

# Circulatio, Circulo, Kyklosis:

from

Dietrich Bartel's

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*Baroque*

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*Handbuch der musikalischen Figurenlehre*

Definition of the terms (pp. 216-217):

**Circulatio, Circulo, Kyklosis:** a series of usually eight notes in a circular or sine wave formation.

The *circulatio* (*circulo, circolo*) is formed by positioning two opposite (rising and falling: *intendens* and *remittens*) *circuli mezz*i adjacent to each other in such a way that, were the two “half-circles” to be superimposed, a circle of notes would result. The figure is defined both as a text-explanatory musical-rhetorical figure as well as a simple ornament (*figura simplex, Manier*). This difference is further emphasized through the use of both Greek or Latin (Kircher, Janovka) and Italian terminology. Customarily, classical terminology is reserved for the musical-rhetorical figures while Italian is used for embellishing ornamentation and figurations. Only Kircher and Janovka explicitly correlate the *circulatio* with the expression of circular ideas or motion in the music's text. As a symbol of perfection, the musical circle has a long tradition of expressing not only circular concepts but also the eternal, infinite, and complete, ultimately symbolizing God. Like virtually all of Kircher's figures, the *circulatio* is understood as a form of *hypotyposis*. The remaining authors simply describe the motif's construction without referring to any text-expressive content. Even Walther, who frequently quotes Janovka in his *Lexicon*, does not mention the text-interpretive nature of the figure. Furthermore, he only defines the Italian term. While Vogt calls the figure by a Latin term, *circulus*, he includes it in his list of *figurae simplices* and not among his text-expressive *figurae ideales*. Even though circular or infinite concepts are frequently expressed through a *circulatio*, such a content is not frequently associated with the figure itself.

Most writers (aside from Kircher and Janovka) explain the *circulo* as a formation out of two opposite *circuli mezz*i. While Vogt, Spiess, and Mattheson describe the *circulo mezzo* in accordance with Printz's definition, Walther's definition is based on Brossard, a description which agrees with Printz's *groppo* rather than *circulo mezzo*. In his definition of *groppo*, Walther explains that Brossard does not differentiate between *circulo mezzo* and *groppo*, both being four-note arching figures with common first and third rather than second and fourth notes. Nonetheless, Walther's definition of the eight-note *circulo* is in agreement with that of the other authors, even though he describes it as two *circuli mezz*i. Mattheson defines only the *circulo mezzo*, but he adds a fifth note to the figure, presenting in fact an entire half-circle. In Spiess's example, two ascending and two descending *circuli mezz*i rather than one of each kind are adjoined, resulting in a figuration which does not agree with other *circuli*.

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