didactic Montage

The editing style of Bach Suite films, using montage to signpost the structure of the music, was certainly not developed in a vacuum. Bach films are made not only with sensitivity towards the generic formal attributes of the music, but also with a knowledge of related film genres. One of the film traditions that have influenced the production of Bach Suite films is the documentary. Documentary as a genre is very difficult to define, but John Grierson’s characterization of the documentary, one of the earliest of such attempts, is particularly revealing [here paraphrased by Izod and Kilborn]. “The documentarist must deploy a whole range of creative skills to fashion the ‘fragments of reality’ into an artifact that has a specific social impact: that is educationally instructive, or, in some measure, culturally enlightening.” (Izod and Kilborn 1998: 426-427) This definition points towards a key tension in the documentary genre. On the one hand, these films purportedly show some kind of truth or reality. On the other hand, in order to enlighten the audience, these films fragment reality, juxtaposing pieces of it in a creative and provocative manner. In order to create this “truth,” a great deal of artifice is necessary (Izod and Kilborn 1998: 427). These ideas about reality, fragmentation, and creating a didactic product are reflected in Bach Suite films.

Truth becomes a difficult concept when dealing with recordings, as we may recall from the earlier discussion of Glenn Gould and audio recording. Some recordings may seek to “preserve” a performance, such as Sviatoslav Richter’s recital in Sofia (Gould 1966: 334). Such a recording might claim to be merely a document that passes on the reality of a performance. Igor Stravinsky was particularly notable for seeing recording technology in this light, claiming that the CBS recordings of his compositions “have all
the importance of documents, which can serve as guides to all executants of my music.” (Stravinsky 1936: 150) Bach Suite films make some claims to truth, though these are more limited than Stravinsky’s claims to complete authority. Viewers of Bach Suite films are expected to readily accept that they are watching the actual performers, who really are authorities of cello performance. By comparison, in narrative film audiences have come to accept that often when an actor “plays” an instrument, it will not be synchronized with the soundtrack. We know that the actor is not really a musician and that the sound was recorded later by someone who is (Buhler et al 2010: 107). Bach films suggest a “real” relationship between sound and image: they show actual musicians, and sometimes include microphones in the frame, suggesting not only that the sound and image are the same performer, but also that they were recorded at the same time.

Despite this element of “reality” implied in documentaries, audio recordings, and Bach Suite films, they are all, in fact, creative interpretations. All of these involve the manipulation of “fragments of reality” in order to achieve a result. As we have seen in the last section, combining multiple audio takes or multiple camera angles can be used to interpret musical events. For example, Rostropovich’s use of montage contrasts the pedal point and arpeggiation of one section with the arrival in C major and rolled chords in the next, one possible interpretation of the music. Similarly, documentaries combine shots of different events or statements in order to highlight a particular pattern connecting them. Just as Rostropovich contrasted sections of music, a documentary might juxtapose two shots that contrast one person’s opinion with another’s. Even recordings made in a single take, such as observational documentaries or live concert recordings, divide up their source simply by deciding when to start and stop recording, or when to cut out an
“unimportant” part (for example, concert recordings generally cut most of the applause, pauses between pieces, and ambient talking before and after the concert). The notion of crafting meaning out of fragments of supposedly raw truth is common to both documentary films and Bach Suite videos.

The distinctive generic goal of documentaries is to teach the audience by showing them this arrangement of truth fragments. Montage in Bach Suite films acts in a similarly didactic manner. By seeing the music divided into parts, the viewer is intended to learn about the structure and hear the divisions as well. This becomes particularly evident in films that supplement the performance footage with sections spoken to the camera, much like a standard documentary or journalistic interview. In the Rostropovich example, a viewer who is watching actively may notice the correspondence between sectional changes and camera cuts. However, for those who might not necessarily be familiar in this case with some of the musical distinctions between the two sections, Rostropovich’s speech helps explain. He defines pedal point, describes tonic, dominant, and subdominant functions, culminating with his description of the pedal point and tonic arrival in the C major Prelude. The aim of this speech and the subsequent montage during the performance, therefore, is to teach the viewer about how Bach’s music is organized and some basic features of tonal music. From hearing language, the audience is made more likely to see the visual interpretation, which in turn translates back into an auditory understanding, this time of music. As with documentaries, Bach Suite films attempt to enlighten their audience, presenting what is actually a fragmented interpretation as a form of truth.
Music Video: Illustrating Both Structure and Gesture

Popular music video of the kind made known by MTV is another film genre that has a strong influence on the structural montage used in Bach Suite films. Unlike documentaries, music videos eschew any didactic overtones and make no claims regarding the truth or authority of their interpretation: “Music video directors like to say that there is no right visualization of a song, only a number of readings.” (Vernallis 2004: 96) Music video uses montage in order to illustrate musical features and make watching music an engaging experience for a wide audience, without these didactic elements. A large part of making music visible in both music videos and Bach Suite films is cutting based on structural and phrase divisions. However, in music videos there is also an emphasis on using narrative, settings, or color schemes to emphasize the structure, as well as a concern for lending the video a sense of musical gesture and flow. These techniques are sometimes used by Bach Suite films, and are particularly present Yo-Yo Ma’s films, but for the most part, Bach films are fairly conservative in their manner of adopting music video idioms. Perhaps Bach films are tapping into music video genres in part because of music videos’ complex approach to visualizing music and musical types, but the Bach films’ conservatism also indicates some ambivalence regarding the genre’s associations with the contemporary and the popular.

Like the dance movements of the Bach Suites, popular music usually focuses on repeating structures, based around alternations of verse and chorus. Videos of both of these forms often work to highlight when these repetitions occur. According to Carol Vernallis’ *Experiencing Music Video*, music video editing is concerned with various aspects of the music, but “especially the song’s sectional divisions.” (2004: 27) This
illumination of the broad structure of the music is highly reminiscent of how Bach Suite films usually cut at repeat signs and the beginnings of new sections. In addition, Vernallis describes how narratives in music video can contribute to this sectional cutting, using Janet Jackson’s “Love Will Never Do (Without You)” as an example.

A more telling aspect of the Jackson video is evident if we acknowledge the form of the song as it relates to moments of narrative revelation or closure. Specifically, Jackson always initiates a meeting with her lover at the beginning of a verse, sits isolated on the bed in her bedroom during the bridge, and then unites with her lover during the chorus. The minimal nature of the narrative – girl apart, girl together – fits well with the song’s three-part structure. (Vernallis 2004: 9)

By crafting three general visual themes to go with the three musical sections, videos like Jackson’s are able to emphasize the cuts that occur at each of these structural divisions.

Bach Suite films are not the only classical music videos to reflect these pop music video techniques. Simon Cellan Jones’ BBC film Eroica bears several generic similarities to Bach Suite films. Eroica depicts the first rehearsal of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major (“Eroica”), placing its primary focus, like the Bach films, on showing the performance of a complete work of classical music. While there is some dialogue between movements and occasionally during the music, the majority of the film is comprised of an uninterrupted performance of Beethoven’s work by John Eliot Gardiner and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique. In addition, Nicholas Cook’s article on Eroica helps to show how the film’s adaptation of music video methods is particularly exemplary.

Though Beethoven’s “Eroica” does not share the same repetition-based structure as pop songs and Bach Suites, there is a similar, music video-influenced, emphasis in
Eroica\textsuperscript{2} on showing structure through both montage and narrative. In the first movement, the recapitulation is emphasized by a dramatization of an anecdote from the memoirs of Beethoven’s student, Ferdinand Ries. Ries denounces the horn player for coming in too early when he plays the first theme motive, a tonic triad, over a dominant harmony. In fact, the horn player’s entry two measures before the recapitulation is correct, and Beethoven is furious at Ries (Cook 2007: 30). The eventual result in the film is that the lead-in to the recapitulation must be played again, re-affirming the importance of this point of return (though Ries’ memoirs do not indicate that the orchestra actually had to re-start as they do in the film; Cook 2007: 30). In terms of montage, the first time through, the moment of recapitulation is not clearly marked, suggesting uncertainty about the return. However, on the second try, the recapitulation is confidently illustrated with a cut exactly on the downbeat of measure 398. Like in music videos, the narrative element and the montage are both structured to highlight the musical systems of repetition and return.

There nevertheless appears to be a pronounced difference between the relatively simple structural cutting in Bach films and the use of both montage and narrative to highlight form in music videos and in Eroica. Unlike music videos, Bach films focus almost exclusively on footage of the performance, a style that makes narrative elements much less pronounced. However, this is not to say that narrative is completely absent from Bach Suite films. Many of these videos use their setting as a framing structure that is superimposed on the musical structure. At certain structural points, the films will call attention to the location. In Mischa Maisky, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Wen-Sinn

\textsuperscript{2} NB: Eroica in italics refers to the film by that title, while “Eroica” in quotes refers to the common name of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3.
Yang’s films, we notice at the beginning of each Suite that the cellist is sitting in a different part of the location than they were in the last Suite. This highlights the change from one Suite to the next, treating all Six Suites as a single macroscopic structure. The movement through the keys of the Suites (G maj., D min., C maj., E-flat maj., C min., D maj.) is translated into physical displacements of the cellist. In addition, the camera will sometimes wander away from the performer to show off the architecture. This may occur in between movements of the Suite, marking off the each of these divisions within a single suite. It may also highlight a particular section of one movement. For example, Yang’s version of the Sarabande from the Suite No. 3 in C major shows only Yang from the beginning until the first repeat sign (m. 1-8), but then changes to a shot of frescoes in the church during the repetition of this section (see Music Example 6, Video Example 7, 0:00-1:35). Yang returns into view as the next section starts. The architectural tour in this case highlights the difference between new material and repetition. Touring the location becomes a minimal kind of narrative that supplements the music. Like a pop music video narrative, these tour narratives do not have a clear beginning, middle, or end, but are “episodic rather than sequentially directed.” (Vernallis 2004: 3) In both pop and classical videos, narrative acts primarily as a framing device for the music.

So far, we have only focused on how pop music videos show larger structures of repetition through montage and narrative. In this sense, they are very similar to Bach Suite films. However, other music video techniques that illustrate musical flow and gesture are adopted by some Bach films, but not by others. After identifying some of these techniques, we will compare Yang’s relatively conservative approach to Ma’s open embrace of these music video ideas. Though section changes in music videos usually
feature a cut in the montage, one of the most easily recognizable aspects of music video is that it cuts very quickly from one shot to another (Vernallis 2004: 27). Since there are so many cuts, the few that occur on large section changes do not appear particularly prominent. Rather, it is the changes in narrative and setting that make these sectional cuts noticeable. Unlike the slower structural montage in some Bach Suite films, the fast-paced montage in music videos works primarily to show smaller ideas about rhythm and gesture. This type of editing is often characterized as “cut[ting] to the phrase or beat, music video style,” which is, in fact, how Nicholas Cook describes *Eroica*’s approach to montage (Cook 2007: 29; Vernallis 2004: 27). However, Vernallis emphasizes that this editing style involves more than just showing the downbeat, which might give each video a fairly uniform approach. Instead, she claims that music video editing responds to a variety of musical elements.

Obviously, editing can reflect the basic beat pattern of the song, but it can also be responsive to all of the song’s other parameters. For example, long dissolves [fading instead of cutting from one shot to the next] can compliment arrangements that include smooth timbres and long-held tones. A video can use different visual material to offset an important hook or different cutting rhythm at the beginnings and ends of phrases. And, of course, these effects can switch from one-to-one relationships to something more contrapuntal. (Vernallis 2004: 49)

We have already seen some of these techniques in Bach Suite films. The use of “long dissolves” for “long-held tones” is very similar to the example where Rostropovich’s film does not use any cuts during a pedal point section. This essay also explored the contrapuntal relationship between Maisky and Bylsma’s sonic interpretations and the visual interpretation provided by the montage. However, the techniques of illustrating smaller gestures, such as cutting to the beat or highlighting rhythms at the beginning or ending of phrases, do not appear often in the cutting style of some Bach Suite films like
Yang’s. Rather, these Bach films’ montage tends to favor large structure over individual phrase rhythms (Ma’s films provide especially notable exceptions, which will be explored later on).

Another way in which the music video approach often differs from the more conservative Bach Suite films is in their expression of musical momentum. Music videos make pervasive use of several techniques that contribute to a sense of instability and forward motion. Some of these methods have already been mentioned here, such as fast rates of montage, or using narrative to reflect changes in the music (though the examples above also emphasized the repetition in narrative). Other techniques that build momentum relate to the use of the camera within each shot. For example, shots in music videos often frame their subject in ways that are not conventional in narrative film:

Most [film] textbooks recommend that the proportion of the figure to the space in the frame fall within set guidelines to achieve a sense of balance: if too much or too little space surrounds the figure, a shot is said to look awkward. Further, the camera should not frame the body in such a way that the frame’s edge passes through a join of the body, such as the neck, elbows, knees, or ankles. Music videos do not follow these rules. Not only is the relation between the figure and space frequently off kilter, but the camera bisects the figure in places that would be unacceptable for classic Hollywood film… This kind of framing can give a shot a precarious quality that the succeeding shot cannot always put right. In this way, the image moves forward, matching the momentum of the music. (Vernallis 2004: 32)

The instability of these unusual framings can also be supplemented by angled shots that are traditionally used only sparingly in narrative film. A shot can be from a low- or high-angle, where the camera is tilted up or down, or can be at a “Dutch angle,” where the camera is tilted left or right (this technique skews lines that would usually be horizontal or vertical, like the outline of a doorframe, making them diagonal lines). “A music video, by contrast, may contain a long series of high-angle or low-angle shots. When high- and
low-angle shots are mixed together to form a series, the video will lack a sense of 
ground.” (Vernallis 2004: 34) In addition, the pervasive use of moving shots in music 
videos, where the camera pans (left or right motion), zooms in or out, or moves on a 
dolly, contributes to this sense of musical flow. Combining a dolly shot with a low angle 
is especially common (Vernallis 2004: 34-35).

This type of momentum and instability is a particularly notable feature of Eroica. 
Cook notes that “The effect of dynamic motion is also constructed for the viewer by the 
constantly moving handheld camera, opening up different paths through both the 
orchestra and the listeners… The effect of this constantly dynamic quality – which again 
might be seen as a more or less straightforward translation to a classical-musical context 
of the commonplace practices of pop music videos – is to draw the viewer-listener into 
the film and into the music… and so creating the sense of really being there, of being part 
of the music while it lasts.” (Cook 2007: 42) Cook links this use of moving cameras 
directly to the same genre and function that Vernallis identifies – the technique is 
borrowed from music video, and it lends the music a sense of dynamism. Incidentally, 
the handheld cameras and “sense of really being there” also suggests references to 
documentary styles. Some Bach Suite films make use of these techniques of forward 
momentum only infrequently and tentatively. Others, on the other hand, fully adopt these 
methods, combining techniques for greater effect in the liberal manner of Eroica and pop 
music videos. This combination of techniques and genres remains very much in the 
multivalent vein of Bach Suite films.
Case Studies: Comparing the Influence of Music Video on Two Bach Films

Wen-Sinn Yang’s videos could easily exemplify a “standard” approach to Bach Suite films, one that is more conservative in its use of montage and camera techniques than pop music videos. On the other hand, Yo-Yo Ma’s *Inspired by Bach* films provide a notable counterexample by wholeheartedly adopting music video techniques. In order to fully appreciate the effect that these differing approaches have on how the viewer understands and categorizes the music, it is useful to compare Yang and Ma’s versions of the Gavottes from the Suite No. 6 in D major. While Yang’s restrained approaches to montage, framing the subject, camera angles, and camera motion create a sense of stability, Ma’s film makes use of these techniques in an off-kilter manner that pushes the film forwards.

Yang’s film clearly follows the previously discussed principle of cutting according to major formal divisions (see Part I, Montage Case Studies). Yang makes a cut at each repeat sign in each of the two Gavottes, as well as at certain notable moments such as the return of the initial motive of the Gavotte I in its original key (m. 20 third beat), or the section of increased figuration over a pedal point in Gavotte II (m. 12 third beat – m. 19; see Music Example 7, Video Example 8). Though montage often highlights what is different about each shot, here it is useful to notice what is basically the same about the shots in Yang’s Gavotte. Yang uses a fairly limited number of camera angles to create this montage. This movement appears to have been made using three cameras, one placed in front of Yang and the others on the left and right of him at about 45 degrees. A larger number of framings are created from this limited number of angles by using wider or closer shots. For example, during the repeat of the A section, Yang is
shown from the front, framed from the thighs upwards (0:21). After a number of other shots from the left and right, the next occurrence of a front view is closer in, framing Yang from the chest up (m. 8 third beat-m. 16 on repeat, 1:17). Yang’s film creates a sense of variety of shots, but there is a basic unity of angles used.

Each of these shots is aesthetically “correct” by conventional narrative film standards, making for a well-balanced and stable appearance. Most shots frame Yang’s body either full-length (from below the feet to above the head), or from the chest, waist, or thighs upwards, with sufficient “head space” above the head. These framings follow Vernallis’ characterization of standard film practices by not dividing up the body in an “awkward” manner and giving it the proper amount of space in the frame. In addition, the use of fairly straightforward camera angles add to sense of stability, without any Dutch angles and shooting straight on, only occasionally using a slightly low angle for shots from the right side.

The same sense of balance is created by the static nature of the camera. Aside from Yang’s movements, there is no other motion within the frame and the camera remains stationary, without any use of zoom or moving camera. It is also especially important that the viewer stays within a single setting, the Serviatuskirche auf dem Streichen in Chiemgau, Germany. Yang, seated on a chair, remains in the same place throughout the movement and does not move through the space of the church (though he does move when one looks at a broader level: he sits in a different part of the church for each of the six Suites). Using a variety of methods, Yang’s film expresses a sense of unity and a fairly conservative appropriation of music video montage. However, even this fairly conservative approach is quite removed from concert performance practices.
The film does not pretend that it is representing a concert, and the performance is framed only by a shot of Yang arriving and leaving the church and by his prefatory comments. There is no audience, and the camera flits among angles suggesting no particular subjectivity. Some of these angles might suggest an audience’s point of view, but others are purely cinematic.

Ma’s film of the same Gavotte, however, proves to be much more indebted to the sense of “flow” and instability present in music videos. Perhaps the most noticeable difference between Ma and Yang’s films is Ma’s use of multiple settings within a single movement (see Video Example 9). The movement begins and ends with hand motions over a black background. The hands, we soon realize, belong to ice dancers Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean, with whom Ma collaborated to choreograph the D major Suite. The dancers move on a large set (with ice instead of a floor) that does not suggest any clear location. In addition to this dance performance space, there is a cello performance space: Ma is shown playing on the roof of a city building. Within the rooftop setting, there is also notable use of text. The film pauses for a moment on a Bach quote written in graffiti style on the wall of the building. “There is nothing remarkable about it. All one has to do is hit the right notes at the right time and the instrument plays itself.” (0:47) The message of the graffiti oddly appears to contradict the emphasis in both music videos and Bach videos on displaying the star or virtuoso performer (Vernallis 2004: 54). However, the message also functions as part of the crossing of “high” and “low” art materials that is part of this video. On the one hand, it brings Ma and Bach to the language of “the street” while elevating graffiti to the level of philosophy, so that it, too, comments on the performance. In addition, the shot focuses exclusively on the text for an extended period.
of time, allowing us to read the full quote. This momentarily isolates the text from the rooftop setting, making the text almost like its own independent location. This use of multiple locations is a key aspect of music video and creates a sense of mobility and forward motion.

The use of moving cameras, which Ma also adopts, is especially important to a music video sense of flow (Vernallis 2004: 34-35). Moving camera work plays a particularly fundamental role in Ma’s video of the D major Suite, since he is collaborating with ice dancers who must be, by the nature of ice skating, almost constantly moving. The panning and tracking cameras that occur during almost every shot of the skaters are therefore both a practical and an aesthetic choice. Shots of Ma’s playing also use moving cameras. One recurring low-angle close-up of Ma moves left and right at a Dutch angle, following Ma’s motions (e.g. 3rd beat of m. 8 in Gavotte I, first time 0:28, or the beginning of Gavotte II 1:37). We may recall that it is particularly common for moving shots in music videos to be from a low angle (Vernallis 2004: 35). These same moving camera shots in Ma’s film use unconventional framing, another music video technique that suggests dynamism. Instead of framing the body in a standard, “balanced” way, the close up of Ma often cuts across his face at odd angles, sometimes so much that his chin is the only visible part of his face. Though it is not conventional for the framing to cut through joins in the body, at measure 12 (second time, 2:32) in the Gavotte II the dancers are cut from the neck down. These purportedly unbalanced framings, as well as the motion of the camera through spaces and between settings, create a sense of forward propulsion that mirrors the music’s continuous nature.
The sense of “flow” is especially present in Ma’s use of montage. While Ma still makes cuts at the repeats and section breaks in the music, the importance of these cuts is diminished by a generally faster speed of montage. There are enough cuts in Ma’s version that it becomes difficult to accurately count and compare the exact number of splices that Ma and Yang make, Ma makes almost twice as many cuts as Yang in the Gavotte I (Ma: 13 cuts, Yang: 7 cuts). This greater montage speed creates a sense of forward motion in the music.

However, more important than sheer speed is the way in which Ma’s montage reflects specific rhythmic aspects of the music. This is a technique which is related to music video montage, but we will also see how it influences how we perceive the dance genres on which the music is based. Occurrences of the main motive of the movement, two quarter notes leading to a downbeat, are often highlighted in Ma’s film (see Music Example 7). Sometimes the three-beat motive is highlighted by making a cut before it and another just after it finished, such as at the da capo of measure 16, 3rd beat, through measure 17 (3:16). At other times, there are four cuts made in this short space, one per quarter beat (e.g. m. 16-17 second time, 1:14). In the Gavotte II, Ma’s film applies this same principle, though the opening motive is slightly different. This time, the emphasis is on the upbeats leading into the second downbeat of the motive, rather than the first downbeat (in its opening occurrence, the first downbeat is a dominant, while the second downbeat arrives at the tonic). Accordingly, when Ma arrives at this motive, there are often cuts made on every quarter note (e.g. m. 1-2 first time, 1:37, and m. 20-22 and 22-24 first time, 2:13). This type of montage directly mimics the music, unlike the examples in Bylsma and Maisky’s performances of contrapuntal editing. Yang’s film uses more of
a mimicking approach, but his focus on illuminating broader structures is quite different from Ma. As we have seen, Ma’s emphasis on cutting to the beat and emphasizing a particular rhythm is also particularly prevalent in music video.

It is tempting to claim that Ma’s use of techniques from popular music video is a crass modernization of Bach’s music. However, his highlighting of motivic rhythms may in fact make us listen to the music in a more historically accurate way than other Bach videos that primarily show structural divisions. Most Bach films, by using montage to emphasize the larger structural pattern of the dance movements, primarily identify these movements as examples of “binary form,” that is, AABB. Lawrence Dreyfus argues that this sort of analysis improperly equates genre with external form.

The relation between ‘genre’ and ‘form’ changed radically during the nineteenth century. Under the influence of new ideas about large-scale musical structure, especially in the writings of Adolf Bernhard Marx, ‘form’ became especially identified with the idea of an external plan… Instead of considering schematic layout as one feature of a kind of music, writers on music began to view musical kinds as ancillary manifestations of larger forms. Instead of two distinct genres such as allemandes and courantes sharing in common the feature of two repeated sections, as in the traditional view, both genres now merely illustrated examples of binary form (or ‘the two-part Liedform,’ as Marx termed it). (Dreyfus 1993: 101).

Most Bach Suite films, therefore, follow a distinctly 19th century view by identifying the allemandes and courantes (and other dances) as essentially the same in their use of binary form. Ma’s film of the Gavotte in the D major Suite, on the other hand, illuminates the rhythm aspects of the music, focusing especially on the motive of two upbeats leading to a downbeat. This pattern is, in fact, a characteristic rhythm of the gavotte genre of Bach’s time, a feature which distinguishes it from other dance genres that use binary form (Thompson and Bellingham 2009). Ma uses music video techniques of showing
current dance and musical gesture in order to illuminate older dance forms. It is perhaps no coincidence that several of Ma’s films were made in collaboration with various types of choreographers (besides Torville and Dean, Ma also works with the Mark Morris dance company and kabuki actor Tamasaburo Bando), and that the film of the Sixth Suite in particular is titled *Six Gestures*. By using montage methods usually associated with current popular music, Ma’s film actually shows the viewer how to listen to Bach in a manner attuned to a baroque sense of genre. In addition to mixing influences of various film genres, Ma’s film has also combines ideas about old and new genres and understandings of Bach in a curious but effective manner.

The influence of documentary and music video genres on Bach Suite films provides multiple layers of possible genre combinations. Documentaries and music video styles particularly inform the manner in which structural and interpretative montage is used in Bach films, which in turn reflects assumptions about how the Suites demonstrate certain musical genres. This allows for a wide variety of visual possibilities, combining influences of both film and musical genres. As we have seen from Ma’s example, this mixture and appropriation of genres can interact in a complex manner with both historical and contemporary views of Bach’s work, as well as with ideas about high and low art.

**PART III: THE HISTORICAL BACH: REPRESENTING SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT/GENRES**

**Showing and Telling History**

As we have seen in much of this essay so far, montage can be used to show form or highlight interpretation choices in Bach Suite films. Similarly, the combination of
visual and audio performances in these films can work to communicate other understandings of the music, especially historical context. Yo-Yo Ma’s illumination of the gavotte rhythm already presented a nuanced way of engaging with historical context, particularly with ideas about how listeners of Bach’s time would have understood the music. Bach Suite films are able to show historical context in a number of other ways, though these methods are often implemented in a more straightforward manner. They may show the visual, architectural context in order to suggest a historical context, or, conversely, they may tell the viewer about history, speaking to the camera. The emphasis in Bach Suite films on showing historical context suggests an interest in teaching about history, much as we saw earlier how montage can aim to teach the viewer about musical analysis. In both cases, there is an element of the didacticism used in documentary film. However, just as a documentary film’s use of montage can easily be accused of providing a selective account of the “truth,” these methods borrowed from historical documentary styles can be misleading. While sometimes the historical context provided by Bach films is accurate and informative, the films are just as active in perpetuating myths, often passing on inaccurate portrayals of Bach. Before looking at how these films represent or distort historical context, it will be useful to take another look at Simon Cellan Jones’ Eroica, a film which proves to be a particularly deft example of many of the techniques employed by Bach Suite films.

Just as Eroica previously provided an example of the influence of popular music video montage on classical music films, the film also shows one way in which these films can integrate historical discussion into the performance. Though it is similar to Bach Suite films in its use of both showing and telling, Eroica’s use of re-enactment and
emphasis on understanding complex social context provides an antithesis to the approach favored by Bach films. Nicholas Cook’s essay on *Eroica* points out how the films’ emphasis on historical re-enactment suggests the influence of documentary style. Part of this re-enactment is contained in the style of the performance. “The BBC press release for *Eroica* described the period-instrument performance, featuring L’Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique under John Eliot Gardner, as ‘the first in modern times to replicate exactly the number of players and size of venue which invited the audience, on that historic day, experienced.’… What is interesting in this context, however, is that the BBC wished to emphasize the factual credentials of the film, as if it were as much a documentary as a drama.” (Cook 2007: 29) In addition to reproducing the instruments and number of players present on that particular day, suggesting historical accuracy in terms of musical style, this quote emphasizes the accuracy of the “size of venue,” suggesting that showing the social context of the rehearsal is considered equally important. The rehearsal is not in a concert hall, the venue we have come to accept as where Beethoven’s music should be played, but is instead in a large hall of what is intended to be Prince Lobkovitz’s palace (neither Cook’s article nor the DVD notes suggest that the film was shot at the actual location). The accurate representation of venue works largely to give a sense of actually being “there,” in the particular time and place. However, this is not merely authenticity for its own sake: the setting also suggests to the viewer the relationship between Beethoven’s music and aristocratic patronage.

In fact, the relationship between the aristocrats and the working musicians form an important theme in the film. This is especially conveyed through verbally “telling” history to the audience, integrating commentary on class and music into the characters’
dialogue. The representation of Prince Lobkovitz promising to pay back a musician for the cost of transporting two double basses (his own and his elderly father’s) and Beethoven’s agreement with the Prince to an exclusive contract to perform the Symphony suggests both musicians’ dependence on the nobility. On the other hand, the contract shows that Beethoven is, unlike the court musicians, an independent agent, as does Beethoven’s frequent sparring with Count Dietrichstein, “who serves throughout the film as the voice of aristocratic reaction,” both politically and aesthetically (Cook 2007: 33). Beethoven’s dedication of the work to Napoleon becomes a central point of the film, suggesting the effects that political change would have on musical life. By using historical re-enactment, *Eroica* is able to dramatize the importance of political and social life to understanding Beethoven’s music. These verbal cues about class and music take an especially deft form since they are worked into the dialogue, instead of being conveyed in a lecture form. As we will see, this fairly complex manner of representing history contrasts with the more basic approach of Bach Suite films.

Though *Eroica* provides a compelling vision through its complex integration of performance and historical context, it is not without some historical embroidery. Nicholas Cook spends ample time discussing the ways in which *Eroica* reproduces myths of Beethoven as the revolutionary genius. For example, the centrality of Napoleon and class warfare previously noted is “one conspicuous case in which the relocation of events turns into surely conscious historical misrepresentation.” (Cook 2007: 31) Throughout the film, Napoleon is openly discussed, and it is only at the end of the film that Beethoven learns that Napoleon has named himself emperor and destroys the dedication page of the symphony (his reaction is drawn from his student Ferdinand Ries’s memoirs).
However, the film represents the rehearsal on June 9, 1804, long enough after Napoleon’s announcement that the event would have been common knowledge already in Vienna. “Under such circumstances the kind of sympathetic, openly political discussions of French republicanism pictured in *Eroica* would be downright implausible.” (Cook 2007: 32) The way in which the film links Beethoven directly with the promise of social and musical revolution is to some extent overstated.

Among the Bach films, Yo-Yo Ma’s version of the Suite No. 6 in D major perhaps comes closest to the historical re-enactment used in *Eroica*. For this Suite, Ma’s film includes an actor playing Bach, who appears in between movements to deliver a monologue to the camera. Bach sits at a table in front of a non-descript wall, placing the emphasis here on telling, rather than showing. Bach describes, in the past tense, a number of events that occurred while he was in Cöthen, where, as a title card from the film claims, he wrote the Suites. Though the date and patron of the Suites are not explicitly known, some sources, such as Christoph Wolff’s Bach biography, claim that there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to link most of the Suites to Bach’s period working for Prince Leopold in Cöthen (Wolff 2000:196). Even though the film accepts the Suites as part of Bach’s output in Cöthen, the details of the genesis of the Suites are not as documented as Beethoven’s *Eroica*. Accordingly, the monologues in Ma’s film do not suggest any details regarding how the Suites were written, only implying a connection between the monologues and the music through their juxtaposition. Some of the monologues feature trivial facts, such as Bach’s love for pipe smoking. At other points, he describes some more relevant parts of Bach’s biography, such as his favorable
impression of his patron Prince Leopold’s musical understanding, and later his learning of his wife Maria Barbara’s death.

However, though this information gives a small amount of perspective on the context of Bach’s work, these autobiographical monologues function primarily to complement the character of the music. This matching of biography with music also locates the composer at the center of the work, lending them a mythical status. The film inserts Bach’s lament over his wife’s death just before the performance of the slow Sarabande, lending the music a sorrowful quality to match the monologue (see Video Example 10). At the end of the film, just before the Gigue, Bach describes meeting his next wife, Anna Magdalena, and his own joy translates into the joyful conclusion of the Suite. By aligning Bach’s emotions with the content of the music, Ma’s film suggests that the true meaning of the music lies in Bach’s biography. This notion that a composition is primarily about the composer is, in fact, a 19th century romantic fantasy. Cook, noting a similar tendency in Eroica to identify Beethoven as the titular hero of the Third Symphony, points out that this view is only part of a later reception history, notably a short story by Richard Wagner (Cook 2007: 35). Neither Beethoven nor Bach’s works could truly be said to reflect the personality of their creators, though these films anachronistically suggest that this is the case.

**The Myth of Bach’s Spirituality: A History, and its Influence on Bach Suite Films**

Bach Suite films are especially prone to reproducing myths regarding Bach’s religious views, a tendency present both in how the music is talked about and how it is represented through the use of church settings. Despite the unclear intentions of the
Suites, their adaptation of secular dance forms clearly indicates a non-liturgical function. However, there is a well-established tradition that suggests that Bach’s religion pervaded all his work, whether sacred or secular. Those who make this claim, including Bach Suite films, often use language evoking a modern sense of non-denominational spirituality, rather than evoking Bach’s espousal of a specifically Lutheran theology. Before discussing the films themselves, however, it will be necessary to set out a brief history of Bach’s reception in terms of this myth. Richard Taruskin’s recent argument regarding the misrepresentation of Bach’s religious views is very different from my own, but is related enough to provide a useful starting point.

Taruskin, reviewing Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Gustav Leonhardt’s recordings of the complete Bach sacred cantatas, boldly claims that the religious nature of Bach’s music has been greatly undermined by scholars and the general public: “The Enlightened, secularized view of Bach is the one advanced by most modern scholarship… Lip service is paid to the composer’s ‘unfailing expressive profundity,’ but the whole question of expression is assimilated into innocuous notions of beautiful form, as if to lure attention away from rhetoric and imagery and onto ‘the music itself.’” (1991: 309) The Bach familiar to most people, he claims, is the “hearty, genial, lyrical Bach of the concert hall” rather than a darker Bach, whose cantatas translated Lutheran depictions of hell, sin, suffering, and longing for death (as a reward of faith) into music (Taruskin 1991: 310-311, 313). Harnoncourt, he claims, has done well by preserving this horrific aspect of Bach in his performances (1991: 312).

Aside from his claim that the darker Bach is the “essential Bach,” Taruskin’s point is a sound one: as 20th and 21st century listeners, the religious views in Bach’s texts
are often foreign and unsettling to us (1991: 310). However, Taruskin’s claim that audiences have secularized the music by turning away from these texts (and the manner in which Bach sets them) could use some qualification. By looking at responses to Bach’s overtly secular music, especially considering written and filmed accounts of the cello suites, one notices that Bach’s music is often considered to have religious meaning even when it has no apparent sacred text. Bach’s music, both sacred and secular, has not so much been “secularized” as it has been stripped of any theological specificity. Here it is necessary to draw a distinction between theology, beliefs which are attached to a particular religion or denomination (and, in this case, to a particular time period), and spirituality, a non-specific expression of supernatural faith. Instead of depicting Bach’s religion as rooted in the Lutheran beliefs of his time, many more recent accounts, including Bach Suite films, have lent Bach a modern sense of universal spirituality.

Albert Schweitzer’s classic Bach biography provides an early example of how Bach’s secular music was considered spiritual. “For him [Bach], art was religion, and so had no concern with the world or with worldly [sic] success. It was an end in itself. Bach includes religion in the definition of art in general. All great art, even secular, is in itself religious in his eyes; for him the tones do not perish, but ascend to God like praise too deep for utterance.” (Schweitzer 1905: 167) Schweitzer defends his claim with a number of instances in which Bach wrote sacred inscriptions before a secular work, and uses the surviving inventory list of Bach’s library to conclude that “Bach’s views were strictly Lutheran.” (1905: 168) However, he quickly reverses this claim, stating instead that Bach’s religion moved beyond the confines of a particular doctrine. “In the last resort, however, Bach’s real religion was not orthodox Lutheranism, but mysticism. In his
innermost essence he belongs to the history of German mysticism… His whole thought was transfigured by a wonderful, serene longing for death.” (Schweitzer 1905: 170)

Ultimately, for Schweitzer, Bach’s religion was not a matter of a rigid faith that was “shouting down reason” (Taruskin 1991: 313; referring to the aria “Schweig nur, taumelnde Vernunft!” from Cantata No. 178), but rather an open, non-denominational belief that is described primarily in nationalist terms rather than religious ones.

Slightly later in the 20th century, Heinrich Schenker’s analysis of the Sarabande from the Suite No. 3 in C major similarly places Bach’s work in a mystical light. At first glance, Schenker’s work would appear to be an exemplary instance of Taruskin’s claim that Bach is treated primarily as scholarly, enlightened music. Schenker describes Bach here purely through formal analysis, what Taruskin refers to as a “problematical” attempt to distill “the music itself.” (1991: 309) Schenker never uses any sort of religious language to describe the suite. However, his overarching goals for this analysis have a distinctively spiritual edge. Schenker’s purpose in this analysis is to identify the “Urlinie” (a diatonically descending line) and “Ursatz” (bass notes moving tonic-dominant-tonic) in the structure this movement. Within his work The Masterpiece in Music (Das Meisterwerk in der Musik), Schenker claims to be able to find the Ursatz and Urlinie in various “masterworks” of tonal music, many of which were written long after Bach’s time. Such a grandiose and trans-historical vision would certainly appear to have a mystical element, a hypothesis which is corroborated by Schenker’s own claim in Free Composition (Der freie Satz). “Included in the elevation of the spirit to the fundamental structure is an uplifting, of an almost religious character, to God and to the geniuses through which he works – an uplifting, in the literal sense, to the kind of coherence which
is found only in God and the geniuses.” (Pastille 1995: 116) For Schenker, each time Bach works out of the “fundamental structure” in his music is an inherently spiritual act, and Bach’s ability to apprehend this structure is a sign of his own demi-god status. This musical mysticism, like Schweitzer’s, is void of any theological or historic specificity. As a Jew who attempted to assimilate himself into Viennese society (wearing no outward markers of Judaism but still practicing the religion in his private life), Schenker may well have been cautiously avoiding either explicitly Jewish or Christian readings of the Urlinie (Cook 2007: 202-203). Rather, his view of Bach exhibits a timeless sense of the spiritual.

More recently, the spiritual view of Bach put forth by Schweitzer and Schenker became particularly prevalent among performers of the Cello Suites. Cellist Gé Bartman’s essay “Christian Symbolism in the First Three Preludes of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Six Suites for Cello Solo” carries on Schweitzer’s notion that Bach’s music, whether sacred or secular, is essentially informed by religious belief. Bartman even takes this logic a step further: while Schweitzer claimed that “All great art, even secular, is in itself religious in [Bach’s] eyes,” Schweitzer’s specific discussion of the Suites or of other secular chamber music does not make any such claims. Instead, he focuses, for example, on comparing the manner in which polyphony is suggested in the Cello Suites and the Violin Partitas and Sonatas (1905: 167, 393). Bartman, on the other hand, sees the notes on Bach’s pages as themselves linked to the composer’s religious persuasion. As will be shown, his argument proves highly unconvincing, but significant in its insistence on regarding Bach’s work as essentially sacred. For the Suite No. 2 in D minor, Bartman claims that the Prelude references Psalm No. 7 (“the number of notes in bar 1 is 7” 2001: 2), whose text references King David. Bartman then argues that David’s
name is fused into this Prelude through the recurrence of the notes D, A, F (VI), D (2001: 3). It does not seem to particularly matter that this David spelling is merely a D minor triad – by this logic, any work in either D major or minor could be consistently referencing the biblical king. Regardless of whether the point he makes is true, Bartman’s work reflects a general tendency to view Bach’s secular works in a sacred light. Unlike some others, however, Bartman does not ascribe Bach’s religion to a universal spirituality or “mysticism,” but rather stays within the realm of Lutheran psalms and symbols. This is perhaps what allows this otherwise speculative essay to be included in the back pocket of Anner Bylsma’s performance-practice oriented book *Bach the Fencing Master* (Bylsma does not engage in any religious discussion of Bach, focusing instead on problems of articulation and bowing).

The performers and filmmakers of Bach Suite films often participate in this spiritual assessment of Bach’s secular music. Perhaps this is best exemplified by the frequent choice of setting the films in churches, despite the secular nature of the Suites. However, the films make no claims that these Suites were an expression of a particularly Lutheran faith – most of the films set in religious spaces are, in fact, in Catholic churches. Mstislav Rostropovich performs in the famous Basilique de Sainte Madeleine in Vézelay, France, while Pablo Casals plays in the Abbaye Saint Michel-de-Cuxa near Prades. Wen-Sinn Yang’s film is set in Servatiuskirche auf dem Streichen in Chiemgau, Germany. Anner Bylsma provides an exception to this lack of theological specificity by setting his film in the Bartolomäuskirche in Dornheim, where Bach married Maria Barbara in 1707 (Wolff 2000: 90-91). However, it is hardly likely the Suites would have ever been performed there, and Bylsma’s film never even mentions the historical
significance of the church. Ultimately, the avoidance of this topic makes the Bartolomäuskirche no more meaningful to the viewer than the churches used by other performers. Despite the frequent lack of historical specificity, these choices of church settings were not made casually. Many of the films allow the church architecture to come to the foreground at times while the music continues off-screen. Yang’s version places great emphasis on the intricate altarpieces, frescoes, and hagiographic statues of the Serviatuskirche. Similarly, Rostropovich often includes a brief image of a tympanum or statue in between movements (see Video Examples 7 and 3). The prevalence of church architecture within Bach films suggests a conscious connection between Bach and spirituality.

The spiritual myth of Bach is also evoked in statements by the performers and in the liner notes, both of which shape the viewer’s expectations of the music. Richard Eckstein’s liner notes for Yang’s film, one of the only instances found in which the choice of location is explained, are ambivalent about the significance of the church setting. “Although Wen-Sinn Yang does not see any need to interpret Bach’s cello suites in specifically Christian terms, they are nevertheless imbued with such a deep spirituality that he thought it appropriate to make use of the inspiration offered by such a remote but historically resonant location.” (Eckstein 2005: 7) Though Yang and Eckstein are clearly being cautious and recognizing that the Suites were intended as secular music, there is still a substitution of “specifically Christian” terms for a more generalized view of “deep spirituality” without the trappings of any particular time or religion. Yang similarly suggests the presence of religion in his spoken introduction to the Suite No. 2 in D minor, noting that the Suites appear to be arranged in two groups of three: “This trinity, the
number three, still exercises a great deal of fascination on us, and is a powerful symbol. Of course, the reason for that lies in Christianity.” (Yang 2005)

Yo-Yo Ma makes what is perhaps the most emphatic statement linking Bach to a universal spirituality. For his film of the Suite No. 5 in C minor, Ma collaborates with Kabuki actor Tamasaburo Bando to choreograph the music. At one point in the film, Ma says, “The Sarabande, for me, is a prayer, and I think Tamasaburo instinctively understands this.” (Ma 1995) Ma’s statement is clearly anachronistic, since we may recall that all the genres used in the Suites were originally dance forms. The association of Sarabande with prayer is particularly odd, since the zarabanda was actually considered obscene in its early days, though this was still almost 200 years before Bach wrote the Cello Suites (Hudson and Little 2009: 1, 2-ii). Nevertheless, Ma not only claims that it is a prayer, but considers it a trans-cultural expression of spirituality. Tamasaburo Bando, as shown in the film, knew little of Bach or classical music before he began working with Ma (see Video Example 11). Though Tamasaburo describes on film the difficulty of understanding and choreographing the music, Ma considers the Sarabande to be universal enough to be “instinctively” appreciated by Tamasaburo. Bach’s religion and music, according to Ma, are capable of speaking to anyone through their spirituality, and need not be understood as a product of a particular time and place.

This myth of the spiritual Bach, which divorces the music from a particular history, is, in fact entirely of its time. It is a view that allows us to circumvent the tensions between the Protestant and Catholic churches that Bach’s sacred music often plays out, as Taruskin himself points out (1991: 310-311). In addition, stripping the music of historical particulars also serves to democratize Bach, to be able to claim that he
was not writing for any specific time, patron, religion, or type of person. By suggesting that Bach is generally spiritual, one can instead claim that his music is for everyone to listen to and appreciate. This said, one could equally well imagine a democratized vision of Bach in which religion plays no role in his secular music. Regardless, the fact that these Bach films have encouraged this myth both through telling the viewer and showing through the use of setting demonstrates the enduring quality of this view.

**Cautious Avoidance of Historical Context**

Since these Bach Suite films set out to some extent to show the historical context of the Suites but often ended up reproducing myths, it is understandable that some performers err on the side of caution when discussing historical maters. Despite the previous discussion of Wen-Sinn Yang’s video with regard to myths of spirituality, Yang’s comments at the beginning of the film make as few assumptions as possible. Yang suggests that there is really nothing we can know for certain about the Suites, avoiding not only myths, but also any of Wolff’s circumstantial evidence linking the Suites to Côthen. “Most such works [of Bach’s time] were written for specific purposes or occasions, such as cantatas for Sunday church services, or masses for weddings, coronations, or funerals. Composing music for a living, on commission so to speak. The aristocracy and the church were the clients… But in the case of Johann Sebastian Bach’s solo cello suites, the question of whom they were written for remains unanswered, and whether he was even able to play the cello is uncertain.” It is appropriate that this interpretation of Bach history of delivered verbally, since if one cannot be sure of the
music’s origins, any kind of re-enactment becomes impossible (though this oddly does
not prevent Yang from setting his film in a church).

This cautious manner of telling about history tends to avoid issues of social
context more than engage with them. In this sense, Yang’s comment about the lack of
definitive knowledge about the intent of the Suites is exceptional. In fact, he even gives a
brief description of some of the different social displacements that the Suites have gone
through, differentiating the dance genres from their stylized adaptation into chamber
music, and describing Pablo Casals’ role in making the Suites part of the concert
repertoire. By contrast, Jean-Guihen Queyras’ only comment on the history of the Bach
Suites is to note the unprecedented use of the cello as a solo instrument. Rostropovich’s
introduction to his DVD briefly mentions the fact that no autograph copies of the Suites
have survived, and that he relied on the copy made by Anna Magdalena Bach. In terms
of how history is addressed in Bach Suite films, this tendency to tell the audience the
information only verifiable information often results in an emphasis on individual facts,
rather than a social vision of music in Bach’s time. Whether cautiously presenting facts
or ambitiously re-enacting events, these films’ attempts to articulate history are
simultaneously looking backwards at the past and forwards at the present.

From Dances to DVDs: Melding New and Old Contexts and Genres

The fact that Bach Suite films have used setting as part of showing how to
understand Bach’s music and history suggests a complex interaction with the social genre
associations of the Suites. Previously, this essay looked at how the films dealt with
musical genres, identifying the significant aspects of the works through montage, as well
as with blending various film genres. Issues of setting, on the other hand, are particularly important to historical and social considerations of genre. Choices of physical location can suggest a particular social setting for a performance. Social context, in turn, plays a large role in identifying a piece’s genre (Samson 2009: 2). As was presented at the outset of this paper, the settings of Bach Suite films, both in terms of church settings and their overall setting on a DVD or videotape, act as one dislocation of the Suites among the many they have undergone since their inception. Given their past trajectory from dance genres to chamber music and on to the concert hall, placing Bach Suites in churches and on DVDs is merely an extension on this trend. However, it is not necessarily clear what kind of the genre shift that this most recent displacement represents. In some ways, the settings in Bach Suite films may represent a very new milieu for the Suites, but other evidence suggests that the films may in fact be turning towards replicating older contexts. The result is a mix of various genres and contexts, both old and new.

The shift in location for video performances of Bach Suites in certain ways mirrors Glenn Gould’s description of how audio recordings moved music away from the concert hall and to the recording studio. According to Gould, part of the reason for this shift was for acoustical reasons: “Recording has developed its own conversions, which do not always conform to those traditions that derive from the acoustical limitations of the concert hall. We have, for instance, come to expect a Brünnhilde, blessed with amplification as well as amplitude, who can surmount without struggle the velvet diapason of the Wagnerian orchestra… demands which contravene the acoustical possibilities of the concert hall or opera house.” (Gould 1966: 334) By moving video and audio recordings away from the concert hall, therefore, we may establish a new way of
listening (much of this new listening was described in this essay with relation to montage and music analysis). In addition to a mere change of aesthetics, Gould sees the move away from the concert hall as a fundamental shift in the social setting of music. He radically predicts that “The public concert as we know it today would no longer exist a century hence, that its function would have been entirely taken over by electronic media.” (Gould 1966: 331) Thus, the move of audio recordings and Bach video recordings away from the concert hall might indicate a new social setting for music, one that is totally separate from previous contexts (even if one does not agree wholeheartedly with Gould’s prediction of the end of concerts, one can certainly accept that recordings have allowed for a new context in which music is performed). While the shift in performance locations is significant, perhaps the most important part of this shift initiated by recording technology is the displacement of the listener’s experience from the concert hall to the living room stereo or TV set (and also to car stereos, video iPods, and the like). In this sense, the settings in Bach Suite films represent a new context for music that is provided by new media.

However, there is a key difference between the acoustical aesthetic that Gould pursues and the sound towards which Bach Suite films have turned. This distinction suggests an alternative view, in which Bach Suite films are actually looking backwards, attempting to reproduce previous performance contexts. According to Gould, previous concert-going generations favored a “cathedrallike [sic] sound which the architects of that day tried to capture for the concert hall – the cathedral of the symphony.” The recording aesthetics of Gould’s time, however, favored the drier sound of the recording studio (Gould 1966: 333). At the same time, concert halls began to reflect this dry
aesthetic, which Gould claims makes for poor concerts but excellent recordings (Gould 1966: 333). While Gould’s generation appears to have been going to the recording studio to escape the “cathedrallike” sound, Bach Suite films have taken to the churches, perhaps to escape the studio-like sound of newer concert halls. While both Gould and the Bach cellists are moving away from the concert hall, the cellists’ move towards churches may in fact indicate a move “back” towards a concert hall sound from a previous generation.

On the other hand, if we consider the visual effect of these settings, we might conclude that Bach films are leading viewers towards an even older and more “authentic” context for the Suites. The move the videos make towards audience-less churches and their intended home viewing suggests a context that is smaller and more personal, replicating the Suites’ original context as a chamber music genre. Gould agrees that the chamber context of baroque music makes it particularly well suited to recording, even suggesting that the baroque performance practice movement was made possible by recording technology. “Since the recording techniques of North America and Western Europe are designed for an audience that does most of its listening at home, it is not surprising that the creation of a recording archive has emphasized those areas which historically relate to a Hausmusik tradition and has been responsible for the triumphant restoration of baroque forms in the years since World War II.” (Gould 1966: 335)

Paradoxically, Bach’s music comes closer to its original social context when it is received through new media than when it is performed in the concert hall. However, this argument makes sense if one considers the churches only as small or personal spaces. If one considers church settings as indicating a religious context, the result is far from the original intentions of the Suites, as we may recall from the previous
discussion of myths about Bach’s spirituality. The settings in Bach Suite films allow a variety of possible interpretations, each implying a different genre or function for the performance. Depending on how one understands these settings, the films may be looking back towards an “original” 18th century context, towards an 19th or 20th century concert hall context, or they may be creating entirely new genres for the Suites. The result might be a multivalent and complex approach to social genre. On the other hand, this complexity may simply be chaotic confusion of the old and the new.

**CONCLUSION**

Bach Suite films, as we have seen, do not exist within their own world, but rather reflect already existing genre understandings of the Suites. Though they use new media, the musical analysis provided by montage and the vision of Bach’s social context implied through settings in Bach films are firmly rooted in discourses that have surrounded Bach’s music. Some of the existing ideas picked up by films have appeared to be accurate in their depiction of Bach’s music, while others have reflected anachronism and myth. Whether correct or incorrect, however, these understandings have usually been borrowed, rather than unique to films. In addition, though film is a new form compared to the age of Bach’s music, it is old enough that it has formed its own generic conventions and sub-genres. This provides yet another set of existing languages on which Bach Suite films draw extensively.

The question becomes whether this genre mixture provides a meaningful result. Skeptics could still easily claim that Bach Suite films are meaningless. After all, these multiple understandings of genre becomes so refracted that a comprehensive
understanding of the Suites becomes lost and genre threatens to become an irrelevant marker. In this sense, as tools for teaching historically and analytically “correct” musicological understandings of Bach’s work, the films are fairly useless. However, if we study Bach Suite films for their value as indicators of how we understand Bach today, they are rich with meaning. The messy confusion of genre distinctions, the mix of the old and the new, “authenticity” and “modernity,” is representative of the current music world’s interaction with Bach. Though the Bach Suite films themselves are not especially critical texts, studying them critically allows us to apprehend an entire history of Bach reception. This history is exposed by the films without any neat unifying theory. Rather, it is presented as a pastiche genre that continues to draw on more and more other genres in a thickly intertwined web of references.
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(Note on parenthetical citations: year cited is the original date of books, articles, and videos/DVDs. For liner notes of videos/DVDs, year of the publication consulted is used, in the event that liner notes for a DVD re-release are different from those in the original VHS release. Both dates are used in full bibliography.)

Film and Audio Materials


**Books/Articles/Music Scores**


Little, Meredith Ellis. “Gavotte.” *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10774>  


<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40599>  


Example 1: Bach *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Fugue No. 20 in A minor, exposition
Glenn Gould’s editing (red line)

**FUGA 20**
(in 4 parts)

1 Voice

2 Voices

3 Voices

4 Voices

5 Voices

6 Voices

APPENDIX – MUSICAL EXAMPLES
Example 2: Bach *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Fugue No. 20 in A minor, conclusion
Glenn Gould’s editing (red line)
**Example 3:** Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Allemande
Pablo Casal’s editing (red line) and Wen-Sinn Yang’s editing (blue arrow).
2 indicates cut taken on repeat.
Example 4: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 3 in C major, Prelude
Mstislav Rostropovich’s editing (red line)
Example 5: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 1 in G major, Gigue
Anner Bylsma’s editing (red line), Mischa Maisky’s editing (blue arrow), and Pablo Casal’s editing (green double-arrow). 2 indicates cut taken on repeat.

Example 6: Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 3 in C major, Sarabande
Wen-Sinn Yang’s editing (red line). 2 indicates cut taken on repeat.

Example 7 (next pg): Bach *Suites for Solo Cello*, Suite No. 6 in D major, Gavotte I & II
Selections of Wen-Sinn Yang’s editing (red line) and Yo-Yo Ma’s editing (blue arrow). 2 indicates cut taken on repeat, 3 on da capo.