OPERA AND NON-NARRATIVE MUSIC

Vol. I

Tiago Cutileiro

Tese apresentada à Universidade de Évora
para obtenção do Grau de Doutor em Música e Musicologia
Especialidade: Composição

ORIENTADORES: *Professor Doutor Christopher Bochmann*
Professor Doutor Benoît Gibson

ÉVORA, MAIO 2014

INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO E FORMAÇÃO AVANÇADA

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A Ópera e a Música Não-Narrativa

Resumo:

Nos últimos vinte-cinco anos, o termo *narrativa* tem sido um ponto preponderante de discussão musicológica. Os musicólogos que preferem evitar o termo definem narrativa como uma impossibilidade musical ou então consideram-na presente, como refere Carolyn Abbate, em todas as músicas composta por sequências de eventos sonoros (1989, p. 227) e, por esta razão, uma inútil máquina para definir toda e qualquer música (1991, p. xi).

Mesmo aceitando a ideia de Abbate, o conceito de música narrativa torna-se, ainda assim, essencial para compreender um modelo musical muito menos comum e bastante recente que propositadamente evita todos os elementos musicais que possam induzir uma sensação de narrativa musical. Esta música pode ser denominada de não-narrativa. A música não-narrativa é assim definida por oposição à música narrativa.

O que é problemático na música não-narrativa, para além da necessária adopção de uma atitude de escuta adequada, é a sua conjugação com elementos que preservam laços narrativos —i.e., o texto cantado e a encenação dramática. A composição de uma ópera exclusivamente alicerçada em música não-narrativa é, por conseguinte, um exercício estilístico e um desafio de composição para preservar quer o movimento linear do texto quer a essência de temporalidade estática da música não-narrativa.

[Palavras chave: aesthetics, music, narrative, non-narrative, opera]

Abstract:

In the last twenty-five years, the term *narrative* has been an important point of discussion in musicology. Scholars who prefer to avoid the term consider narrative either impossible in music or, as Carolyn Abbate remarks, an element that can be found in "any music with sequences of events" (1989, p. 227) and, for this reason, a useless "machine for naming any and all music" (1991, p. xi).

Even if agreeing with Abbate's claim, the concept of narrative music becomes nevertheless essential to understand a much less common and very recent music that purposely avoids any element that could induce narrativity in music. This music can be classified as non-narrative. Non-narrative music is, thus, defined through the opposing concept of narrative music.

What is problematic in non-narrative music, besides the adoption of an adequate listening stance, is its use with elements that themselves preserve narrative threads—i.e., sung text and/or staged drama. The composition of an opera exclusively grounded on non-narrative music is therefore a stylistic exercise and a compositional challenge to preserve both the verbal text's ongoing motion and non-narrative music's essence of temporal stasis.

[Key words: aesthetics, music, narrative, non-narrative, opera]

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introduction: Overture

"le futur n'a plus d'avenir"[1]

A PhD thesis in musical composition centred on opera and non-narrative music divides its research scope between composition proper and the study of the aesthetic principles that governed that composition. However, these two areas of work are not completely separate. In artistic production, one tends to intuit a thought that runs parallel with the production moment. This dissertation presents the theoretical study that leads to, and is the result of, the composition of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*.[2] The whole idea comes from a simple musical observation and a consequent compositional problem.

The observation was that sung music tends to absorb verbal language in a quasi organic fusion. This seems to happen because both systems—music and oral language—share a common form of articulation and perception. In fact, music's and oral language's rhythmic and melodic articulations have morphological similarities, and these elements are processed through identical mechanisms of memory (Snyder, 2001, p. 47 and p. 63). Both systems connect sound in a time span that creates in the listener a feeling of sonic motion. The listener tends to perceive a flux of energy passing—moving—from the beginning to the end of a breath sized verbal or musical phrase. It is this motion that makes language graspable (Scrutton, pp. 173); and this thesis proposes that it is this same motion that makes music *narrative*.

However, there is a specific type of music that, instead of inducing a perception of sonic motion, appears to be static. Before such music, the listener cannot feel temporality, in the sense that time was not sonically arranged for a temporal—narrative—experience. The musical sound seems merely to be present for what can be considered a time frozen contemplation. It will be proposed here that this music's lack of sonic motion makes it *non-narrative*: non-narrative music induces no narrative intuition, and is conceived precisely to block the listener's *narrative impulse*. Non-narrative music offers no temporal experience to be decoded into a narrative-like sequence of sonic events, or into a language-like sequence of expressions, phrases, or sentences. It presents itself as a sonic object to be contemplated, merely existing through a certain, usually not completely determined, non-developing time span (Mertens, pp. 106-109). As shall be argued, this difference between two antagonistic

1 [The future has no future. (trans. by author)]
2 In English: *Everything Always Never the Same Different Nothing* (trans. by author).

ways of dealing with time in music composition is enough to justify the use of the term *narrative* as a classifying criterium in music.

The compositional problem was, then, whether verbal language could also blend with this motionless music, conceiving a work where, as with sung *narrative music*, language could seem to emerge from within the music. It is clear that the above mentioned affinity between both systems ceases to exist in a *non-narrative music* context. This music does not function within the same perceptual time frame of oral language and its lack of evident articulation has no parallel with verbal discourse (Snyder, 2001, pp. 234-238). To work with verbal language and non-narrative music is thus to join the sonically moving contour of language with the objectified static system of non-narrative music—the two are, at first glance, temporally incompatible. While the former—oral language—unfolds itself through time and gains its meaning through a strict ordering of this temporal development; the latter—non-narrative music—seems to freeze time, and its meaningfulness is obtained precisely from this absence of temporal directionality. To follow verbal language, the listener needs to follow the order of things in time, the hierarchical arrangement of those elements, and build from that structure a linear and unique logic that has only to do with that particular arrangement of sound events. To experience the non-narrative music, the listener should not follow any temporal sequence but immerse her/himself in the undirected perception of sound matter (Barthes, 1985, pp. 245-260). It becomes clear that following both oral language and non-narrative music simultaneously may imply a somewhat paradoxical listening stance.

This explains why it is not common to find repertoire where verbal text is articulated by the non-narrative music. And when it happens, the texts tend to be treated in a fragmented way, shaping language to non-narrative music's morphological characteristics but rendering language itself not only non-narrative but non-linguistic. The present thesis argues that language can maintain much of its directionality and still be articulated within a non-narrative music context. This permits non-narrative music composers to work within musical genres that are grounded on sung verbal text and that require a more direct understanding of the meaning of this text—the most obvious example of these genres being *opera*.

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The operatic genre demonstrates both human's will to tell stories and music's inability to do it alone. It is by using verbal *language* and theatrical *mimesis* that music goes beyond

music and becomes able to tell specific stories. The fact that the characters speak in singing voices, and the fact that they seem not to be aware of this, makes it clear that music is not merely commenting on a story, from outside of it—as can happen, for instance, in theatre or in film. In opera, music calls *verbal language* and *mimesis* into its own world, and it is then, from within music, that the story is told. As Joseph Kerman (1988) states "a work of art in which music fails to exert the central articulating function should be called by some name other than opera" (p. xiii). But, despite this primordial function of music in opera, verbal language and theatre cannot be dismissed. It is only through them that the specificity of a story can be made to happen from the unspecific form of expression that music is.

What is suggested by composing an *opera* using *non-narrative music* is that non-narrative music may also absorb theatrical and verbal language, and that, with them and despite music's static nature, a thin thread of story may, nevertheless, emerge. Thus, this thesis resulted in an opera that keeps language's essential function despite it being articulated by an exemplarily non-narrative music. In other words, it suggests that a basic conception of opera as "staged sung drama" (Williams, 2007) is compatible with the concept of non-narrative music.

For the sake of coherence, even if non-narrative music could easily articulate language without sacrificing its static nature, the use of such music in a plain dramatic narrative context should still be questioned. Why use non-narrative music in opera if narrative music articulates verbal language in a much more organic way? If there is action going on on stage, shouldn't music be also moving? When music articulates with other media the perceiver expects the typical coherent whole of an artistic object where all elements supports each other in a unified expression. When elements are not completely complementary, it is because their discrepancy adds meaning to that unified expression—the incongruities are themselves meaningful (Webster, 1989, p. 44). Hence, except for some possible specific moments, there seems to be no reason for static music to articulate an operatic developing drama.

However, throughout the second half of the twentieth century a decline of narrative paradigms can be traced in several artistic areas beyond music. A post-modernist skepticism towards the grand historical narratives (Lyotard, 1984) seems to have contaminated the temporal arts that start either reducing the conflicting dynamism of traditional story-telling or avoiding stories *tout court* (Fink, 2001, pp. 121-123). So it is not music alone that tends to become less- or non-narrative. It is a movement transversal to all arts. Even in literature and drama, narratives become fragmented and flattened. Intense dramas give way to mundane

descriptions of objects instead of characters and plot (Jameson, 1991, pp. 131-153). The present thesis argues that non-narrative music is the result of this aesthetic shift in recent western art history and is consequently coherent with it. Hence, in *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*, the opera composed for this thesis, non-narrative music conforms from the start with the static atmosphere transmitted by the *libretto*'s verbal narrative, and with other video-graphic stage choices provided in the score. Music, verbal language, and stage drama are reduced to a thin thread of non-dialoging characters in frozen scenes. The only forward motion is that of language itself. And it is this relation, between the sonic motion of language in a language-dependent context of opera and the sonic stasis of music, that this thesis explores and that is the central point of its research.

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The present dissertation embraces several concepts and relates them with each other (Fig. 1).

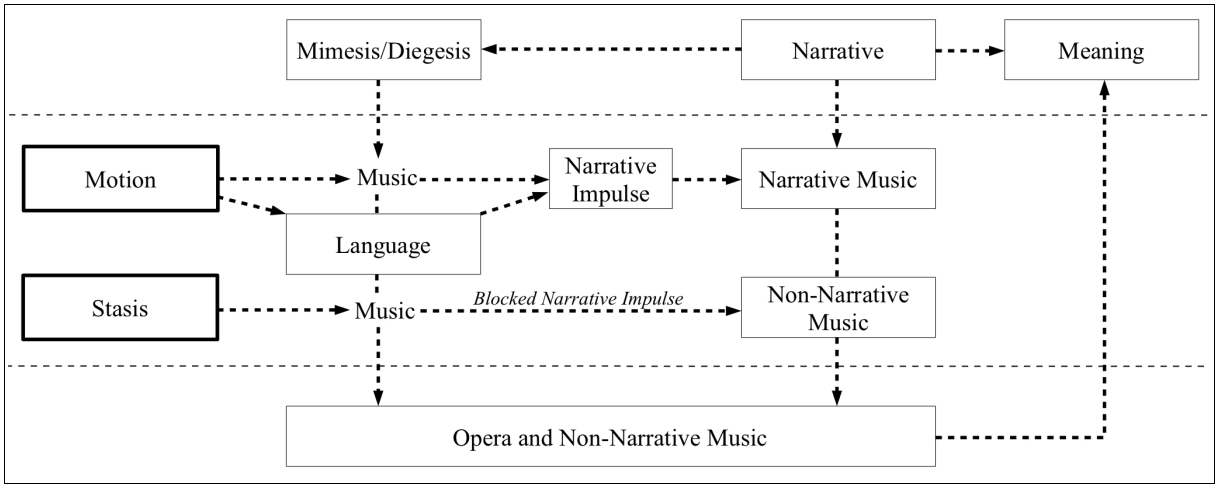

Fig. 1: Global schema for the thesis Opera an Non-Narrative Music *(boxes indicate chapters).*

It discusses each of these concepts, explaining how they are understood within this thesis and how they relate with the two main concepts of this work—*opera* and *non-narrative music*. The central thesis revolves around three principle elements: (1) *musical motion*; (2) *musical stasis*; and (3) verbal *language*. The antagonistic concepts of motion and stasis in music represent two different ways of handling time in musical composition and of perceiving time in music listening (Barthes, 1985, p. 259). Verbal language relates to time in two different strata: that of its referential content; and that of its sonic matter. The first strata can refer both

to moving temporality and to static temporality; the second necessarily implies the perception of sonic motion in linear temporality (Agawu, 1999, pp. 141-146).

As consequence of the three above stated elements, three concepts emerge for discussion: (1) *narrative music* and (2) *non-narrative music* relate directly to musical motion, musical stasis, and language through a (3) *narrative impulse*. This last point refers to a way of grouping and understanding temporal phenomena. It can be defined as the tendency for the perceiver to intuit a narrative logic in certain sonic sequences that occur within the specific time span of short-term memory (Snyder, 2001, p. 114).

Finally, three other concepts relate indirectly to this thesis and also need clarification. They are concepts that come from non-musical fields of study but, nevertheless, are appropriated by musicology. These are: (1) the plain concept of *narrative*; (2) its related notions of *diegesis and mimesis*, on one side; and (3) the unavoidable concept of *meaning*, on the other. These concepts can be used in music but must be contextualised in order to understand what they refer to when applied as musical concepts.

Throughout this dissertation, each one of these concepts and its aesthetic pertinence in the compositional work of the opera is discussed in a separate chapter. Each chapter starts with a literature review and discussion of its central theme, followed by practical examples of musical composition extracted essentially from the opera composed for this thesis. Nevertheless, other examples are also used, whether from musical pieces that were preparatory studies for that opera, or from works by other composers that reflect the discussed concepts. The idea was to delimit each thematic unit within itself. Although cross-references are frequent, this option reveals the disparity of subjects involved in this thesis and, simultaneously, replicates the very compositional process of the opera.

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In chapter one, the concept of narrative is introduced. In his book on *Story and Discourse*, Jonathan Culler (1981) states that “to make narrative an object of study, one must distinguish narratives from non-narratives” (p. 171). In the present thesis things work the other way round. The distinction between narratives and non-narratives is essential to make non-narrative an object of study. The main arguments, naturally, come from literary studies. But it is within cognitive sciences that the main break points are found. Finally it is explained how these principles were applied in the conception of the opera’s *libretto*—the grounding

element of the compositional work for the present thesis.

Chapter two comes as a consequence of chapter one. Understanding that narratives imply meaningful temporality, whether conceived as meaningful by a creator or rendered meaningful by a perceiver, it becomes essential to discuss what does *meaning* mean in music. This chapter follows Ferdinand Saussure's (1959) semiotic principle that "differences carry signification" (p 118). It describes how this principle is responsible for music's narrativity, when applied to sonic temporality, and how, avoiding temporal differences, music may still be meaningful without, however, being narrative. Antje Vowinckel's *Terra Prosodia* is used as an example of how the concept of meaning is profoundly distinct in music and in language, and a preparatory study for the opera—*Uma História Única* for orchestra and electronics—serves as a musical example of how temporality can be dealt with within a non-narrative music context.

In her book, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth* Century, Carolyn Abbate (1991) questions whether there is "non-narrative music, as there are non-narrative text genres" (p. 46). It is not specifically the concept of non-narrative music that troubles Abbate but the whole idea of narrative applied to music. Narrative in music is not a peacefully accepted concept by musicology scholars. Chapter three confronts different theoretical positions on this subject and suggests that non-narrative music may be essential for a more consensual definition of narrative music. As suggested by Culler's above statement, three quartets, used as non-narrative instrumental accompaniment in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada,* will serve as an opposite example to what narrative music is.

Cognitive sciences suggest that "narrative organises the structure of human experience" (Bruner, 1991b, p. 21). In other words, it argues that what builds a narrative is the perceiver's impulse to organise what s/he experiences temporally. Chapter four discusses this "narrative impulse" (Nattiez, 1990a, p. 245) applied to music perception. The main idea is that a narrative understanding of sonic events is humanly instinctive and that it is non-narrativity that needs to be carefully organised to avoid such impulse—a problem that is enhanced when, as in opera, verbal language is used. Olivier Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* is used as an example of how certain serial techniques can hinder the listener's narrative impulse, and a vocal quartet from *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* exemplifies how scenic solutions can help to fittext in a context where narrative impulse is blocked.

As has been said, what makes music narrative is a metaphorical perception of sound as being in motion. This notion and its contrasting concept of stasis are the founding elements of

narrativity and non-narrativity in music and are the central points in this dissertation. Chapter five deals with the concept of musical motion. Motion in music is a perceiver's construct. Their is nothing in music that really moves. Bob Snyder (2003) explains that "any motion [… music units] may seem to have can only be in their perceived connections with each other (p. 113). Chapter five discusses how this sonic illusion is built, and its relation with time and with human's memory system. Jason Kahn's piece *Timelines* exemplifies how music becomes static when escaping the temporal frame of motion, and a duo for clarinet, violin, and live electronics—which is probably the most static scene in the opera composed for this thesis—will serve as an extreme example of a music that totally avoids motion.

The second half of the dissertation deals more specifically with non-narrative and/or operatic concepts. Chapter six opposes the previous chapter by referring to musical stasis. It thoroughly discusses what static music implies as a compositional act, as an aesthetic quest, as a creative attitude, and as a new listening stance. It also briefly contextualises static music within twentieth- and twenty-first-century western society. A piece by Phil Niblock, *Five More String Quartets*, serves as a paradigmatic example. Finally, regarding the articulation of verbal text within static music, a piece for Soprano, Horn, and Piano, again conceived as a preparatory study for the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*, exemplifies the main problem of the present thesis: *how can the motion of language be articulated within a static sound*.

Chapter seven surveys various forms of non-narrative music, from indeterminate music and repetitive music to noise music and *field recording*. It explains how these disparate aesthetic approaches are complementary to the notion of static music, and how all of them carry the main common trait of avoiding narrative music's language-like communicative essence. Chapter seven demonstrates that the *non-narrative* term is most appropriate to define such music precisely because it alludes to the composers' will to avoid any communicative gesture. It is suggested that it is the end of this paradigm—of music as communication—that turns music static and not the opposite. Finally, it will be shown how the main paradigm of musical motion and consequently of musical narrative, the melodic gesture as a speech-like 'voice of music', is avoided in non-narrative music.

Chapter eight discusses the relation between language and music. A recent study by archeologist Steven Mithen (2006) has pointed to the possibility that the two media may have a common origin in primitive human communication. This theory will serve to explain morphological similarities between language and narrative music that have prevailed until the

present days. Steve Reich's piece *Different Trains* is used as example because it emphasises such similarities through its specific compositional process. An opposing approach is exemplified by the compositional process of the sung parts in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada.* Renouncing the 'musicality' of language, this opera avoids the paradoxical contrast between a motionless music and language's moving force.

The similarities between language and music can be considered mimetic. In chapter nine it is postulated that narrative music is in fact a mimesis of a diegesis—the imitation of the sonic design of a communicative language. As Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990a) stated "music is capable of imitating the intonation contour of a narrative" (p. 251). It is suggested in this chapter that narrative music mimesis functions by isomorphism—imitating temporal forms—while mimetic elements in non-narrative music are *isosonorous*—imitating non-temporal sonic identities. The concepts of mimesis and diegesis are also fundamental in opera. This chapter exemplifies several ways through which mimesis and diegesis was articulated in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*.

Finally, chapter ten discusses the very concept of opera. Essentially it tries to show what are the limits of the genre and how the opera composed for this thesis fits into a tradition that has produced diversified works throughout more than four-hundred years. As Hans Killer states, what an opera is "depends on the next one, not the last one" (cited in Ashby, 2005, p. 264). It will be seen that the operatic genre carries only very few elements that are constant and recurrent through its history and that these elements are, in more or less evident forms, present in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*. In the end, it will be seen how, even within a strict non-narrative approach to music, this opera can still leave an impression of narrative progression, beyond motion and immediate perception, within a formal retrospective remembrance.

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This dissertation is half of a two-part thesis. The other half is a music composition work—the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*. In an effort to homogenise these two elements of the same investigation, certain work processes were shared by the two media. This is evident mainly in a previously conceived structure that served as basis for the construction of both works. Hence, there are strong formal similarities between the opera

Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada and the present dissertation. These can be summarised in six points:

(1) the opera is composed of twelve scenes—the dissertation has ten chapters plus introduction and conclusion; the opera is divided into two parts by two complementary stories—the dissertation is thematically divided in two halves;
(2) the basic pitch material for the opera is the twelve note sequence from the *circle of fifths*—each chapter of the dissertation has twelve thematic sections;
(3) each scene of the opera can be understood individually and played separately, despite its connecting relations with the remaining scenes—each chapter of the dissertation is in some way self sufficient, although frequently referring to the other chapters, containing the basic elements of a micro-thesis within itself;
(4) the previous point implies that the specific order of the scenes in the opera is not so important for its understanding—the ordering of the chapters in the dissertation obeys necessarily a certain logic but is by no means essential for its reading;
(5) the secondary character of the opera is called *Narrativa* (narrative) and refers to the grounding function it has in this thesis—each chapter of this dissertation, plus introduction and conclusion, start with a quote from the *libretto* of the opera that in a not so subtle way alludes to the main theme of that chapter.

In no way is there an intention to establish similarities between the content of the musical composition and the literary dissertation. Neither is it considered that there are strong links between theoretical studies and the compositional practice of music—although these may happen. Both works are quite distinct and, most importantly, serve radically distinct purposes. The opera composed for this thesis is not a self-referential work, as was common practice at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, in the midst of the crisis of the genre, where opera as concept was the dramatic theme of its own productions. What is then intended by building formal links between the opera and the dissertation is to transmit in the latter an idea of how the compositional process of the former was dealt with. This takes advantage of a study field that, by reasons related to the very disparate nature of all that it studies, hasn't a clearly canonical form for a PhD presentation. Apart from this point, no interpretative relations should be established between the two parts—the theoretic dissertation and the music composition—of this thesis.

chapter one: Narrative

"percorreu a distância que lhe faltava e tornou-se diferente"[1]

i. *intro*

In a footnote from her book, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, Carolyn Abbate (1991) remarks how structuralist narrative theory may have unfocused the definition of *narrative*, opening its reach as to potentially "embrace all forms of utterance" and "text types".[2] She also highlights how this very broadening of the concept renders it insufficient when searching through specific media for "narrative signs" (p. 259). The idea here seems to be that, if a concept becomes too wide and, therefore, its defining characteristics permit its use in widely different scales and contrasting disciplines, it becomes no longer useful and needs to regain more limited focus. In 1972, Gérard Genette (1980) too had warned that "we currently use the word *narrative* without paying attention to, even at times without noticing, its ambiguity, and some of the difficulties of narratology are perhaps due to this confusion" (p. 25). More recently, Byron Almén (2008) points to the same problem but through a different perspective. When trying to find some common ground in different approaches to the term *narrative* in musical theory, he says: "the *definition of narrative* itself is the source of confusion" (p. 12, emphasis in original).

The reasons for discordant approaches to a specific term may be quite natural when concepts shift from different study fields. Almén suggests that, "because narrative was first conceptualised in relation to literature, we have largely failed to recognise the distinction between narrative *proper* and narrative as manifested in literature" (p. 12). Almén is assuming that, when transferring concepts from one studied field to another, misinterpretations are bound to happen, making it recommendable to build a kind of *pure concept* that aims to be valid independently of the academic field where it appears. Only then can a term have some usefulness in theoretical debate. It should however be stressed that, in this specific case, the reason for the polemics around the meaning of *narrative* doesn't lie exclusively in some kind of translation loss from the literary to some other academic field. In fact, the concept of narrative in literary studies is itself, like Genette and Abbate had remarked, ambiguous and subjected to several interpretations. Michael Klein points it out in his introductory text to

1 [He travelled his remaining distance and became different (trans. by author)]

2 Here, Abbate appears to use the term *text* in Mieke Bal's relatively broad meaning as explained by Meelberg (2006): "a finite, structured whole composed of language signs" (p. 44). Or simply how Laurence Kramer (2003) also uses it "text (image, dramatic action, musical unfolding)" (p. 8). This broader meaning of the word will be used frequently throughout this dissertation.

Music and Narrative since 1900 (2013), "if we hope to find consensus in literary theory on a definition for narrative, we will only be disappointed" (p. 11). Thus, even in literary theory, where the concept of narrative originated, contradictory perceptions of its actual meaning still subsist. Now, this would not be a problem *per se*, provided the concept is well defined by each author before being used, but when the term is de-contextualised and read as a somewhat universal concept, it undoubtedly can lead to avoidable misunderstandings, false consensus, or erroneous disagreements. This chapter proposes to summarise the different uses of the term in recent literary and cognitive theory with the intent to understand if narrative threads can be found in music, and how they are evinced. In other words, whether it makes sense to conceive a deep distinction between music in which narrative is intuited and music which seems concerned with its avoidance.

ii. *Chatman's dualistic theory of narrative*

Exploring the idea of a *concept in-between fields*, and looking for narrative bridges between literature and cinema, Seymore Chatman's text *What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice-Versa)* (1981b) seems to exemplify some of the ambiguity that surrounds several concepts used in narratology. Comparing Guy de Maupassant's literary and Jean Renoir's cinematic *Une partie de campagne*, Chatman remarks that "close study of film and novel versions of the *same narrative* reveals with great clarity the peculiar powers of the two media" (p. 119, my emphasis). What is most striking in Chatman's argument is that he considers *narrative* as something so abstract that can remain *the same* even through such different media. Since these two works are perceived so differently it becomes imperative, after Chatman's statement, to seek what in fact remains unchanged from one to the other. Essentially, Chatman's theory (1978) decomposes narrative into two distinct constituents: *story* and *discourse* (p. 26).[3] Here, the second term, what Jonathan Culler (1981) would summarise as "the discursive presentation or narration of events" (p. 170), is the form by which the first term, the content, what Culler defines as "a sequence of actions or events, conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse" (p. 170), is revealed[4]—the *what* and the *how*, as Chatman puts it (1978, p. 19). Now, from this perspective, it seems more plausible that, in the above-mentioned works of Maupassant and Renoir, it is the content, the

3 "Story and Discourse" is, in fact the title of Chatman's main treatise on the subject of narrative (Chatman, 1978).

4 Culler (1981) goes as far as to say that the dichotomy *story*/*discourse* is one of the few points of agreement (if not the only) between narratology theorists (pp. 169, 170).

story—the *what*—that remains the same, since the discourse—the *how*—is bound to be different in each medium. And this happens not simply because verbal text became film, it occurs because formal elements needed to be altered, eliminated or replaced in this transposition. The two works appear to the perceiver as being the same sequence of main events exposed through different ways, perspectives, and details. These different ways *are* the discourse. However, if one considers that the discourse has changed, one is left with the supposition that narrative is independent from its discourse and owes its identity exclusively to its story. In other words, if changing the discourse doesn't alter the narrative, then the narrative is only dependent on the story. Although this supports Lawrence Kramer's (1991) statement that "commonsensically enough, a *narrative* is an acknowledged story" (p. 143), meaning that if it is the same story it is the same narrative, regarding Chatman's own dualistic theory this doesn't seem plausible. Narrative cannot be the sum of story and discourse and then be independent of one of its components. Once the narrative components—its discourse—have changed, it becomes imperative for the sake of logic that the narrative itself has changed—changing the components of a whole should somehow change that whole. So, contrarily to what Chatman argues, Maupassant's novel and Renoir's film are not *two different versions of the same narrative*; but *two different narratives of the same story* (Fig. 2).

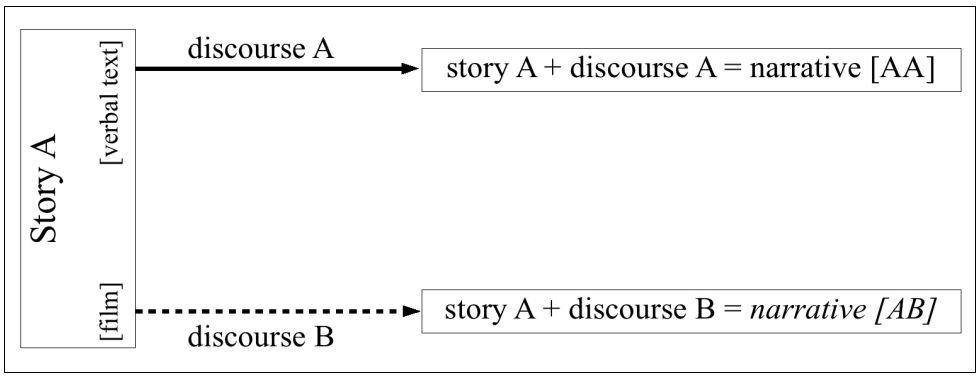

Fig. 2: Narrative equals story plus discourse.

Despite this ambiguity of terminology, Chatman's theories of narrative transposition unearth the idea that narrative may not be a term exclusive to literature, and that its marks can be traced in several other artistic media.

> A medium—language, music, stone, paint and canvas, or whatever—actualises the narrative, makes it into a real object, a book, a musical composition (vibrating sound

> waves in an auditorium or on a disc), a statue, a painting: but the reader must unearth the virtual narrative by penetrating its medial surface. (Chatman, 1978, p. 27)

It is, therefore, plausible, according to Chatman's theory, to speak of narrative beyond the literary medium; and music, being an art that develops and unfolds through time, seems at first likely able to sustain some of narrative's fundamental elements.

iii. *Genette's tripartite narrative system*

Chatman's dualistic theory owes some of its ground to Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980, originally published as *Figures I-III* between 1967 and 1970). Yet, Genette views *narrative* decomposed as a tripartite system where all poles are interdependent: "as narrative, it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationship to the narrating that utters it" (p. 29). Putting aside the fact that the English translation of the text uses "the word *narrative* for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself" (p. 27), a concept very close to what Chatman (1978) refers to as *discourse*, something which complicates even more any attempt to define clearly the term *narrative*, what appears fundamentally different in Genette's theory is this *third element*—the "narrating." Genette (1980) describes it as "the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place" (p. 27). What the concept stresses is the idea that the point of view of the narrator may, in fact, be part of the narrative proper, as a flexible element, as part of its construct. In other words, the positioning of the teller's *voice* (which is not synonymous with the narrator)[5], much more than being an imposed necessity when a story is told, is one of the tools for building and manipulating narrative and, consequently, a subject to be interpreted and analysed. As Genette puts it, "in every narrative we define the narrator's status both by its narrative level (extra- or intradiegetic) and by its relationship to the story (hetero- or homodiegetic)" (p. 248).[6] This emphasis on the narrator element of narratives is even more understandable when knowing that Genette uses Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, a somewhat fictional first person narrative, as the main literature work for the development of his theory. In fact, one may be tempted to postulate that the principal distinction between Genette's and Chatman's theories, the emphasis given to the narrating act, derives exactly from the main objective of

5 Academically, the manipulation of the teller's voice in a narrative is named *focalisation* (Prince, 2003), a term introduced by Genette himself (1980, p. 189).

6 For a thorough reflexion on the concepts of diegesis and mimesis see chapter nine.

their two works: the former exploring how Proust uses the predominantly literary tool of author/narrator positioning; the latter searching for common narrative threads between literature and other media. And these other media usually tend to hide or eliminate completely the concept of narrator, even while keeping story-telling efficiency. The literary specificity of Genette's theory leaves it less apt for musical theory. In fact, the whole concept of narrator seems either impossible to integrate in any narrative approach to music, or appears as an ambiguous element, a mix between author and teller, which has none of its traditional literary particularities.

iv. *Smith's wider perspective of narrative*

Perhaps one of the most vivid critiques against Chatman's (1978) dichotomous theory of narrative, or any theory that aimed to separate narrative in abstract constituents, came from Barbara Herrnstein Smith in her text *Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories* (1980). Smith questions the existence of an abstract incorporeal narrative or story present previously to its telling (pp. 216-218). For her, what the narrative tells—the story—can't ever be dissociated from the narrative itself because it exists exclusively through this mean: "for any particular narrative, there is no single *basically* basic story subsisting beneath it but, rather, an unlimited number of other narratives that can be *constructed in response* to it or *perceived as related* to it" (p. 221). Underlying this idea is the thought that *story* and *discourse* can't be considered as separate identities. This is because "there are very few instances in which we can sustain the notion of a set and sequence of events altogether prior to and independent of the discourse through which they are narrated" (p. 229). What Smith questions seems to be not so much that the same *story* or *narrative* can persist through different versions or media, one of Chatman's main points, but something that leads more or less to the same idea: that it is actually impossible to conceive what a *story* or a *narrative* really is without that story or narrative, or some other (story or narrative) related to them, coming again into existence through all the indissociable means needed for it to happen.

To be retained, when taking this thought forward, is the fact that, in some way, a narrative is only completed (made concrete) by and through the perceiver, through its interpretation and understanding of yet another narrative: the one perceived (thus also made concrete) by the transmitter, i.e. the author. For Smith, as had been already stressed in Umberto Eco's *Open Work* (1989, first printed in 1962), no narrative can accurately be studied without some knowledge of the cultural and social motivations that surrounded its creation

and/or, not less important, its reception. Eco explains this thought through the simple "That man comes from Milan" example (p. 29). He states that the content of this simple expression, what Genette (1980) would call one *minimal form of narrative* (p. 30), is, shall we say, reader-dependent:

> The expression itself is merely a juxtaposition of conventional terms that need … [the perceiver's] collaboration in order to be understood: in other words, … [the perceiver] must invest every new term with a certain number of previous experiences in order to be able to understand its current meaning. (Eco, 1989, p. 29)

Eco proceeds explaining how the perceiver can be more or less touched or moved by the information expressed, depending on whether or not the elements inside the sentence relate to her/his cultural or social background (pp. 29-30). It becomes clear, through this example, that every reading will lead to slightly (or meaningfully) different understandings of what can, only abstractly, be considered *one* authored information (Fig. 3).

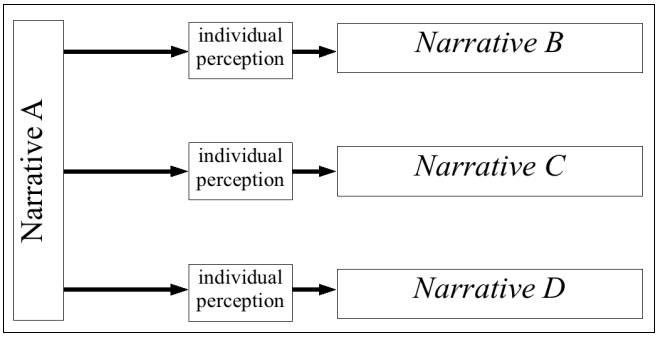

Fig. 3: Narrative perceptions

It is this idea of multiple, contextually dependent narrative interpretations, and the conscience that it is in that interpretation stage that narrative comes into being, that builds the essence of Smith's, so to say, tendentiously *post-modernist* theory. This concept is also fundamental for narrative music theory. As will be seen, regarding music's incapacity for explicit meaning, narrative music can only be understood as a perceiver's construct, even if strongly oriented by strategically prepared musical elements.

v. *Bruner's cognitive approach to narrative*

To shift the attention from the narrative object to the narrative act, while highlighting its *transmitter* and, especially, its *receiver* agents, permits an even more volatile view of the

narrative object itself. This, in the sense that *that* object becomes a result of interpretation and not a physical medium; a *reactive construct*, if you will, instead of a specific text. It is not surprising, hence, that these more recent narrative studies served as foundations for non-literary narratological academics. The psychologist Jerome Bruner (1991b) specifically considers the collection of trans-disciplinary essays *On Narrative*, a collection of papers on the subject of narrative by several scholars from various academic scopes, published in 1980 in the *Critical Inquiry*[7] (in which Chatman's (1981b) and Smith's (1980) above-mentioned texts appear), as a turning point for narratological studies in several human and natural sciences (p. 5). Bruner stresses that "we organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative" (p. 4). The full extent of his concept leads to understanding "narrative as a form not only of representing but of constituting reality" (p. 5), since *to represent* and *to constitute* become, in everyday-life's perception, almost identical actions.

This interpretation of *narrative*, as being "a form of organising experience" (Bruner, 1991a, p. 70), can be approached both through a perceiver's and a transmitter's perspective. Organising experience serves its understanding as much as its transmission. Bruner stresses this idea quoting Henry James's claim that "adventures happen to people who know how to tell about them" (p. 68). The point is that, although *narrative* may be essentially a perceiver's construct, this shouldn't let one forget that there is still an essentially manipulative substance in the narrative transaction (Tomaščíková, 2009, p. 287). This idea that narrative is a form of both understanding and communicating temporal events from real life, reinforces the notion of musical narrative as a basic instinct of the listener, trying to make sense out of sequences of sonic events—namely, that s/he will inevitably try to build a kind of sonic narrative out of a listened musical piece—and of the composer, trying to conceive it.

vi. *Fludernik's concept of narrativisation*

This making consistent sense out of a succession of elements that become events, evaluating them and, accordingly, rendering them hierarchically, until they too become some kind of logical, somewhat volatile, temporal unit, is close to what Monika Fludernik (1996) refers to as *narrativisation*. As she states: "[narrativity] is not a quality adhering to a text, but rather an attribute imposed on the text by the reader who interprets the text *as narrative*, thus *narrativising* the text" (cited in Meelberg, 2006, p. 36). Fludernik's narrative theory, although

7 This collection was later published by the University of Chicago Press (Mitchell, 1981).

quite framed in literary studies, reveals principles common to cognitive sciences and, once more, liberates the concept from its original academic surroundings, permitting important musical extrapolations. For Fludernik (2009) "actions, intentions and feelings are all part of the human experience which is reported and, at the same time, evaluated in narratives" (p. 109). Through this line of thought, one can say that it is as if human perception asks for, or needs, a kind of logical string that can tie its experiences together over time—a kind of irresistible thirst for coherence. It is this logical string that recent cognitive theories tend to call *narrative* (Fig. 4). David Herman (2001) clarifies: "narrative … constitutes a logic in its own right, providing human beings with one of their primary resources for organising and comprehending experience" (pp. 130-131).

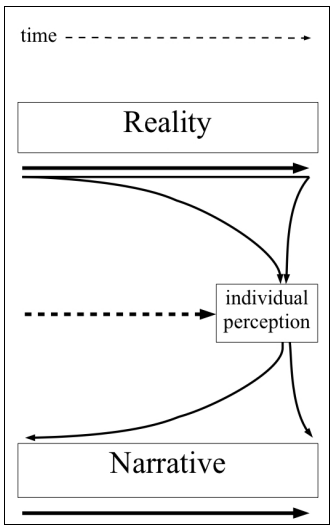

Fig. 4: The building of narrative through perception of reality.

Summarising these recent approaches to the extra-literary narrative concept, three features strike as essential: (1) humans attempt (and usually manage) to organise their own temporal experiences building mental, more or less realistic, narratives; (2) humans express temporal organisations in order to produce, or reproduce, real or fictional mental narratives in other humans; (3) humans expressing temporal organisations, conscious of how the narrative act is processed—conscious that part of the act is made by the receiver—or simply through intuition, can choose to leave out portions of their narrative that will be filled by the receiver's own narrative tools. This last point is actually, in some degree, forced by language's own limitations, since it is impossible to transmit every single and smallest detail of an occurrence one wishes to relate. Nevertheless, these three points may show how, in music, a composer

has an active part in pre-perceiving how listeners will build his music as a logically organised temporal experience—i.e., as a narrative—thus moulding his musical ideas accordingly.

vii. *Almén's theory of narrative universals*

The idea of narrative being both a literary and a cognitive concept reinforces Almén's (2008) claim that some kind of extra-literary narrative essence, what he calls "narrative universals" (p. 13), really exists. These *universals* would be some kind of lowest common denominator to all narrative theories, separate from "those arising from specific media" (p. 13).

The origin of the word keeps, in some way, the ambiguity between the concepts of constituted *knowledge* and its *telling*, between cognitive and literary fields: "the Latin *gnarus* ('knowing,' 'acquainted with,' 'expert,' 'skilful,' etc) and *narrb* ('relate,' 'tell') from the Sanskrit root gna ('know')" (White, 1987, p. 215). And although the modern concept of narrative may have originated in literary theory, as a form of *telling*, White's opening sentence in *The Content of Form* (1987), advocating that "to raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself" (p. 1), clearly posits narrative as prior to any literary mean, as *knowing*. All the same, as has been shown, recent narrative theories tend to concentrate not specifically on the *knowing* or *telling* but on their temporal experience and the inherent dynamics of that experience. Almén (2003) remarks that theorists like Vladimir Propp, Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, and Lord Raglan have considered *narrative* as being found in the action, in "*the relations between elements* and not [in] the elements themselves" (p. 11). Almén (2008) too sees "narrative as articulating the dynamics and possible outcomes of conflict or interaction between elements, rendering meaningful the temporal succession of events, and coordinating these events into an interpretive whole" (p. 13). Through his perspective, narrative becomes somewhat like an abstract force, "meaningfully ordering events in time" (p. 14), independently of its specific agents, its subtleties, and, consequently, its medium. It is, thus, limited to its irreducible factors: "temporality, hierarchy, conflict, and the observer's perspective" (p. 40). Through this abstraction from the specificity of meaning, one starts to perceive how the concept can rightfully enter musical theory, somehow classifying not only the way one listens to music but also the way music, as a sonic object, tends to be structured by the composer in order to fulfil an ideal of meaningful temporal order.

viii. *is everything narrativisable?*

As has become clearer in some recent academic studies, *narrative* is found in, and studied through, the communicating agents—transmitter and receiver—and not so much in the ethereal substance, objectified in some specific medium, that is communicated. This is not just a shift from the objective to the subjective side of the narrative phenomenon. It is a recognition that the objective side is in fact an illusion, that the narrative object is a construct, actualised at every new exposure, by a unique subject, thus, becoming "a subjective representation through the medium of consciousness" (Fludernik, 2009, p. 109). Vincent Meelberg in his narratological study of contemporary music, *New Sounds, New Stories: Narrativity in Contemporary Music* (2006), considers this dilution of the *narrative object* too excessive and, thus, tries to find a compromise between one narratological perspective that centres its attention on the narrated object, and the other that focuses mainly on the transmitter and the receiver. Responding to Fludernik's conception of narrative as dependent on the perceiver's *narrativisation* (Herman, 2003, pp. 243-267),[8] Meelberg (2006) finds it necessary to clarify that not everything is *narrativisable*, that the experienced object has to have certain conditions in order to potentiate narrative, and that these conditions, found in that object, can and must also be subjected to study (pp. 36-37). In this context, Meelberg prefers to specify something that seems implicit in Fludernik's theory but perhaps not sufficiently stressed: that "narrative depends on *both* the narrative potentiality of the object and the act of narrativisation of that object by an observer in order for that object to become a narrative" (p. 37, my emphasis). So Meelberg brings back some of the attention to the narrative *per se*, as an autonomous part of its own transmission act.

Although it seems prudent not to dismiss the narrative *thing* (*that* which is transmitted as opposed to *those* who transmit it) from narrative studies, it may still be conceivable, contrary to what Meelberg states, that one's tendency to narrativise experience, whether naturally or mythically, can indeed embrace all sorts of objects and occurrences; that when one can't find some kind of narrativity in what is perceived one tends to fill this gap with whatever elements one can find. This is precisely what Fludernik (1996) calls *narrativisation*, the "process … of making something a narrative by the sheer act of imposing narrativity on it" (p. 25). Meelberg (2003) defends the opposite with an extreme example. He affirms that it is not possible to "narrativise, say, an ordinary coffee cup" (p. 36).

However extreme Meelberg's example may be, what seems interesting, and it needs to

8 Fludernik also exposes this concept in her 1996 and 2009 texts but Meelberg quotes and responds specifically to her article in Herman (2003).

be addressed at this point, since part of the present dissertation will move around this idea, is that an ordinary coffee cup may in fact be narrativised; it simply needs a context, and a coffee cup isn't a conceivable experience without a context. Paul Veyne as cited by Nattiez (1985) seems to address this point, when he states that "facts do not exist in isolation, in the sense that the web of history resides in what we might call a plot, a very human but unscientific mixture of material causes, aims and coincidences" (p. 111). How did the coffee cup appear there? Why is it there? And other questions will arise and demand answers, be they naturally simple or esoterically complex (when every other thing fails),[9] and these answers will have the shape of narratives. Again, this concept has deep repercussions in the understanding of music: not only it may point to what has been the main issue of this chapter up to now—that music can and usually is understood in the shape of a narrative—but it may also imply that music cannot be perceived as anything else but narrative—meaning that their would be no non-narrative music.

ix. *the framed world that can ignore narrative*

Narrative seems in fact almost impossible to avoid in ordinary human perception. Therefore, it is important to return to Meelberg's extreme example and conceive one situation where some object, say the same coffee cup, can in reality be stripped out of any context and, therefore, avoid narrativisation. For that to happen the object needs to be *framed* in a time-frozen *representation*—for instance, in the simple textual phrase representing it: "an ordinary coffee cup"; or in a background-less picture of an ordinary coffee cup, that in fact represents it, but, as Magritte would probably agree, isn't *it*.[10] Barbara Czarniawska (1998) puts it in a simple way: "alternatives to a narrative are lists and formal logic" (p. 7). In such instances, what is missing for narrativisation to be possible is a temporal axis, an agreed *sine qua non* condition for narratives.[11] It is, therefore, pertinent at this stage to understand how that axis

9 In a quite famous 1980 South African comedy movie—*The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Jamie Uys, Dir.)—the whole story is built around a de-contextualised (put in an unnatural context) coca-cola bottle that leads to characters construing complex mythical narratives.

10 Magritte's famous painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, by representing a quite realistic pipe accompanied by the written text stating that that image is not a pipe, questions the differences between the object, its concept, and its possible pictorial representations.

11 Virtually every definition of narrative refers to its time dependent or time related status. Paul Ricoeur's (1980) approach expresses this dichotomy well: "I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent" (1980, p. 169). More poetically Vitor Silva Tavares (2012) wrote: "O que importa é a escrita-em-si-mesma, … esta música, este teatro das palavras, esta mania de dar sentido ao tempo" (p. 4). [What is important is the writing-in-itself, … this music, this theatre of words, this craze to make sense to time (trans. by author)].

was eliminated.

As is confirmed by common reasoning, time is unavoidable in all human experience (e.g., Husserl, 1928, 1991, and Heidegger, 1927, 2001, deal with this concept exhaustively). Yet, time was voided from the coffee cup. Through an act of a transmitted *representation*, some kind of 'parallel world', a *framed* artifice—a *text*—was created. Here—in the text—it is the writer's (or the speaker's) job to put things and the reader's (or the listener's) to accept them and to keep them somehow apart from the 'real' experienced world. As Jean-Jacques Nattiez suggests:

> In the description of a person or a landscape there is someone who speaks—the writer—and, among the infinity of things which can be said about this person or landscape, he has made a selection. For us, he reconstructs a world and indeed relates to us his own experience of it. (Nattiez, 1990a, p. 241)

So, it was in this reconstructed world, circumscribed by the accepted act of transmission, that an ordinary coffee cup was put and time was not. This area of framed representation appears to be what separates literary from cognitive narratology. Cognitive sciences tend to centre on how we apprehend what surrounds us and, thus, around on what could be called an internal creation of temporal meaning—an internal narrative, a "self-construction" (Bruner, 1991a, p. 77). From this point-of-view, it becomes less relevant whether what is being apprehended comes from the reality surrounding the perceiver or from some communicating agent like, for instance, a book. For what matters, a communicating agent comes from the surrounding reality anyhow. For literary studies, however, the focus tends to shift to the transmitter and, more emphatically, to the artificially separated world s/he creates with her/his transmission. In other words, it concentrates on a unidirectional statement—the text—and how its addresser—the author—positions himself within it and in relation to the potential addressees—the readers.

As has been explained, the *text*, just like any perception of the surrounding world, will be uniquely interpreted by a listener or a reader. However, in this case, in the presence of the text, the reader will not interact directly with it, in the sense that s/he is not physically exposed to what s/he interprets: the natural world is (naturally) *present before* the perceiver; yet, the text is *presented to* the perceiver. These two realities shouldn't mix for the sake of the understandability of both.[12] For the receiver, there is undoubtedly a change in perception. To

12 Hayden White (1987) has drawn attention to this fact, referring to how it can be a problem for historical narratives. For him "a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as 'found' in

make sense of what surrounds her/him is inevitably different from making sense of what is being told. One can conclude, through a joint understanding of literary and cognitive theories, that in perceiving a literary text: (1) a literary narrative can run parallel to a constant inner narrative, as in "for years in this fleshcase a shesoul dwelt" (Joyce, 1937, p. 180) running simultaneous with "I'm reading Ulysses;" (2) a timeless representation can accompany a persistent inner narrative, as in Meelberg's extreme example: "an ordinary coffee cup" running parallel to "I'm reading a non-narrative text." Hence, it is in this artificial parallel world of framed information—the *text* in its most widest sense (the verbal text, the picture, etc...)—that time and consequently narrative can be blocked. Thus music could also be non-narrative if it could freeze its temporality. Something that, as will be seen further on, is not so simply done.

x. *the unavoidable narrativity of verbal language*

> The hermeneutic narrative is constructed according to our image of the sentence: an organism probably infinite in its expansions, but reducible to a diadic unity of subject and predicate. To narrate (in the classic fashion) is to raise the question as if it were a subject which one delays predicating; and when the predicate (truth) arrives, the sentence, the narrative, are over, the world is adjectivised (after we had feared it would not be). (Barthes, 1990, p. 76)

Barthes's linkage, between the structural tension of a single sentence and that of a whole narrative, reveals yet another issue that broadens even more the reach of narrative: the verbal discourse has an inherent dynamic and, even if time-frozen in its content, is perceived through time and its structural organisation implies causal understanding, in order for its meaning to be grasped. Such grasping happens at several levels: from the gluing of simple phonemes into words, to the grammatical structuring of phrases; from the semantic decoding of these phrases to the understanding of a whole text's meaning. As Barthes (1975) puts it: "a narrative is a large sentence, just as any declarative sentence is, in a certain way, the outline of a little narrative" (p. 241). We have seen that the large-scale of narrative, dealing with content and its multiple understandings, is the focus of literary studies. The more abstract small-scale is dealt with in linguistics. What is worth stressing is that, at this level, the process of perception occurs still outside the text's 'world', in the sense of what is being expressed, and thus seems

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the events rather than put there by narrative techniques" (p. 21).

closer to the normal everyday-life grasping of reality. So it can be postulated that the same awareness that leads to causal constructs of reality, therefore narrativising it, is being used in the process of inferring meaning to a listened (or read) text.[13] The text makes sense because the reader finds a certain causal logic in its structure and builds, through it, blocks of meaning. And these blocks have their own internal dynamic, as described by Barthes, not merely semantical but also syntactical. This syntactic logic is time dependent, like narrative, it needs temporality to be built but remains still independent of its content, therefore belongs to the directly perceived world. The artifice of the verbal text is not at the level of the text itself but at the next level—i.e., in what it represents. As Barthes (1975) says, "linguistics stops at the sentence; it is the last unit that falls within its scope … : having described the flower, the botanist cannot concern himself with describing the 'bouquet'" (pp. 239-240). And here we are still dealing with the *flower*, the "bouquet" has but started to reveal itself. The point is that one may need a "narrative mode of thought" (Bruner, 1991b, p. 5), the same that one uses to grasp real-time reality, in order to decode a text before it may or may not reveal a narrative (Fig. 5).

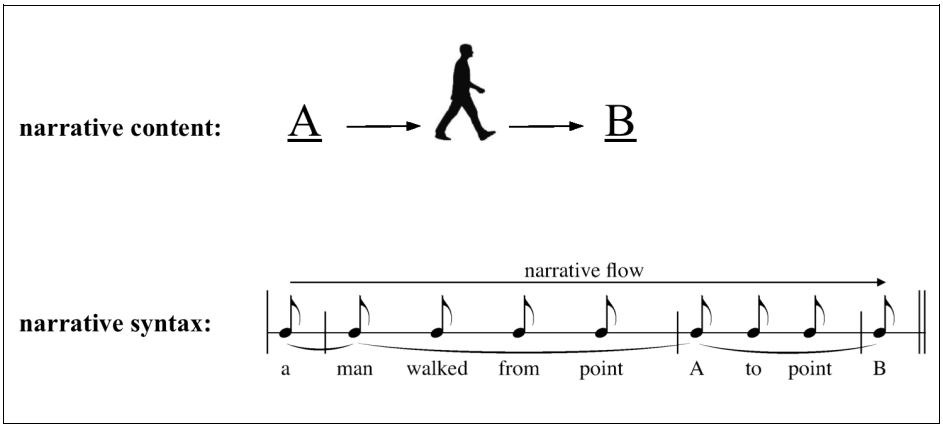

Fig. 5: Semantic and syntactic narrative properties of a phrase.

To understand a verbal text before its meaning has been extracted is to understand it as sonically functional, as having a logical coherence independently of what it is transmitting. This obviously shares strong connections with the way one normally understands music—a narrativising of temporal and sonic dynamism. It may be argued that this, possibly futile, exercise is nothing more than facing the text, to use Nattiez's (1990a) terms, "as if we are hearing a conversation in a language which we do not know" (p. 251). But wouldn't Bruner,

13 Bob Snyder (2001), in his book *Music and Memory: an Introduction*, confirms this idea, referring to the similarity between how the human brain deals with the recognition of physical motion, of language, and of music (p. 47).

or Fludernik, or Herman agree that, before such case, to narrativise would precisely be the human cognitive instinct? It is this implied narrativity of any verbal text that leads to the main compositional problem dealt with in this thesis: *being a verbal text, independently of its content, inevitably narrative in its structural unfolding, how can non-narrative music, following a traditional relation between music and word, use that verbal text and not become itself narrative?*

xi. *the libretto*

Before addressing this issue—how the articulation of verbal text with non-narrative music can be done without damaging its essential non-narrativity—it is important to focus on what is at stake for the present work: the conception of an opera in a non-narrative music context—a concept that will become clearer throughout this dissertation. Not being the primary interest of such a work to challenge the main paradigms of the operatic genre (the reason and nature of which will be thoroughly discussed in chapter ten), it becomes clear that this opera should have a supporting and structuring text—the *libretto*. And, working with non-narrative music, the first question that arises is if the text too should be itself non-narrative.

It has been proposed throughout this chapter that narrativity can exist both inside a verbal text—inside its meaningful content—and outside that same text—in the causally linked structure of its phonemes, syllables, words, sentences, and so on. Since this last feature is indissociable from the very essence of spoken language, any word will possess a kind of structure that makes it temporally logical and causal. It is, so to say, narrative in its sonic essence. Thus, in these terms, a text can only be non-narrative if it doesn't use words—i.e., even if it was semantically non-narrative, like the phrase "an ordinary coffee cup," the words themselves would still be syntactically narrative (Fig. 6).

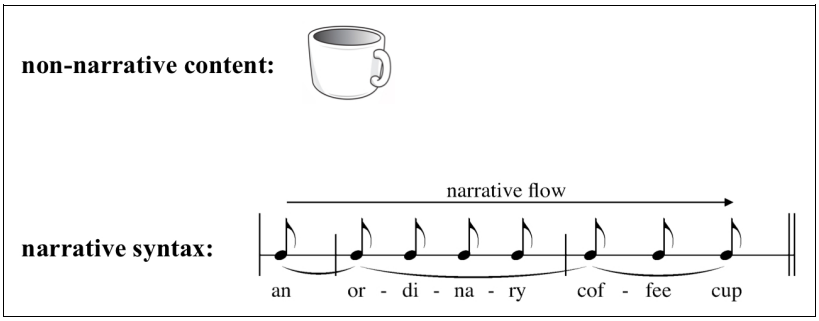

Fig. 6: Narrative and non-narrative properties of a phrase.

Again, one could challenge the concept of opera depriving it from a verbal text altogether—in a way, something similar to what Luigi Nono did with his *Prometeo: Tragedia dell'Ascolto* (1985), in his case, depriving the opera from theatre. The intention of the present work was, however, as remarked, to assume the main elements of opera, and to work within them. Therefore the text was built, at least in its structure, with a tenuous narrative thread—there is a situation, there are characters, there is even a narrator (for the full *libretto* see volume II).

Nevertheless, there are different models, or degrees of narrative. One can, with words that possess narrativity, describe a situation where nothing happens. Semantically speaking, there is really no narrative, or a very weak one. Nothing is happening or will happen. These words merely describe a physical or psychological state, or relate something so usual that one does not understand it as action. As Jerome Bruner (1991a) states, "we are bored and offended by such accounts as 'I got up in the morning, got out of bed, dressed and tied my shoes, shaved, had breakfast, went off to the office and saw a graduate student who had an idea for a thesis….'" (p. 71). But is it less narrative just because it is not exceptional?

It was precisely this minimum degree of narrative that was sought in the writing of the *libretto* for the opera, that is, a verbal text that describes a certain state of things and from which the reader can narrativise: maybe something happened previously to this 'non-story' but that is not relevant in the text itself; it may, nevertheless, become relevant in the mind of the reader. The *libretto* and consequently the opera was named *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*, a sequence of words that somewhat exemplifies verbal language's syntactical and semantical malleability.

xii. *narrative and order*

There is an interesting and important particularity in these formally non-narrative kind of texts that was fundamental for the overall composition of this opera: their sentences and even some segments of these sentences do not require a specific ordering. This means that their order in the text may be altered, leaving however the overall significance more or less identical (Fig. 7).

Original: "Hidden under wild ferns on Howth. Below us bay sleeping sky. No sound. The sky. The bay purple by the Lion's head."

Broken units of meaning:

Hidden under wild ferns on Howth. Below us bay sleeping sky.	No sound. The sky. The bay purple by the Lion's head.

Four random combinations:

#1: The sky, No sound, Below us bay, Hidden under wild ferns on Howth, sleeping sky, The bay purple by the Lions head

#2: sleeping sky, The sky, Below us bay, Hidden under wild ferns on Howth, The bay purple by the Lions head, No sound

#3: No sound, The bay purple by the Lions head, Below us bay, The sky, sleeping sky, Hidden under wild ferns on Howth

#4: The sky, sleeping sky, The bay purple by the Lions head, Below us bay, Hidden under wild ferns on Howth, No sound

Fig. 7: Four random combinations of an Ulysses sentence (Joyce, 1937, p. 164).

This is of crucial importance, since with some non-narrative music something very similar can be done: its sonic events don't need to happen in a precisely determined order to maintain its basic identity. The piece *Time Flies*, for sine-waves, spoken text, and video (in attached DVD), composed as a preliminary sketch for the opera evinces such features. A recorded voice reading an excerpt of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1937, pp. 164-165) is cut into small units of meaning and then randomly played by the computer while different frequencies within a small range are also randomly played in sine-tones (Fig. 8). At every new performance the order of sonic events changes as also the order of Joyce's sentences. However, the overall meaning of the lament is never lost, independently of the opposing conjugations that may happen (Fig. 9).[14]

Sine Wave I and II:	**Sine Waves III and IV:**
pick randomly from these frequencies: 390 Hz 395 Hz 400 Hz 405 Hz 410 Hz	pick randomly frequencies from: 390 Hz to 410 Hz or, with a probability of 1/5, pick from: 500 Hz to 700 Hz
Envelope: Sine. **Durations: Sine Wave I: 10"; Sine Wave II: 11"; Sine Wave III: 12"; Sine Wave IV: 13".** **Repeat *n* times**	

Fig. 8: Map of frequencies, envelopes, and durations applied to the four sine waves in "Time Flies."

14 This piece was slightly reworked to fit in the opera, becoming its scene II.4.

Stuck on the pane two flies buzzed, stuck.

[phrases to pick randomly:]

Glowing wine on his palate
lingered swallowed.
Crushing in the winepress grapes of Burgundy.
Sun's heat it is.
Seems to a secret touch telling me
memory.
Touched his sense moistened
remembered.
Hidden under wild ferns on Howth
below us bay
sleeping: sky.
No sound.
The sky.
The bay purple by the Lion's head.
Green by Drumleck.
Yellowgreen towards Sutton.
Fields of undersea, the lines faint brown in grass,
buried cities.
Pillowed on my coat she had her hair,
earwigs in the heather scrub
my hand under her nape,
you'll toss me all.
O wonder!

Coolsoft with ointments her hand touched me,
caressed:
her eyes upon me
did not turn away.
Ravished over her I lay,
full lips full open,
kissed her mouth.
Yum.
Softly she gave me in my mouth
the seedcake warm and chewed.
Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour
with spittle.
Joy:
I ate it:
joy.
Young life,
her lips that gave me
pouting.
Soft warm sticky gumjelly lips.
Flowers her eyes were,
take me,
willing eyes.

Pebbles fell.
She lay still.
A goat.
No-one.
High on Ben Howth
rhododendrons
a nannygoat walking surefooted,
dropping currants.
Screened under ferns she laughed
warmfolded.
Wildly I lay on her,
kissed her:
eyes, her lips, her stretched neck
beating,
woman's breasts full in her blouse of nun's veiling,
fat nipples upright.
Hot I tongued her.
She kissed me.
I was kissed.
All yielding she tossed my hair.
Kissed,
she kissed me.
Me.
And me now.

[to repeat *n* times]

Stuck, the flies buzzed.

Fig. 9: List of phrases to be read in random order in 'Time Flies"; first and last sentence close the piece.

This flexibility of textual arrangement reflects the *libretto's* very form of conception: sentences were extracted from several different and diverging sources and languages—from high literature, to movie quotes; from pop-song lyrics to personal mobile phone text messages;[15] these sentences and sometimes fragments of sentences, some of them unrecognisable, were then reordered with the specific intention of permitting eventual narrative threads between them so that the understanding of semantic logic would be possible, despite language changes (Fig. 10); finally portions of this new text are distributed through the three characters of 'the play'—two unidentified individuals, man or woman, and the narrative, which after all, as in this dissertation, becomes itself a character, commenting as a narrator on the other characters and on its own function (see full score in volume II). Figure 10 shows the text arrangement for *Narrativa*'s part in Act III scene 1:[16]

15 James Joyce, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Marguerite Duras, António Lobo Antunes, Luís Pacheco, Maria Teresa Horta, António Vieira, Karen Blixen, Henry Miller, Fernando Pessoa, Thomas Bernhard, Patrícia Reis, Dietmar Dath, Comité Invisible, Woody Allen, Wong Kar Wai, Paul Schrader, Charlie Kaufman, Stina Nordenstam, João Gilberto, Damon Albarn, Elliott Smith, Pascal Briggs, Joe Strummer, Björk and Manel Cruz are the authors of part of the sentences in the *libretto*; some other sentences were extracted from private text messages received on my cell phone.

16 The Portuguese sentences, some already translated from English, mean: "And he felt that once more the air opened him, but with pain, a freedom in his chest" – Alberto Caeiro; "He was determined to recover all he had lost; his loss was infinite; it was one of those situations that would go on forever" – Jack Kerouac; "He

Group of sentences and its authors (ordered alphabetically):

e sentiu que de novo o ar lhe abria, mas com dor, uma liberdade no peito: **[Alberto Caeiro - *Poemas Inconjuntos*]**
it's everybody eating everyone else. that's what life is after all. **[James Joyce - Ulysses]**
he saw that he was in the land of phenomenon where he must for a certain one day die like the rest too a passing show. **[James Joyce - *Ulysses*]**
estava determinado a reaver tudo o que perdera; a sua perda era infinita; era daquelas situações que se iriam prolongar eternamente. **[Jack Kerouac - *Pela Estrada Fora*]**
tornar-se-ia de tal forma ele próprio que só a verdade, esta verdade que ardia agora nele como um incêndio, seria reconhecível… **[Henry Miller - *Um Sorriso ao Pé da Escada*]**
you can't feel the pain until it's gone. **[wrong understanding of the lyrics of Linkin Park - *Somewhere I Belong*]**
a enorme paz de quem se perdoou por tudo o que é… **[personal writing]**
como se alguém pudesse perdoar alguém, **[António Lobo Antunes – *A Morte de Carlos Gardel*]**

Ordered text attributed to the Narrator – *Narrativa* (Act III; Scene 1):

“a enorme paz de quem se perdoou por tudo o que é… como se alguém pudesse perdoar alguém, it's everybody eating everyone else. that's what life is after all.
he saw that he was in the land of phenomenon where he must for a certain one day die like the rest too a passing show.
estava determinado a reaver tudo o que perdera; a sua perda era infinita; era daquelas situações que se iriam prolongar eternamente. tornar-se-ia de tal forma ele próprio que só a verdade, esta verdade que ardia agora nele como um incêndio, seria reconhecível… e sentiu que de novo o ar lhe abria, mas com dor, uma liberdade no peito: you can't feel the pain until it's gone.”

Fig. 10: Ordering of disparate sentences for the libretto (excerpt from Act III; Scene 1).

would become so much himself that only the truth, that truth that now burned in him like a fire, would be recognisable” – Henry Miller; “the enormous peace of he who has forgiven himself for all he is” – personal writing; “as if anyone could forgive anyone” – mobile phone message. (trans. by author)

chapter two: Meaning in Music

"há memórias que não consigo dizer porque são sensações"[1]

i. *intro*

If one assumes that a concrete meaning exists in a piece of music (or in any work of art, for that matter), then one has to anticipate that several wrong interpretations will appear, and that several people may never be able to really understand it. If, on the contrary, one presumes that a piece of music or art work has no meaning, then, obviously, any interpretation will be wrong—actually, any attempt to interpret it will already be a wrong approach. If, through another possibility, one considers the existence of a diffuse and subjective meaning, built from an intuitive and/or emotional grasp of structural elements, then all concepts involved become more complex: (1) being a subjective construction (*aesthesic*, in a semiological sense), there will not be found *one* but several meanings, possibly one for each listener; (2) being a construction built from a framed perception—the piece of music (a *trace*, again in a semiological sense)—meaning will still be exclusive, in the sense that it will still be somewhat limited and confined to what originated it. But this last point doesn't necessarily force some profound interpretation or a mastered listening. It can simply imply that, for instance, failing to recognise, rationally or intuitively, the reoccurrence of a musical phrase or melodic line at some point of a musical piece involves failing to perceive a part of that work's meaning. And this, for its part, means that understanding that musical phrase as a melodic line, and not as dispersed sounds, is already partially making sense out of the piece.

This survey of how meaning can be approached in music aims simply to highlight another polemic concept. Again one is faced with a dilemma: either music has meaning, and the problem of what its meaning is and how one grasps it needs to be addressed; or it has none, and it becomes necessary to understand how a meaningless thing can produce such different reactions as profound emotional states, as in, say, a classic concert hall, or hypnotic dance compulsion, like in a weekend urban club. Roland Barthes, in *Listening* (1985), one of his most musically directed texts, describes his stance towards two opposite musical examples:

> 'Listening' to a piece of classical music, the listener is called upon to 'decipher' this piece, i.e., to recognise (by his culture, his application, his sensibility) its construction,

1 [There are memories that I'm unable to say because they are feelings (trans. by author)]

> quite as coded (predetermined) as that of a palace at a certain period; but 'listening' to a composition (taking the word here in its etymological sense) by John Cage, it is each sound one after the next that I listen to, not in its syntagmatic extension, but in its raw and as though vertical *signifying*: by deconstructing itself, listening is externalised, it compels the subject to renounce his 'inwardness'. (Barthes, 1985, p. 259)

The key element in Barthes's thought is that some music calls for some kind of decoding, in order to extract from it something more than what seems to be immediately present, while other music doesn't. Being this last case less usual, then, in Barthes's opinion, the majority of music tends to have something that is to be found and understood, that is to be interpreted. But may one call this something a *meaning*, as in the *meaning of a verbal text*? Or is it not the same thing?

One has seen that narrative implies making sense out of temporal elements: be it by trying to extract meaning out of the surrounding reality; by conferring meaning to what one wishes to tell; or simply by understanding the meaning of that which is being told (see chapter one). To expand the concept of narrative to music is to assume that music can also deliver some kind of meaning, that it is perceived with this expectation, and that it is conceived with such intent. The concepts of musical narrative and musical meaning are thus intimately linked: apparently, one cannot exist without the other. Again, the term *meaning* can induce different interpretations and, being shared by several other areas of human expression, can produce misunderstandings. This chapter aims to clarify the concept of *meaning* as used throughout this dissertation, and its relevant role in the concept of musical narrative: whether, regarding the apparent interdependence between meaning and narrative, a music that avoids the latter will necessarily miss the former—i.e., whether non-narrative music should inevitably be considered meaningless; and whether such absence of *meaning* would be incompatible with a genre that uses meaningful verbal text as its structural foundation such as opera.

ii. *units of meaning and meaningful units*

In his paper for the 1980 '*On Narrative*' *Critical Inquiry* issue, Hayden White (1980) links narrative to meaning, stating that "the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself" (p. 6). This sides with cognitive theories that consider narrative as "the main mode of human knowledge" (Czarniawska, 1998,

p. 3). Byron Almén (2008) reinforces this relation between narrative and meaning considering that narratives "function as a subset of meaning, coordinating the successive and simultaneous organisation of content" (p. 41).[2] What is implicit in all these theories is that the meaning arises from the narrative, from the built temporal structure presented to, and/or constructed by, the perceiver. It is meaning that appears through narrativisation and not narratives that appears through meaning. Nevertheless, before this temporal narrative meaning is built, one can surely conceive meaning in simple representational units, the simplest of which would be a single word.

For the semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), "the important thing in the word is not the sound alone but the phonic differences that make it possible to distinguish this word from all others, for differences carry signification" (p. 118). Hence, essentially two things are implicit: (1) that differences need to be temporally sequenced and understood as particular units, thus causally linked; and (2) that these perceived temporal differences have an identity, meaning that they are meaningful in themselves. Since words are a temporal phenomenon, based on the detection of change to extract meaning, one can postulate, as has already been addressed (see chapter one), that a certain kind of micro-narrativisation is also in use at this level. Barthes's (1975) proposal that "any declarative sentence" could be an "outline of a little narrative" (p. 241) would then be taken one step further, that is, to the level of words as *micro-narratives*. This may be too excessive for a narrative theory, but emphasises nevertheless the different scales of temporal perception and how each one of them is essential for the creation of meaning.[3]

Musically speaking, Saussure's idea that *meaning is difference* implies that perceived sonic changes can be considered, to use Kofi Agawu's (1999) terms, as "the enabling conditions for music signification" (p. 141). Agawu focuses his text *The Challenge of Semiotics* in the links between language and music and in their different time scale segmentation possibilities. He considers that "a musical text, like a verbal text, is organised into discreet units or segments" (p. 142), and that these segments, usually perceived culturally, already carry their own meaning as an emerged metalanguage (pp. 142-143). As he states, "units, defined as elementary oppositional elements in a closed structure, subtend 'semantic' meanings whether or not such meanings are made explicit" (p. 147). These meanings, if

2 It is relevant that, of Almén's two recent major contributions to recent music theory, one focuses on meaning (Almén, 2006) and the other on narrative (Almén, 2008).

3 Although specifically directed to the study of sound and granular synthesis in music, Curtis Roads's *Microsound* (Roads, 2004) gives a rich and insightful perspective on temporal scales and how they are humanly perceived.

coming from sonic events, are necessarily the result of temporal perceptions (Fig. 11).

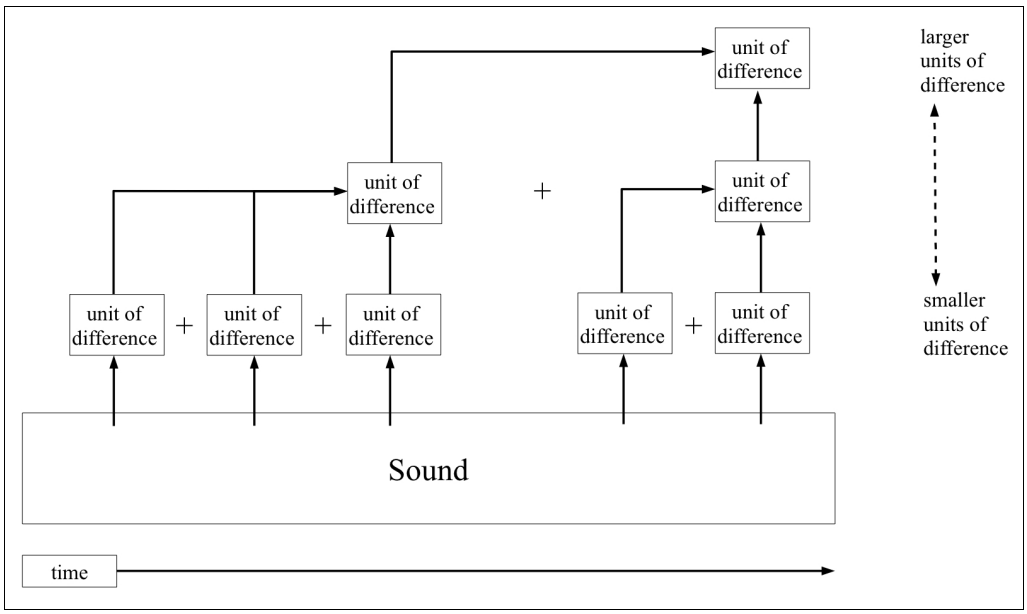

Fig. 11: Temporal building of discrete units of meaning.

Thus, one can assume, returning to Almén's idea of narrative as organisation of content, that music's narrativity is responsible both for the organisation of content and for its very creation. This content is not composed of fixed referential units, as in verbal language. It appears through the discourse, through a design of differences, and through the understanding and recognition of that design in what may already be a narrative interpretation. J. Peter Burkholder (2006) states that in music "narrative meaning […] requires at least an awareness of semantic oppositions and a tracking of their interactions through a relevant time span" (p. 78). What remains to be said here is that those semantic units are themselves build up from temporal (*micro-narrative*?) oppositions. Music, in its traditional form, like verbal language, is composed of recognisable units. The main difference seems to be that verbal language's units—words—carry a meaning, are referential, while music's units may be simply meaningful without any external referent (Fig. 12).

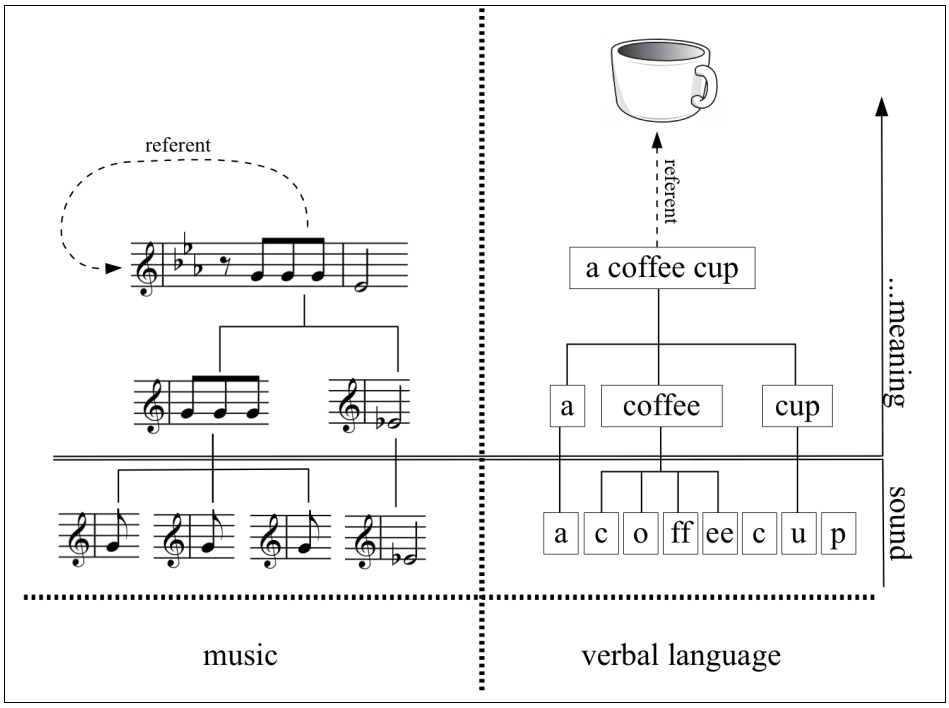

Fig. 12: Construction of meaning in music and in verbal language.
[*musical excerpt from: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, C minor, Op. 67, beginning of first movement.*]

iii. *structure as meaning*

In his text, *Music as Drama*, a study of how certain music seems to present itself dramatically to the listener, Fred Everett Maus (1988) finds "the received notion of musical 'structure,' as an aspect of music that can be distinguished from 'meaning,' to be vague and obscure" (p. 60). This is to say that, for Maus, structure and meaning are, more than closely related, parts of the same reality. Tzvetan Todorov defines meaning in a way that seems to support Maus's notion. For Todorov, "the meaning (or function) of an element in the work is its ability to enter into correlations with other elements in this work, and with the work as a whole" (cited in Barthes, 1975, p. 244). Simply by considering *meaning* as synonymous to *function*, Todorov suggests that grasping the structure of a work, with its functional elements, is perceiving its meaning. Put in other words, not perceiving a structure signifies that its functions and, therefore, its meaning was not understood. Barthes (1975) reinforces this idea when sustaining that "it is the functional character of certain segments of the story that makes units of them" (p. 244). Hence, to perceive a unit as so—i.e., as a unit—evinces that its meaning was understood.

Once it is clear that a unit is created by its functions, one understands, as Gregory Karl

(1997) points out, that its meaning "is determined primarily by its relation to other units in a system and not by its intrinsic characteristics" (p. 17). This *meaning by relation to*, contrarily to *meaning in it*, is again a perceiver's construct: opposites and hierarchies are subjective and inconstant evaluations, not clear and objective signifiers. However, although the perceiver will bring her/his background knowledge into the act of interpreting a work, therefore creating unique individual interpretations, s/he is somehow restricted by what that work actually offers to perception. As Agawu (1999) argues, when defending a paradigmatic analysis based on the foundation elements of music, "both composer- and work-immanent prescriptions ultimately determine the work's strongest meanings," despite inevitably plural interpretations (p. 147). So, meaning is a free construction made out of specifically delimited material, thus with restricted outcomes. Agawu's somewhat structuralist stance merely reminds one that musical meaning in fact has its origin in the musical fabric itself.

Formal/structural analysis in music is commonly criticised for seemingly explain more the *why* (or *how*) a piece of music means than the *what* it exactly means.[4] However, through what has been exposed, it seems that in music the *how* and the *what* are not so apart. In fact, grasping structure and grasping meaning may be more or less the same thing. Since the meaning of the musical units is founded in its structural ordering, since the meaning emerges essentially from that ordering, Fred Maus's mistrust of conventional separation between meaning and structure may prove to be justifiable: *how* a music means may very well be *what* it means. Consequently, to explain the *how* may be to unveil the *what* (Fig. 13).

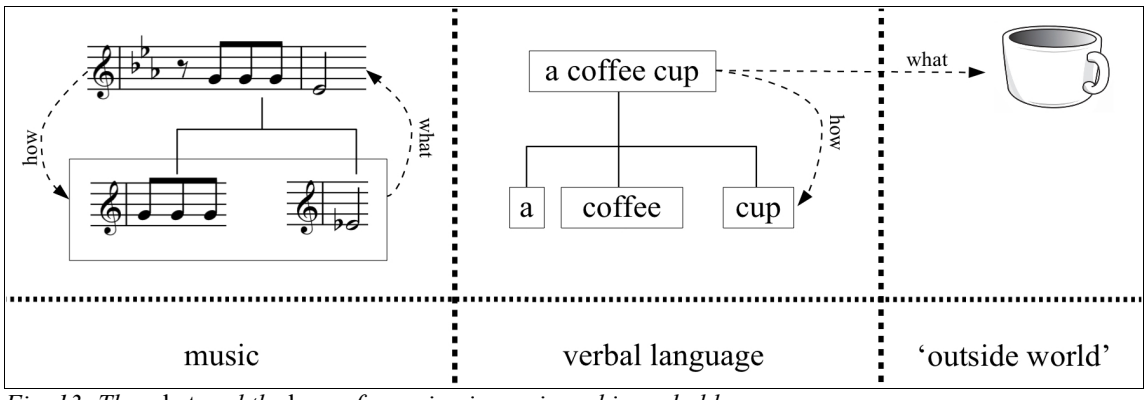

Fig. 13: The what *and the* how *of meaning in music and in verbal language.*
[*musical excerpt from: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, C minor, Op. 67, beginning of first movement.*]

4 This polemic between a more "work-centred analysis" and a "intertextuality theory" had its highest point in two opposing fundamental texts distancing more than twenty years from each other: Joseph Kerman's *How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out* (1980) and Kofi Agawu's *How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In Again* (2004).

iv. *narrativity as meaning*

Otomo Yoshihide, the japanese vanguard composer, states that "the moment one recognises a certain sound in terms of meaning, one stops hearing the sound as sound; that the emphasis shifts from sound per se to a certain fixed meaning" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 63). This somewhat Cagean understanding of the act of listening to music leads to an important postulate: that what takes us from hearing sound as such is our perception of its meaning. This is relatively obvious in verbal language, where our understanding of the meaning of words and sentences spoken to us moves our attention from nuances of timbre and tone carried in that speech. In music however, where there is no referentiality, this deviation from sound proper seems to happen when designed or intuited patterns are listened to as such, as sequences of sounds perceived as logical wholes. Roger Scruton, in his *The Aesthetics of Music* (1999), puts it in a slightly different way:

> We hear the sound world as a whole when we hear it musically: but what we hear has ceased, in our understanding, to affect us as sound. Thus when a sound enters the musical world it is heard in another way. (Scruton, 1999, p. 79)

What hihide refers to as meaning in music, uton considers simply *music*.[5] Although distant from hihide's concept, uton's affirmation may still be interpreted as an assumption of intrinsic meaning in music.

Scruton remarks that "to identify the work of music in the material world is to identify the sound pattern intended by the composer" (p. 109).Sound patterns are characteristic in almost all music from western culture. Usually they are conceived as composites of pitch and duration and named *motifs*, musical *gestures*, musical *phrases*, *melodies*, etc. As Scruton explains, these patterns are not just understood as such, they are recognisable in the sense that they can be identified as "the same again" (p. 106). They have what he calls an "intentional identity" (p. 106): a perception construct, inexistent outside of perception. Since no physical property of the sound implies that these patterns should be heard as such (p. 108), Scruton considers that music can be "perceived only by rational beings, and only through a certain exercise of imagination, involving the transfer of concepts from another sphere" (p. 94): an "indispensable metaphor" that "occurs when the way the world seems depends upon an imaginative involvement with it, rather than on our ordinary cognitive goals" (p. 92). To

5 It should be stressed that Scruton's study centres essentially on tonal music with very few deviations to some dodecaphonic, jazz and pre-tonal music. Therefore its insightful conclusions can't be fully extended to more recent European or Japanese vanguard repertory or to what is generally called ethnic music.

perceive these elements is, for Scruton, to understand them as apart from the sonic world, to hear them as music (Fig. 14).

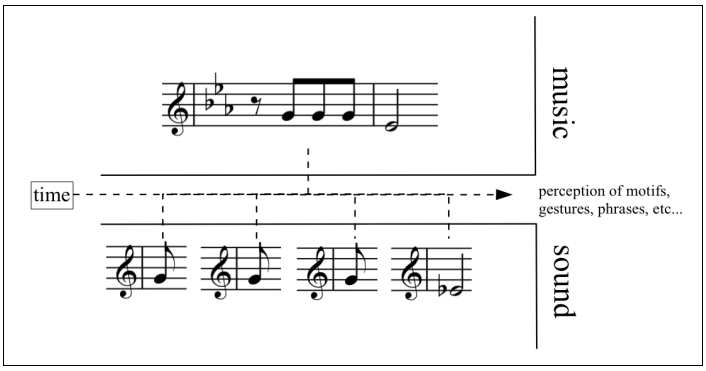

Fig. 14: Schema of sound made music according to Roger Scruton's theory.
[*musical excerpt from: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, C minor, Op. 67, beginning of first movement.*]

This identification of something different—music—from the medium that carries it—the sound—can in fact be a good starting point for a basic concept of musical meaning. As Vincent Meelberg (2009) simply puts it, "a musical gesture is a musical movement that is meaningful" (p. 326). Through this perspective, melodies, motifs, rhythmic patterns and similar musical gestures are more than mere elements of music, they can be considered its very meaning. Transposing Meelberg's idea that "music […] produces sensation by being sensation" (p. 325), one could propose that *music produces meaning by being meaning*? However, what could then be said about all music that, avoiding melodies, motifs, and rhythmic patterns, seeks no meaning but, as Yoshihide puts it, mere "sound per se"? Is it not music? One of the points of this chapter is to demonstrate that what builds the perception of these musical gestures is not, contrary to Scruton's idea, simply *music as such*, but one of its basic characteristics: its narrativity, or, in other words, its meaningful temporality.

v. *musical motion as meaning*

Meelberg's above statement that "a musical gesture is a musical movement that is meaningful," points to the, until now unaddressed, notion of musical *movement*. Scruton (1999) also calls attention to this phenomenon when stating that "in hearing a melody, we hear a beginning and an end, but also a *movement* between them" (p. 47, emphasis in original). This obvious but puzzling matter of movement is a constant in musical descriptions and rarely avoidable. Heinrich Schenker had rendered it implicit when stating that "every linear progression is comparable to a pointing of the finger" (cited in Cumming, 1990,

p. 148). In the middle of the nineteenth-century, Eduard Hanslick's (1894, 1986) was quite explicit stating that "the content of music is tonally *moving* forms" (p. 29, my emphasis), an impressive example of how even such a concise definition of music is still unable to escape the notion of movement. This matter will be treated more thoroughly in chapter five. For now it is important to reflect upon what it means when one hears movement in music.

The sensation that something is moving in a piece of music has, naturally, to be taken metaphorically.[6] This is not because nothing is moving when one hears music: one should not forget that for sound to exist, movement must also exist—from the sound origin, through the air particles, to the internal ear membranes. Movement in music is metaphorical because the sound producing movement is not the movement the music listener hears. What s/he hears when s/he hears movement in music is a motion either between discrete sound events or in their temporal changing. And this movement is not, in fact, there. Actually, even the very notion of change, from which movement is just one of the possible outcomes, isn't always evident (Scruton, 1999, p. 49). Hence, Scruton asks: "How can we speak of movement, when nothing moves?" (p. 51).

Movement, as one knows, is generally a spatial concept, however music doesn't usually, strictly speaking, deal with spatial movement.[7] The principal musical parameters that seem to stimulate the feeling of movement are pitch and durations: the melodic line that 'rises and falls' (movement proper); the rhythm that 'accelerates and slows down' (the quality of movement); and all the possible combinations of these elements. What really happens, as is known, is that sounds appear and disappear from our listening perception, being in time replaced by others. Therefore, in these conditions: (1) to say that a certain sound has *changed* will have to mean that one considers the replacing sound as somehow derived from the first—it is not a new sound but the same made different—despite being it merely a new sound that one is hearing after having heard the previous one; and (2) to say that a sound has *moved* will have to mean that the sound that replaced the first is in fact the same—that it has moved to a different place—although it is again a new sound that has appeared.

It is this *from-one-place-to-another* feeling that one has when one experiences movement in sound that gives it a sense of meaningful directionality, as evinced in Schenker's

6 Although the metaphors of movement are dominant in music theory, they are not necessarily the only form of musical interpretation. Robert Adlington's essay *Moving Beyond Motion: Metaphors for Changing Sound* (2003) reflects upon the dominance of the movement metaphor in music while searching for alternatives that may stimulate new forms of perception. Naomi Cumming (1990) and Marion Guck (1981) have also questioned some recurrent metaphorical allusions in music.

7 Contemporary electroacoustic music uses sound spatial motion regularly, but this is an exception in western music history.

descriptive metaphor of "the pointing of the finger." What is at stake here is that something in the way we hear music articulates different sounds together making them to be perceived as one unique sound in motion with a specific direction. However, this motion is not constant. There are musical moments where one feels that the movement has stopped and that what will come next will be a different thing. It is through this process that units of meaning are created (see chapter five). Motion features, therefore, build form and create its intrinsic structure. But, because a perceived movement implies a sense of direction and of expected goal, musical motion renders itself meaningful.[8]

vi. *non-referential meaning*

In his essay *A Simple Model for Associative Musical Meaning*, J. Peter Burkholder (2006) considers military calls as examples of musical meaning. Rather randomly conceived, like language, each call has a specific meaning and usefulness in military organisation (pp. 81-82). But can one really hear music in these calls? Scruton thinks not:

> If the sounds of music were […] to be put to a linguistic use—if there were literally a musical language—then of course music would be capable of representation. But then it would cease to be music. (Scruton, 1999, p. 138)

For Scruton, for music to be heard as music, it can't have a clear external referential meaning at the risk of becoming plain language.

In a slight approximation to this problematic, the composer Antje Vowinckel realised an electroacustic piece[9] that used recordings of several dialects and minority languages. Her idea, as expressed in the presentation text (Vowinckel, 2012), was to "underline the richness and variety in melodies of spoken languages in Europe." As she states, although the speakers were asked to tell "a personal story which is connected to the places where they live," being a musical work, "it is intended and important that the majority of listeners do *not* understand the context." The composer's worry was precisely that when one understood the languages as such, one would cease to hear them musically. Vowinckel's piece exemplifies how the frontiers between spoken language and music can be tenuous, and how their crossing, paradoxically, inevitably has profound impact on the very essence of both systems.

8 Curiously, and this might be no coincidence, in Portuguese language the concepts of direction and meaning share the same word: *sentido*.

9 Vowinckel's piece, named *Terra Prosodia*, was awarded an honorary mention at Prix Ars Electronica 2012.

Spoken language has both an objective and an expressive content. The first depends exclusively on the signs used and their ordering, and deals with the referent; the second also depends on the ordering of signs but, most importantly, on the expressiveness, on the emotional manipulation of its intonation—it charges the referent with expressive content. Music can deal with this expressiveness but, as Burkholder's and Vowinckel's examples demonstrate, it cannot objectively refer to anything. It is because of this fundamental difference between verbal language and music that the use of text in music is so appealing. Through text—whether sung with the music, whether spoken before or throughout, or whether as a mere title or commentary—music can make its aesthetic evocation more specific; through music—whether articulated with the text, whether accompanying its independent articulation (spoken or written)—text can enhance, lighten or deepen, or even partially alter its own meaning (Fig. 15).

Spoken Language:	*- referential meaning* *- expressive meaning*	**Music:**	*- ... no referent ...* *- expressive meaning*	**Music with Text:**	*- referential meaning* *- expressive meaning*	- text - music

Fig. 15: Layers of meaning in spoken language, music, and music with text.

In fact, it may be music's ability to substitute spoken language's expressiveness, in its direct articulation with the verbal text, that links both systems together and constantly stimulates comparisons.

vii. *meaning through isomorphism*

Up until this point, meaning in music has been considered as lacking external referent. Each musical piece cannot refer to outside itself, its meaning is self-contained and, consequently, non-verbalisable. However, some specific techniques can be used that, so to say, open music's meaning to outside referents. One possible way, even if still somewhat clouded in imprecision, is through what Gregory Karl (1997) defines as "isomorphism with human expressive behaviours" (p. 19). The term *isomorphism* refers to how the musical design, through its dynamic potential of pitch, rhythm, and intensity, can mime the dynamics of human's emotions and reactions. However this is not necessarily a clear mimesis, as when, say, a piccolo follows the contour of a bird song. Byron Almén (2008), who also uses the term, explains as *isomorphic* those "psychodynamic, historical, or interpersonal situations that have parallel or similar shape [to a certain musical sequence]" (pp. 44-45). The main

difference is that when miming a bird a concrete image is built, and with it the perceiver may or not build some emotional response; however, isomorphism, as the term is used by Karl and Almén, implies that the listener is emotionally attached to the dynamic design. It somewhat paradoxically asks the listener to mime emotionally its own design. Through isomorphism, a musical *crescendo*, for example, can be intuited as a growing emotional tension, or a *rallentando* may be understood, for instance, as the pacifying of a troubled mind.

viii. *meaning by mimesis*

Vera Micznik (2001) also associates meaning with the idea of simulation. For her, "musical materials having become signifying units with clear connotative meanings appear as presentations (or fictive retellings) of 'states' or 'situations' of the real world" (p. 218). Micznik is concerned with how music can unveil narratives through these external references. She refers to musical "narrative events whose gestural connotations mimicking concrete phenomena from the outside world suggest with such clarity mental concepts reducible to the 'linguistic ideal of meaning' that their figurations gain the status of 'telling about' or 'presenting' these ideas" (p. 243). Although never referring to isomorphic material, this approach takes its concept even further. The idea is that the configuration of the musical movement mimes, through the flux of exposed events, the sheer act of narrating or dramatising them (Fig. 16). As Micznik states:

> The constant surprise at the sudden interruptions and turns the discourse might take in each episode creates a meaningful unfolding of successive happenings mimicking, if not the articulate propositions that verbal discourse can sustain, at least a sense of the consequential, purposeful entangling of the worlds represented by the musical materials. (Micznik, 2001, p. 235)

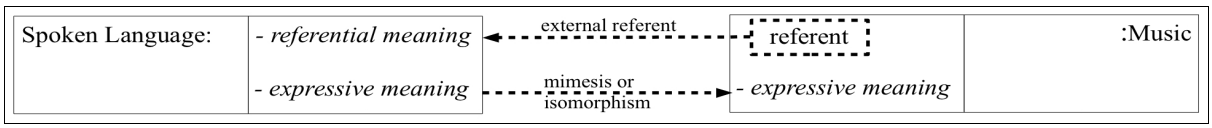

Fig. 16: By being isomorphic with spoken language, music can evoke its external referent.

Through Micznik's perspective, music more than referring to the outside world, refers to the act of referring to that world, with all the expressions, hesitations, and exaltations that this involves—the expressiveness of spoken language. This hypothesis is crucial for the

present work, since it establishes a strong link between oral speech and music, not in what concerns the concrete meaning of language, but regarding its sonic dynamism. It is postulated throughout this dissertation that music's narrativity may be intuited precisely through this sonic resemblance (see chapters three, four, and five).

xi. *meaning through juxtaposition*

The main idea of the previous points has been that meaning is either created through relations between units, forming groups of units that create other meaningful units, and so on, in an unending structure of perception; or obtained through the perception of external references inscribed in units of that structure. However, the chaining of these meaningful units into the structure of a musical piece does not necessarily need to be logically linked. Actually, the absence of that logic can, in itself, embrace meaning. Nicholas Cook (2006) remarks that "any object by itself has an indefinite range of potentially meaningful properties, but the juxtaposition with a second object brings certain of those attributes into play and de-emphasises others" (p. 116). Objects are therefore polysemic units, and to structure or combine them with others is to confine potential meanings into more specific directions. Cook develops this idea through the study of the *collage* technique both in visual and in sound arts. His theory establishes that the more contrasting the juxtaposed elements the more meaningful becomes their relation (p. 118). But this rich meaning is never objective, it depends on strong contrast and therefore on hierarchies established in the perceiver and in the structure of the work. Yves Bonnefoy relates his experience:

> this structure, because of the obliteration of the rational perspective caused by the bizarre combination, henceforth appeared opaque, irreducible to its own meaning or any other, and the reunited objects became mysterious, carrying us by their purposeless existence to a new form of astonishment. (cited in Cook, 2006, p. 118)

A structure "irreducible to its own meaning" is, to a certain degree, what all art works are, even referential ones like literature. Again, the notion of opposing contrasts can be understood at different scale levels, from opposing phonemes, as in Saussure's theory discussed above, to contrasting sections or chapters. Also the intensity of the contrast can lead to antagonistic perceptions of linkage or rupture, where the first case would have a more concise field of meanings than the second, albeit both as result of juxtaposition.

Cook's stimulating idea—that clear denotative meaning, coming from an objective

representation, can become connotative and multiple through the contrasting juxtaposition of another denotative meaning—raises some problems when one concentrates on musical meaning. In music, the previous denotative meanings that will build contrast are apparently inexistent. To deal with this point, Cook turns to film and specifically Sergei Eisenstein's theories, where *collage* turns to *montage*, a temporal medium of juxtaposition therefore more useful for musical analogies.[10] Regarding the difference between linkage and Eisenstein's rupture *montage*, Cook states that "the idea of linkage implies a pre-existing meaning, inherent in the individual shot, whereas the basis of Eisenstein's approach is that juxtaposition creates emergent meaning" (p. 123-124). Cook proposes then that meaning in music can appear in the contrast of otherwise meaningless elements or elements of which meaning is irrelevant. Therefore, what Eisenstein (1948) considers in film "a third something" (p. 17)—a new meaning built out of two different juxtaposed meanings—could in fact in music be its *first something*—a meaning arising from two meaningless yet contrasting units (Fig. 17).

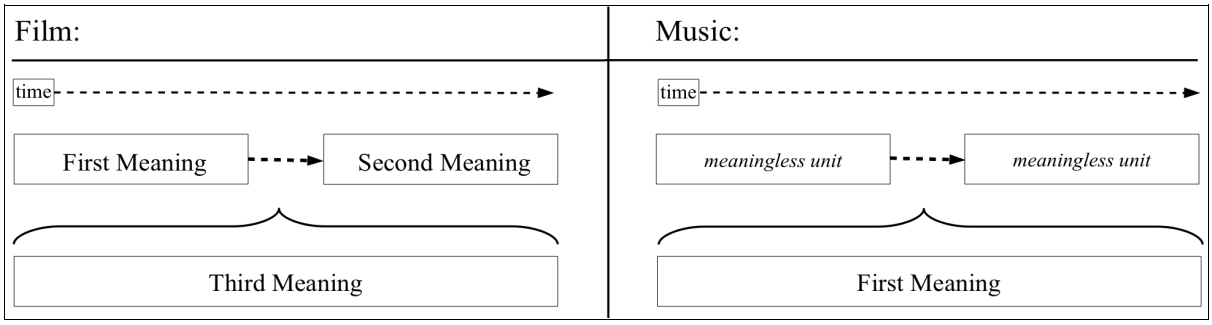

Fig. 17: Meaning by juxtaposition in film and in music.

Cook's perspective may have profound impact on the concept of meaning in non-narrative music. Through his theory it is possible to conceive contrasting non-narrative musical objects, consequently devoid of meaning, triggering meaning simply by their juxtaposition. A substantial part of the compositional work done for the present thesis is grounded on this principle: that meanings can and do arise from combining contrasting musical material independently of their narrative or non-narrative nature; and that these meanings are non-narrative in themselves, i.e., that they do not derive from the perception of temporal causality, but, quite on the opposite, from its rupture. They are temporally meaningless even if aesthetically meaningful.

10 Eisenstein himself considers a proximity between music and cinema objectified in the perception of movement: "To relate these two [plastic and tonal] elements, we find a natural language common to both—movement" (Eisenstein, 1948, p. 70).

x. *aligned and superimposed Juxtaposition*

The concept of meaningless temporality—non-narrativity—through a slightly extended idea of juxtaposition was used in the compositional process of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*. In this case, juxtaposition and the consequent meaningful outcome was worked according, not only to Eisenstein's horizontal montage principle discussed above, where the temporal succession of events creates the meaning, but to a vertical axis where the overlaying of different sound material permits disparate outcomes and sonic identities. These principles of vertical and horizontal juxtaposition had been thoroughly tested in *Uma História Única*, a piece for orchestra and electronics composed as a preparatory study for the opera (see volume II for full score; and attached DVD for recording). Therefore, before addressing how juxtaposition was used in the opera, it is important to understand its use in this preparatory work.

In *Uma História Única*, vertical juxtaposition derived from superposing two distinct sonic identities throughout a four minute time span: (1) a multiple and rippling glissando within the range of half-tone; and (2) a net of sonically stable occurrences in a gradual synchronising/desynchronising process. Both these sonic identities were conceived as separate pieces and then superimposed—creating a new sonic identity (Fig. 18).

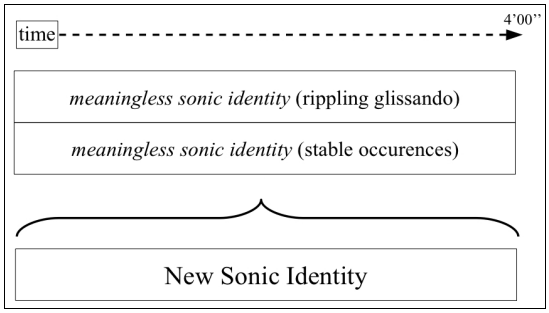

Fig. 18: Superimposed sonic identities creating a new sonic identity in Uma História Única.

The concept of horizontal juxtaposition, on the other hand, resulted from the temporal aligning of contrasting entities. This work involved two stages: one using electronic techniques, the other using orchestration. In the first stage, an electronic piece was conceived as a contrasting complement to its preceding orchestral one. This piece used real-time recorded sound samples from the orchestra that were then processed to create a three-minute drone-like continuum. The orchestral four-minute piece and the electronic three-minute piece were juxtaposed creating a kind of double-sided identity. These two complementing parts

were respectively named *in* and *out*, as an allusion to the electronic process involved.

The second stage of horizontal juxtaposition was the conception of three more modules using identical material and the same processes: each new orchestral piece became a slightly altered arrangement and orchestration of the first module; each new electronic piece derived from the samples captured from each immediately preceding orchestral section, and from a different electronic sound processing mechanism applied to each of them (Fig. 19).

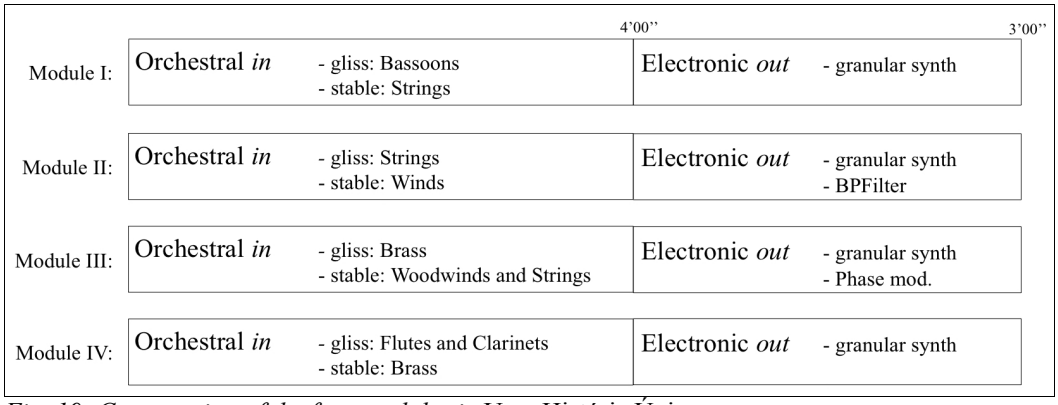

Fig. 19: Construction of the four modules in Uma História Única.

The straightforward disposition of these modules in a temporal sequence created the identity of the whole work. However, it should be stressed that this whole temporal identity, happening through the alignment of extensive sound blocks, is merely built in long-term memory—the duration of each sonic piece is too long for their horizontal juxtaposition to be perceived as in motion, as causally linked, or as narrative.[11]

xi. *juxtaposition in* Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada

As said, the same principles of juxtaposition were used in the compositional process of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*. As a primary step, a set of four different *sound pieces* were conceived: (1) a string quartet; (2) a clarinet quartet; (3) a sine wave quartet—as an electronic piece for four sine waves; and (4) a group of recordings—six audio captures from specific sonic environments in a, so to say, 'tape' format. These *sound pieces* build the main musical basis for the twelve scenes of the whole opera. In fact, with the exception of three specifically composed occasions, they may appear in any of the remaining nine scenes. The compositional process of each of these pieces will be described in later chapters. For now it suffices to know that only the audio recordings are 'closed works', in the

11 The importance of short- and long-term memory in grasping narrativity will be thoroughly discussed in chapters five and six.

sense that they will sound the same every time they are played.[12] The remaining three *sound pieces* are written in a way that, although the main identity of the work is not altered they will sound differently at each performance. This principle, together the principle of juxtaposition, guarantees a constant yet ever-changing sonic scenery for the operatic action.

In comparison with *Uma História Única*, the main novelty was that, as had been done with the quartets, the possible outcomes of both vertical and horizontal juxtaposition were left open in the score. This means that the choice of the *sound pieces* to superimpose and their ordering throughout the structure of the opera should be randomly done either during the production of the opera or before each performance, depending on stage direction decisions. The random choice procedures obey eight important premises:

(1) the opera consists of twelve scenes of ten minutes each;
(2) since three of the twelve scenes of the opera are specifically composed, the *sound pieces* may appear in the remaining nine;
(3) each *sound piece* may appear a maximum of five and a minimum of two times during the whole opera;
(4) each *sound piece* should sound differently at each appearance;
(5) the recurrence of same combination of superimposed *sound pieces* should never happen;
(6) a *sound piece* without any superimposed piece is considered a possible combination;
(7) three *sound piece* combinations are not used.
(8) a scene with no *sound piece* may or may not occur.

It is important to notice that, since the string, clarinet, and sine-wave quartets sound differently at every new performance, by force of their indeterminate scores, they conform with the fourth premise. However, the 'tape' pieces will sound exactly the same each time they are played—each one is a fixed record. It is for this reason and to conform with the fourth premise that more than five different audio recordings are provided: so that a different, also randomly chosen piece can be played at each of the five possible appearances. The particular nature of these six 'tape' pieces, and their impact in the structure of the opera will be discussed in chapter nine.

All eight premises result in twelve possible combinations of which only nine, distributed by the nine available scenes, will be used at each presentation. To perform the random choice, a set of twelve cards were conceived representing all sonic possibilities

12 For the concept of close (determinate) and open (indeterminate) work, see Eco (1989) and Cage (1973, pp. 35-40).

(Fig. 20).

String Quartet	String Quartet Clarinet Quartet	String Quartet Sine-Wave Quartet	String Quartet Sine-Wave Quartet Clarinet Quartet Recording	Sine-Wave Quartet Recording	Sine-Wave Quartet
Clarinet Quartet	Clarinet Quartet Sine-Wave Quartet	Clarinet Quartet Recording	nothing	Recording String Quartet	Recording

Fig. 20: Twelve combinations of superimposed sound pieces.

The first nine cards to be randomly picked will define which *sound pieces* will be played and in which juxtaposing combinations. The order by which the cards appear will define the order of the combined *sound pieces* in the overall temporal structure of the opera. In other words, the order of the cards sets their horizontal juxtaposition (Fig. 21).

scenes:	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
background sound:	**1**	**2**	specifically composed scene	**3**	**4**	**5**

scenes:	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
background sound:	specifically composed scene	**6**	**7**	specifically composed scene	**8**	**9**

Fig. 21: Sequence of available scenes for the sound pieces.

Again, as with *Uma História Única*, the ten-minute duration of each scene and of its corresponding *sound pieces* are too long for their horizontal juxtaposition to be understood as being causally related. Therefore, a musical narrative may be constructed from the recollection of the whole operatic structure, nevertheless it will not be intuited during the listening experience.

A final remark should be made regarding the meaningfulness of the vertical juxtaposition, since it carries important nuances: first, because it permits up until four layers of juxtaposition, stimulating meaningful interpretations, and creating a larger field of sonic possibilities to be revealed throughout the whole opera; second, and most importantly, because these already layered *sound pieces* will be superimposed with yet another meaningful layer—that of the singing voices. As was seen earlier, music earns meaning through its attached text, but the text's meaning is also influenced by the music that supports it. Hence, each scene can gain different semantic connotations depending on which *sound piece* or

superimposed *sound pieces* is accompanying it. The main aim of this juxtaposing technique in this operatic context is, thus, to guarantee that the verbal text too, despite being closed within a preset of chosen phrases, will become polysemic, and subjected to a different emotional content at each new performance.[13]

xii. *narrative meaning and aesthetic meaning*

It has been seen that: (1) beyond vocal speech, for sounds to have meaning—i.e., for them to be perceived apart from the chaotic soundscape of everyday life—they have to be perceived as changing unities with recognisable identities; (2) musical meaning cannot be considered as having the same properties as meaning in verbal language—except through the limited resources discussed above, it does not concretely refer to the world outside itself; (3) music can be said to have meaning merely because its patterns or its designs permit their perception as discrete, meaningful sonic units—as recognisable events with specific identities; (4) musical patterns or musical designs are temporal events and thus can be considered as micro-narratives; (5) these sound events are felt as being in motion, which enhances is meaningfulness; (6) groups of such sonic units can be perceived as causally related, in a way somewhat similar to oral language or to sonic sequences from the outside world, being recognisable as such and motivating expectations as to their outcome; (7) through the process of causally linking sound sequences, sonic temporality is made meaningful—i.e., sound is narrativised; finally (8) if sonic events are not causally linked, if they are not understood as evolving one from the other, they become temporally meaningless.

However, the absence of a temporal meaning does not imply a total lack of any meaning. An aesthetic experience is said to be meaningful in itself independently of being or not temporally meaningful. Scruton (1999) considers that "works of art have an 'aesthetic' meaning over and above their representational content" (p. 140). This implies that the aesthetic meaning exists in an art work beyond its content, whether it exists or not. Traditional music seems to have some kind of temporally structured meaning, a narrativity, that refers exclusively to itself. One has seen how Scruton problematically considers the perception of such structures as essential for recognising music as such (see section iv). But music's aesthetic meaning goes *beyond* that structural meaning. Narrative meaning in music comes from recognising, intuiting, or forcing causality between sonic units that were themselves

13 The attached DVD contains two different 'sonic prototypes' of some of the scenes. The differences between each pair of versions exemplifies how the process of aleatoric superimposing influences the meaning of each scene.

recognised, intuited, or imagined. Aesthetic meaning, on the other hand, comes from approaching such sonic narrative entities, or other sonic entities, whether narrative or not, for no other reason than their mere sensuous experience, appreciating or not their essence. If this essence is narrative, attention tends to focus on the evolving structure and the balance between its temporal elements. If, on the contrary, the music is essentially non-narrative, then the focus shifts to the details of the sonic body, that is, the sound itself—music listening changes from following what is happening to perceiving what is there. Narrative entities are temporally meaningful, non-narrative entities are temporally meaningless. However, both cases may be aesthetically meaningful and, therefore, musical. Hence, it becomes clear that an alternative to Scruton's excessively tight conception of music needs to be found in order to fit these two fundamentally different aesthetic perceptions of music (Figs. 22 and 23).

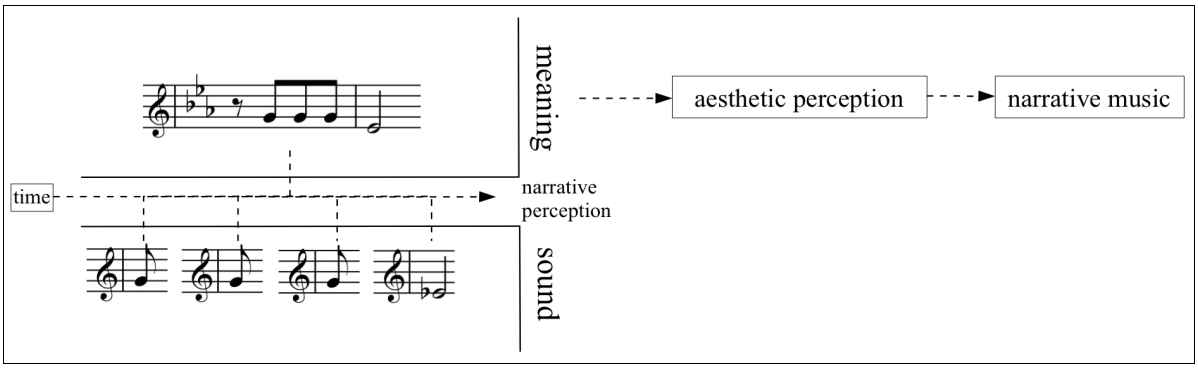

Fig. 22: Aesthetic perception in narrative music.
[*musical excerpt from: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, C minor, Op. 67, beginning of first movement.*]

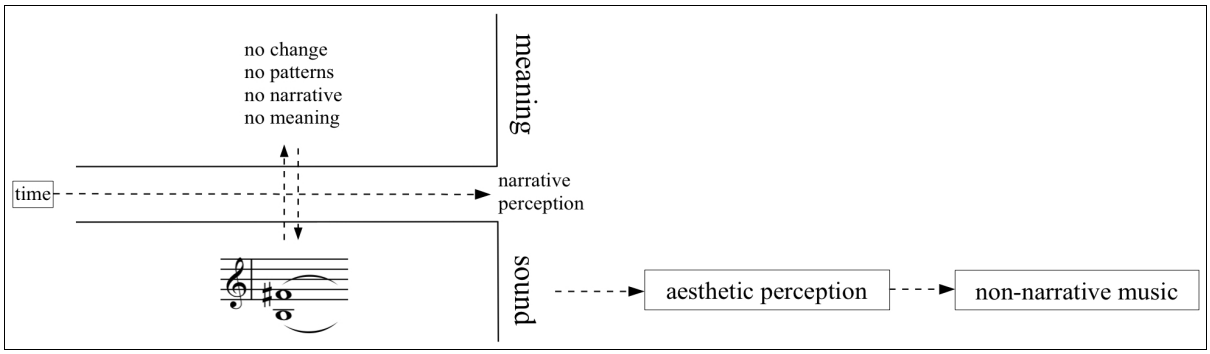

Fig. 23: Aesthetic perception in non-narrative music.
[*musical example from: La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #7*]

Reflecting upon the problem of music definition, the acoustic ecologist Murray Schafer (1994) stated that "to define music merely as *sounds* would have been unthinkable a few years ago, though today it is the more exclusive definitions that are proving unacceptable" (p. 5).

Clearly grounded in Schafer's challenging concept, Francisco López (1998) proposes a similar, yet more precise, definition: "music is an aesthetic (in its widest sense) perception / understanding / conception of sound." Both proposals open the range of music and simplify the categorising of new genres that had started to fall beyond any traditional classification of music. Can thus music become just sound, turned music merely through the aesthetic intention of its listener? Through the growth of more recent approaches in electronic music, field recording, sound art, and other sonorous manifestations it surely seems plausible.

chapter three: Narrative in Music

"demasiado cheia de palavras para conseguir exprimi-las"[1]

i. *intro*

The title of the present dissertation can leave the impression that its basic referents —'narrative,' in music, and 'opera'—are clear and established concepts. However, this is of course untrue. As has started to be shown, meaning ambiguity in music theory terminology is more than frequent. And, in the case of recent terms, imported from other fields of theoretical study, their significance and purpose are both equivocal and highly contested. This is precisely the case for the concept of *narrative music*. In the past three decades the subject has been intensively debated in seminars and conferences, published studies, and books. Scholars have approached the meaning of the concept and its applicability in diverse fields of musicology creating an extended corpus of diversified theoretical approaches.[2] However enlightening the reading of such works may be, one cannot help but think that questions of terminology, of what is meant by such crucial concepts as *musical narrative* or *musical meaning*, still cloud a complete understanding of the subject. Being a temporal art, and because time is such a volatile entity, music theory tends to lean on spatial metaphors in order to make music's temporality more graspable—the concept of *musical form*, for instance, is already a spatial metaphorical analogy. However, temporal allusions are also quite common in musical studies. When referring to *musical motion*, for instance, one expresses both concepts of space and time. Roger Scruton (1999) remarks that music "can be identified only through metaphors, which is to say, only through descriptions that are false" (p. 108). Music has in fact neither real *form* nor real *motion*. These *false descriptions* of perceived entities are simply the only tools musical theory has to work with.

What makes the *narrative* metaphor so attractive to music, and at the same time so polemical, is two of its most basic features: (1) that it, contrary to motion metaphors, deals with time without necessarily dealing with space; and (2) that it may be, like music, a perceiver dependent construction and thus, returning to Scruton's assumption, may itself be

1 [Too full of words to be able to express them (trans. by author)]

2 To name but a few, in particular those that have been most influential in this dissertation: Almén, 2003, 2006, and 2008; Cook, 2006; Grabócz, 1995, and 1999; Hatten, 1991, 1994, 1997, and 2006; Karl, 1997; Klein, 2004 and 2013; L. Kramer, 1991. 1999; Maus, 1991, 1997, and 2005; McClary, 1997; McCreless, 1998, and 2006; Meelberg, 2006; Micznik, 2001; Monelle, 1992, and 2000; Nattiez, 1990; Paley, 2000); Pearsall, 2006; Reyland, 2013; Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, 1997; Street, 1994; and Tarasti, 1994, and 1995. It should be noted that, previously to Abbate's texts, Anthony Newcomb in 1984 and in 1987 had contributed to the introduction of the narrative concept in contemporary musicology, in the moulds which are used today.

dependent on metaphorical descriptions. Therefore this essential proximity between narrative and music is both useful, when searching for enlightening analogies, and prejudicial, when seeking objective explanations.

In confronting each opposing theoretical position on narrative music, one perceives that the problem may lie, as has been already proposed, on the definition of narrative itself. Wittgenstein states that "the use of a word is its meaning" (cited in Gann, 2001). But here the word has different uses, and thus different meanings. So, what many of these different opinions towards narrative in music confront us with, from the sceptical opposition to the unrestrained acceptance, is not so much their different understandings of music—something that should in fact be the point—but, instead, their different understandings of the actual concept that is describing it. Patrick McCreless's (1998) constrained position is therefore, by what has been exposed, more than natural:

> 'Is drama, narrative, or poetry the best analogy for music?' and 'What does music narrate, if anything.' While no one would deny that such questions are fundamental, I feel strongly that it is often pointless in interdisciplinary work even to try to answer them until we have brought the relevant disciplines into productive and detailed contact. (McCreless, 1998, p. 2)

A simple definition of narrative is unlikely to happen. As has been seen, inside and outside literary studies, the word and its concept is in constant reevaluation. Hence, the use of the narrative metaphor implies the previous, even if provisional, clarification of its meaning. As Naomi Cumming stated "differences in analytical outcome cannot be resolved if differences in root metaphor remain unrecognised" (p. 160). Until then one remains either with the unproductive choice of ignoring the issue or the awkward task of picking sides.

This chapter will survey the main theoretical positions on the subject of musical narrative. Regarding the main objective of the present thesis—the creation of an operatic composition using non-narrative musical means—it becomes essential: (1) to acknowledge the controversy on the use of the term *narrative* in music; (2) to accept that it is an imperfect metaphorical devise to define a specific and recurrent musical feature, which is everything but clearly graspable; and, knowing that other terms may be more appropriate for other theoretical approaches, (3) to justify the usefulness of this particular one in this dissertation.

ii. *narrative music as an exception – Abbate and Kramer*

Of the main authors with theoretical production on the issue of narrative music, Carolyn Abbate and Laurence Kramer seem to be the most discordant voices in an otherwise relatively homogeneous line of thought. Mainly disputing the adequacy of the narrative metaphor in music, their texts[3] have stimulated a profound reflexion among the musical narratology community, resulting in more clarified theories on all sides of the discussion, and the appearance of new and potentially more consensual approaches to the subject. In the preface of her book *Unsung Voices*, Abbate (1991) asks: "if we speak of music as 'narrative,' we realise that the word is metaphorical. Yet [… w]hat does it mean? For what musical element, structure, gesture, effect, or device is 'narrative' a satisfying descriptive characterisation?" (p. x). It is not in fact clear what narrative really means in such an abstract context as music.[4] Emphasising Abbate's doubts, Laurence Kramer (1991) states that "any theory of the relationship between music and narrative must start with the cardinal fact that music can neither be nor perform a narrative" (p. 143).

Both Abbate and Kramer don't fully reject narrative interpretations in their musical analyses. However, their approach is constrained through strict convictions that music itself can only narrate metaphorically and in very rare instances. Interpreting the concept in its most literary sense, Abbate and Kramer uncover these "moments of narration" (Abbate, 1991, p. 29), or "narrative situations" (Kramer, 1991, p.145), with the help of extramusical referential import. Through the verbal text in the music itself, in programatic or in sung music, and/or through external contextual interpretation, conceiving relations "to textuality, even when the music itself overtly lacks a text" (Kramer, 1991, p. 145), Abbate and Kramer search for strange moments where music seems to be *working against its verbal story*. For them, these contradicting instances "disengage song from language" (Kramer, 1999, p. 61), separating music from text and context, and leaving one to hear music's narrating *unsung voice*. This voice is music's narrative, something that can only appear in a distancing conflict between verbal text and music (Fig. 24).

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3 The essay *What the Sorcerer Said* (1989) and the, previously mentioned, book *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (1991) are Abbate's most important works on the subject; the essays *Musical Narratology: Theoretical Outline* (1991), *The Narrative Moment* (1999) and the book *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (2002) are demonstrative of Kramer's positions towards narrative in music.

4 In chapter two, it became evident that the meaning of narrative isn't completely clear even in the literary context.

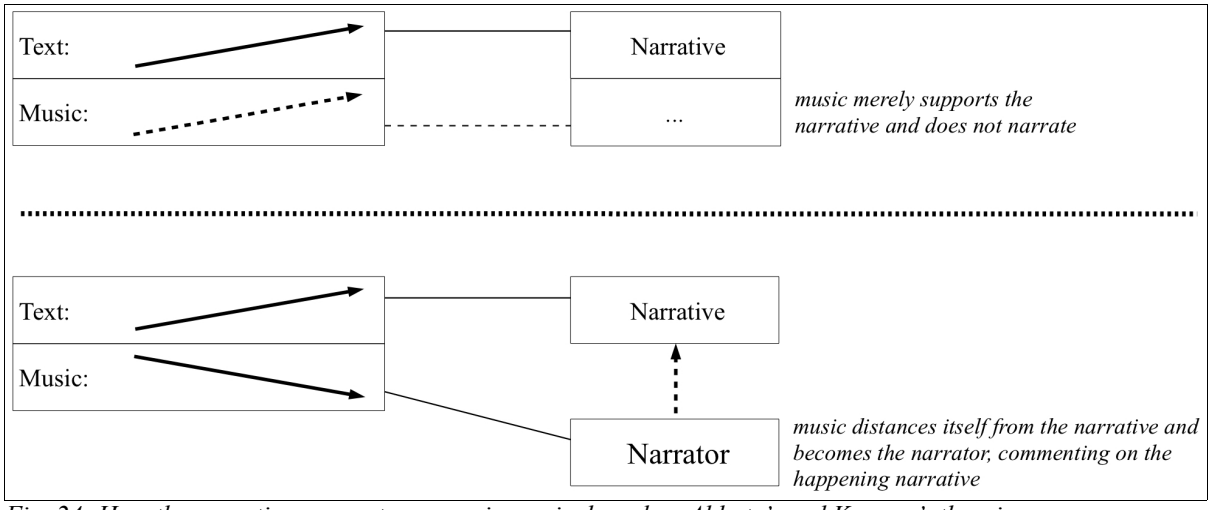


Fig. 24: How the narrative moment appears in music, based on Abbate's and Kramer's theories.

As Abbate (1991) says, "I am seeking to hear the discursive distance that is a sonorous signal for music's voices" (p. 28). One may say that Abbate's and Kramer's search is not for the narrative proper but for its voice, that is, for the sounding presence of a narrator within music's structures.

iii. *narrative music as a mental life drama – Karl*

Abbate's and Kramer's occasional moments of narrating music, as they themselves point out, are not narratives, at least in the sense that the whole musical piece, like in a literary work, through its articulating structure, would tell an unfolding story. Besides, the extramusical input required for these rare *findings* seems to prove that music alone cannot consummate narrative. Kramer (1991) had warned: "anyone looking to narratology as a means of illuminating musical structure and musical unity had better look somewhere else" (p. 162). But is this approach to narrative the only one possible? Are these rare cases the only musical elements for which '*narrative*' is a *satisfying descriptive characterisation*? Gregory Karl (1997) seems to respond with some kind of disappointed acceptance when stating that "from a survey of the term's current usage one might, in fact, conclude that it [narrative] is merely a misleading placeholder standing for an elusive sense of teleology in the expressive or dramatic unfolding of musical works" (p. 14). However, Karl is not really recognising the inadequacy of the narrative term for music, quite on the opposite. What he wishes to emphasise is a crucial point: that the term's usage, or what one means when one uses it, is in the centre of the controversy.

Karl finds narratives in music through the uncovering of "the abstract dramatic plan in which the movement's expressive coherence consists" (p. 32). For him, the meaningful confront between musical units induces "relations of identity and opposition" that, when "systematically developed over the course of an entire composition," create "the stuff of which plots are made" (p. 19). Narratives can thus, from Karl's point of view, be found in the unfolding structure of complete musical pieces. They are abstract entities, despite the fact that "some of its elements can be understood to represent quasi-sentient agents and their actions," and that these actions may form "a complete and coherent unity coextensive with and inclusive of the entire musical unfolding" (p. 16). Narrative music is therefore isomorphic with the "mental life drama" it shapes (p. 15). This means that music specifies narrative through its own formal structure, and through the resemblance of its chain of events with that of "human expressive behaviours" (pp. 18-19). It proposes a plot of abstract entities and events whose meaning is obtained by their opposed relations. These elements of meaning, becoming thematic roles in the musical plot, must "be understood as abstract personifications, impressions, and structures" (p. 23), independently of concrete referential material, and separate from straightforward literary analogies.

iv. *musical narrative as a listener's construct – Almén*

If Abbate and Kramer find narrative, as has been stated, in rare and specific semantic moments of musical pieces, this is because they consider as fundamental the presence of some externally conceptualised content for the existence of any narrative. Yet, some music narratology is not concerned with specific content. Its research focuses on meaningful temporal relations that create a sense of logical continuity, what Byron Almén (2003) calls a "teleological directedness" or a "*significant* change in the relations between elements" (p. 8, my emphasis). In this sense, one might say again that it is not so much the narrative itself that is under study but, this time, music's narrativity—i.e. the music's ability to produce a sense of narrative.

Structurally speaking, this can happen at different scales: from the meaningful relation between small units to the significant linking of large formal sections. For instance, when Roland Barthes (1985) states, as has been remarked (see chapter two), that in John Cage's music he doesn't grasp the "syntagmatic extension" of one sound after the next (p. 259), he is implying that this grasping is what is supposed to happen in normal music hearing. He, and one supposes every common music listener, is used to building meaningful entities from

sound successions: not that they have to signify, referring to extramusical world, but only that they have to form consistent units, rendering logical continuity from the previous and into the succeeding ones.

This idea of a constant evaluation of meaningful relations simultaneous with the constant construction of new meaningful units is close to what James Liszka (1989) defines as *transvaluation*—the "process by which meaning emerges via the reconfiguration of simultaneous and successive relationships between musical elements in the course of a temporal succession, as perceived or conceived by the listener" (Almén, 2003, pp. 11-12). Liszka's understanding of narrative as a process of interpretation, liberating the concept from its literary constrains, is, so Almén remarks, "crucial for the understanding of musical narrative" (2008, pp. ix-x). Following these ideas, musical narrative becomes "the process through which the listener perceives and tracks a culturally significant transvaluation of hierarchical relationships within a temporal span" (2003, p. 12). From such perspective, one tends to understand narrative as a construct of perception, quite independent from the medium that carries it.[5] Musical narrative would then be the perceived and rendered *meaningful order of musical events in time*. To study it would be to look back at all the perceived and transvalued hierarchical relationships between the ordered events. As Almén states, "narrative analysis, considering as it does a temporal phenomenon," becomes "a kind of syntagmatic analysis" (p. 46).

v. *musical narrative and temporality – Hatten*

This tracing of narrative signs in the smallest musical elements, when they are regarded as *in relation to* and not *in themselves*, may have its origins, as Fred Maus (1991) points out, in Heinrich Schenker's analytical theory (pp. 4-5). In fact, as Robert Hatten (1991) explains, "formal accounts of musical structure, such as Schenkerian analysis, are […] fundamentally narrative, in that they infer significance from the particular ordering or interruption of musical events" (p. 96). Schenker's analytical emphasis on the musical work proper, however, means that, for him, more importantly than the listener's construct, the composer's role in the temporal construct is essential. Likewise, Hatten's (2006) theory, although acknowledging the idea of the listener building a meaningful temporal experience from the flux of presented sound events, considers, nonetheless, that these sound events are ordered by the composer,

5 In fact, Almén (2008) considers that "literature, drama, and music share a potential for meaningfully ordering events in time" (p. 14), referring to them as narrative siblings: narrative systems each with its own specificity (p. 37).

who, through this way, controls the listener's narrative perception (p. 62). This manipulation of order is not merely a choice of elements in the sound continuum. It deals with the listener's expectancies and is based on the idea that musical events have "stylistic temporal coding of their own" (p. 62). This means that the musical elements carry expected continuities or resolutions that the composer may control.

This act of dealing with what the listener expects, actively intervening in her/his listening process, is what Hatten calls "*troping of temporality*" (p. 62). His theory is based on the idea that expectancies have an important role to play in the building of the musical narrative. Musical features such as *genre* and *style* create a line of expectations, a field of things to come, that when broken permit, according to Hatten, the creation of different temporalities (pp. 63-64). This idea turns the musical discourse less linear and the temporal flow compositionally malleable, somehow paralleling literary narrative techniques of temporal handling. As Hatten (2006) states, "by interrupting the unmarked or expected flow of events, […] time is problematised as neither strictly sequential nor smoothly continuous" (p. 68).

Carolyn Abbate (1989) had stated that one of music's major limitations for aspiring to the condition of narrative was its lack of temporal tense (p. 228), more specifically, of the past tense that, in Paul Ricoeur's narrative theory (1990), confirms the narration. Hatten's theory doesn't really defeat Abbate's argument but opens up the possibility for music to have some kind of "temporal perspective" (Hatten, 1997, p. 627). For Hatten, musical time ceases to be "only time itself," as Abbate puts it (1989, p. 228), and becomes, through a grid of manipulated sets of expectations, another narrative tool.

> Interpreting reordered events is possible only with reference to a time line of events for which we have some temporal expectation. The dramatic trajectories that are stylistically encoded in what I call expressive genres […] provide one regulative guide; the Schenkerian-conceived stylistic patterns of normative harmonic progression and voice-leading (at all levels of structure) provide another. And, strategically, the individual exigencies or internal logic of a thematic discourse imply still a third. (Hatten, 2006, pp. 63-64)

Still, one is left under the impression that the mere proposal of a line of continuation that these *regulative guides* imply, independently of the composer choosing or not to break its continuity; that bare expectancy seems to suggest that they are in themselves 'narrative

embryos'—i.e., sound elements proposing meaningful temporal direction.

vi. *the paradigmatic plot in musical narrative – Newcomb*

Jann Pasler states that "the ultimate reason narrative events are directed and connected is that they undergo or cause transformation" (cited in Meelberg, 2006, p. 61). Musical events as perceived may also be subjected to change. It is what is happening when one perceives the development of a musical idea—a musical unit is changing. This, however, has to imply that a certain succession of musical elements is grasped as an identity. It is only when something is understood this way, as an identifiable unit, that it becomes susceptible to change. The temporal alternative to change is succession or juxtaposition (see chapter two). Musical motifs and themes are examples of groups of succeeding sound elements that became identifiable, thus, identities. Anthony Newcomb (1987), one of the pioneers in recent music narratology, considers that the "the role of theme in musical narrative—in some ways analogous to that of character in verbal narrative, in some ways not—is fundamental to any discussion of musical narrative as a whole" (p. 166). Newcomb builds his theory of musical narrative around the formal idea of continuation, change, and rupture, functions that he finds also to be present in literary narrative. For him, "modes of continuation lie at the very heart of narrativity, whether verbal or musical" (p. 167).

Once recognised as functions in a plot, the musical elements, through their meaningful ordering, can create what Newcomb calls "paradigmatic plots" (p. 165). As he states, "narrative successions in literature […] and formal types in music […], the two represent similar things, in that both can be thought of as a series of functional events in a prescribed order" (p. 165). This idea of *prescribed order*, not so distant from what Hatten would later call *regulative guides*, is inspired in Russian structuralist literary theories, in particular Vladimir Propp's formalist study of the Russian folktales' recurrent narrative patterns.[6] Newcomb believed that the same kind of pre-established cultural constructs could be found in specific repertory of western Classical and Romantic music. As he said, "in instrumental music one can see musical events as tracing, or implying at any given moment, a paradigmatic plot" (p. 167).

This idea of paradigmatic plot interprets musical narrative as a sequence of functions similar to that of literary narratives, where identifiable units go through processes of dramatic change that may or may not follow expected sequences. For Newcomb, it is when the

6 Propp analysed how each moment of a folk-tale is merely a canonic action with a specific function.

paradigm is broken that narrative activity becomes intense. Thus, for instance, the Romantic period, with its formal freedom, produced musical works with higher narrative activity. As is explained:

> The problematisation of Classical form at the hands of late Beethoven, Schumann, Liszt, Wagner, Mahler, and the like, […] forces the listener to engage in the fundamental narrative activity […], matching successions of musical events against known configurations, in order both to forge an understanding of what one has heard and to make predictions of possible continuations. (Newcomb, 1987, p. 174)

What remains to be clarified in Newcomb's text is whether a piece of music that conforms with a basic paradigmatic plot will loose all narrative force and become non-narrative. In other words, and returning to the same doubt raised by Hatten's theory, don't the units, the motifs and the themes with their melodic lines, have their own narrative ability when they propose a linear plot, even when it is strictly followed?

vii. *degrees of narrativity – Klein, Micznik, Newcomb, and Hatten*

The issue of different degrees of narrativity in music, which Newcomb and Hatten imply in their theory, the idea that some musical relations provide more intense narrative than others, is not simple to approach. Again the question of what exactly is narrative would have to be perfectly resolved. Can narrative (noun) be more or less narrative (adjective)? Nicholas Cook (2006) thickens the plot, so to say, when referring to another narrative medium: cinema. He points out that "narrative and non-narrative film are seen not as mutually exclusive genres but rather as points on a continuum" (p. 122). Here, one is confronted with a unidimensional scale of narrativity that goes from, in theory, extreme and total narrative to complete non-narrative. Non-narrative is, hence, seen as a level of narrative (Fig. 25).

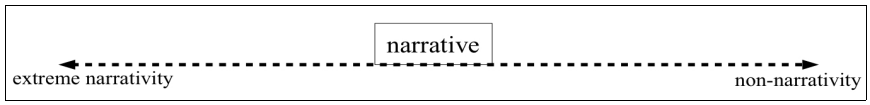


Fig. 25: Unidimensional scale of narrativity.

In Music, Michael Klein (2013) proposes an identical conception, now with a bi-dimensional table where narrativity floats in *x* and *y* axes from narrative to non-narrative and, to embrace

contemporary music alternatives, from neo-narrative to anti-narrative (pp. 5-6).[7] Narrative and non-narrative are then seen as separate features that contaminate each other in different degrees (Fig. 26).

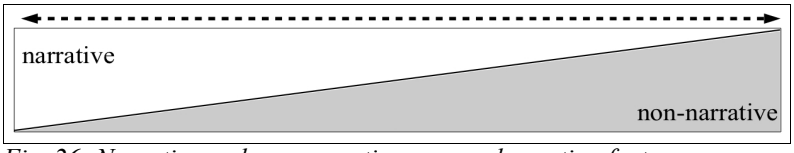


Fig. 26: Narrative and non-narrative as complementing features.

This line of thought, of understanding narrative as something that can appear with different degrees of intensity, has similarities with Vera Micznik's musical narrative theory, as exposed in her essay *Music and Narrative Revisited: Degrees of Narrativity in Beethoven and Mahler* (2001). For her,

> it is only by understanding how music narrative is similar to, and different from, other kinds of narrative structures, and how various musics differ in their degree of narrativity, that we can profitably develop new ways of discussing musical discourse specific to our discipline. (Micznik, 2001, p. 198)

Studying the evolution, from Classical to Romantic music, of what she calls the "semantic dimension" (p. 201) Micznik perceives that syntactic features slowly give way to more pronounced semantical features. Romantic music usually has more thematic and motivic elements, thus, the relations between them, being of individualised contrast, tend to trigger, according to Micznik, expressive extra-syntactical meanings. As she explains, "the more individualised and semantically articulated the materials become, and the freer they remain from specifically musical forms, the more 'natural' or 'closer to more general mental patterns' (among which are narrative patterns) the music is likely to sound" (p. 202). Therefore, Micznik finds that narrativity increases in music when music is able to free itself from its intrinsic formal essence, earning "semantic autonomy" (p. 207).

But, for Micznik (2001), semantical autonomy is not the only element to produce narrativity in music. Like Newcomb and Hatten, she considers fundamental both the abundance of contrasting relations between these semantically autonomous musical elements

7 In one of the several preparatory conversations for the present dissertation, the composer Christopher Bochmann pointed out that he didn't consider his musical work neither purely narrative nor non-narrative. For him, narrative is a characteristic that can never be found in 'pure state' or as completely absent, whether in music or in literature. The author is deeply grateful for professor Bochmann's insight in this and many other matters.

and their manipulation within a field of expected combinations. The first feature mimics the verbal discourse as if presenting the conflicting situations (p. 235); the second realises the dynamics of the temporal flow, the narrativity proper. "In music," she explains, reminding Newcomb concept of paradigmatic plot, "the more the events and the discourse of the piece contradict an expected order and make the listener constantly wonder what unexpected situation will occur next, the more 'narrative' the music will be" (p. 246).

However, this leaves us once again with the question of whether music narrative can be more or less 'narrative'; a point that must finally be addressed. In considering that narrativity lies in the breaking of a predicted paradigm, it can be considered that Newcomb, Hatten, and Micznik may be mixing the concept of narrative with that of *interesting narrative*. In literature, a narrative that relates several conflicting and abnormal situations may in fact be more interesting to follow, than one that merely narrates everyday-life banalities, but to say that one is less narrative than the other is quite off purpose. When Raymond Monelle remarks that, in music, "lyric time is signified in those presentational sections in which melody comes to the fore, and in which harmonic and phrase structures are relatively stable;" and that, on the other side, "narrative time is signified in those sections in which harmonic and phrase structures become more complex, and in which there is generally an increase in rhythmic activity" (cited in Klein, 2004, p. 37); he is in fact referring to different narrative tools and not to different degrees of narrativity. These tools, whether lyrical or narrative, as in literature, always serve the overall narrative. They contribute to a specific perception, more or less dynamic but always a narrative one. Once more, it seems to be an issue of different uses of the concept—narrative as a noun or as an adjective. In Micznik's case, her concept becomes clear when she states in a footnote:

> Both [Jean-Jacques] Nattiez and [Carolyn] Abbate support the idea of music miming or imitating narrative, rather than being one. […] I, however, think that [literary] texts are not narratives but, rather, may have and/or project 'narrative qualities' or characteristics, and in this respect music is not that different. (Micznik, 2001, p. 221)

viii. *narrative music through juxtaposition – Cook and Reyland*

As has been said, the linking of musical elements can lead either to continuation, sequence, or rupture: (1) when what is linked seems sufficiently similar to what existed previously, perception tends to join the two elements into one identity—as when motifs are

perceived as units; (2) if the degree of difference is stronger, elements will be perceived as two identities causally linked—as when melodic lines are perceived as antecedent and consequent; (3) if the aligned elements have very little or no relation, then their succession will be perceived as a break in the musical flow. Traditional music compositional theory tends to deal with the first two procedures, those that permit the construction of organic and unified sound structures.[8] Musical analysis too, as was already noticed, searches for unifying links between elements that may justify their temporal sequencing and their perception as meaningfully coherent.

In his article *Uncanny Moments: Juxtaposition and the Collage Principle in Music*, Nicholas Cook (2006) calls attention to the third model of musical linkage: that of rupture. Cook considers that the literary parallel impels a perception of the musical discourse that doesn't take into account its fundamental resource for dealing with time. He proposes that

> if we really want to address the issue of moment-to-moment relationships in music, it might be better to stop looking for parallels with literature altogether—which only reinforce the historical tendency to think of music as a kind of text related at best problematically to its real-time experience—and start looking instead for parallels with material culture. (Cook, 2006, p. 115)

Searching for new ways to explain the unwinding of music, Cook finds an interesting connection with the conception of museological narratives. Cook quotes Peter Vergo's description of an important museological principle: "The same material can be made to tell quite different stories not just by means of captions or information panels or explanatory texts but by the sequence in which works are displayed" (p. 116). This museological order of things is, as in musical ordering, a temporal factor. As seen in chapter two, musical elements too can be seen as having different meaningful functions that depend on their positioning within a sequence. But the museological parallel highlights a more important issue: between each exposed element, regardless of any formal connection that may or may not exist, the perceiver supposedly builds a meaningful narrative relation. Cook believes that this is also what happens in music.

Nicholas Reyland (2013), reflecting upon radical forms of non-linear musical

8 Schoenberg's *Fundamentals of Music Composition* (1967) is an example of how a compositional method structures musical elements to be organically linked, from the smallest musical entity to the largest formal structures. The task is revealed immediately in the first page: "The chief requirements for the creation of a comprehensible form are *logic* and *coherence*. The presentation, development and inter-connexion of ideas must be based on relationship" (p. 1).

sequencing, seems to agree with Cook: "plot, after all, is always an experience of discontinuity; stories are disunity over time" (p. 32). Though the term "narrative negation" is used (p. 42), Reyland is, like Cook, apparently not referring to an absence of narrative but to a negation of linear narrative. The perceiver's ability to maintain structured listening through ruptured linkage is in fact, as Reyland emphasises, a musical specificity that reinforces the idea that narrative may not be a verbal language exclusivity. Both Cook and Reyland consider that elements of rupture in fact enhance temporal meaning, forcing the listener to more actively imagine semantic relations where syntactical linkage has failed. To strengthen his theory, Reyland refers to Roland Barthes's concept of readerly and writerly texts—where in the second case the reader, confronted with a not completely directed text, is asked to have a more active role in its interpretation.[9] Reverting these ideas to music, Reyland (2013) states that it "is the writerly text *par excellence*, both before and since modernism" (p.47). For Reyland, it is in the music's essence to ask for an active perception and interpretation. Marked juxtaposition of contrasting elements simply reinforces that evidence and enhances possible narrative interpretations. As Cook states:

> The point […] is not to reduce music to the semiotics of juxtaposition, to insist that it consists of nothing but differential replacement […] but rather to recognise the partial but creative and underestimated contribution that the collage principle plays in music. (Cook, 2006, p. 128)

Reyland's (2013) conclusion that "the expressive potential of any music remains open to a plurality of divergent narrativisations and other forms of reading" (p. 51) seems to corroborate Cook's claim.

ix. *narrative music as drama – Maus*

In music, as already remarked, narrative can be understood as a mental construction of the perceiver, a kind of logical deduction out of a coherent temporal perception. This construction can be more or less abstract depending on how much external input the listener adds to her/his perception. Considering music's lack of specific external referentiality, this seems to be the closest that musical narrative can get to literary narrative. But narrative in music can also be seen as some kind of *mimesis*. A showing of something that reminds one of

9 Reyland refers to Barthes's (1990) defence of a new form of text writing: "Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (p. 4).

or looks like something else. It can be the mimicking of the narrative act proper, the oral narrative, where a certain feeling of discourse gives one the impression that something is being said—"as if we are hearing a conversation in a language which we do not know" (Nattiez, 1990, p. 251). Or it can be the mimicking of motion, as if some lively movement were dramatically happening before the listener—music thus perceived as narrative *drama*.

Fred Maus defends this last perspective in two fundamental articles, *Music as Drama* (1988) and *Music as Narrative* (1991). Although the titles can mislead, these texts shouldn't be considered as mutually exclusive theories. Michael Klein (2004) remarks that the "arguments [against music as narrative] rest on a mimesis/diegesis opposition that has been central to western poetics since Plato" (p. 24). These arguments are, essentially, that music is unable to represent the actants and to project a narrator. However, a narrative can be seen as happening both in drama and in literature. Socrates's quote that "fabulists or poets proceed either by pure narration (diegesis) or by a narrative that is effected through imitation (mimesis)" (cited in Berger, 1994, p. 407) reveals that narrative can be both *diegetic* or *mimetic*. The two concepts are simply distinct modes for a narrative concretion (see chapter nine). One must therefore understand Maus's two essays as a study on the two perspectives of one same reality.

According to Maus, the mimesis of motion in music entails a natural tendency for narrative. He explains that "whenever there is an interesting action, there are stories that can be told about it: the concepts of narrative and of action are made for each other" (1991, p. 7). Maus believes that there is an appeal in listeners to conceive music as a narrative, as a plot. This plot, according to him, follows a dramatic model where one perceives the musical events as happening there, in that moment. For Maus, "in listening to a piece, it is as though one follows a series of actions that are performed now, before one's ears, not as though one merely learns of what someone […] did years ago" (1988, p. 67). Maus's perspective avoids the inability of music to project a narrator, without withdrawing, however, music's possibility of producing a narrative. As he stresses, "understanding the music on the model of drama, as the sequential presentation of a world in which the events of the story are perceived directly," is a case where "there may be no sense of a narrator at all" (1991, p. 34).

Regarding the difference between mimetic and diegetic modes in narrative music, Karol Berger (1994) argues that both modes are fundamental concepts in literature "because the overlap between mode and matter is only partial" (p. 415). *What* is told and *how* it is told are not completely the same thing. However, in music, as has been seen, and Berger emphasises,

"the mode and matter seem to overlap so completely that the distinction between them collapses" (p. 415). In *Music as Drama*, Maus (1988) states that "the analogy to drama suggests that the structure of music is its plot" (p. 72). Berger (1994) is actually saying the same thing but dissolving the mimesis/diegesis opposition and extending the idea to all music in general when stating that "in music the matter disappears into the mode" (p. 415).

x. *narrative music as superfluous metaphor – Nattiez*

In his essay *Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?*, Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) builds one of the most sceptical analysis on the narrative music issue. Partially using Anthony Newcomb's theories, Nattiez dissects several arguments of music narratology, considering them in parallel with contemporary approaches to literary narrative, only to reach his now famous conclusion that "music is not a narrative," and that "any description of its formal structures in terms of narrativity is nothing but superfluous metaphor" (p. 257). Like Abbate and Kramer, Nattiez refuses an interpretation of narrative detached from the literary context that created it. Fundamental literary notions of referentiality, causality, and narrator, as well as a clear differentiation between story and discourse are found to be indispensable for a constructive analogy between narrative and music. In their absence, Nattiez considers the existence of "an ontological illusion: since music *suggests* narrative, it could itself *be* narrative" (p. 245).

However, there is no precise point where Nattiez really disagrees with musical narrative theory. It seems, once again, that it is the concept of narrative itself that creates the divergent opinions and not, with few exceptions, the idea of how music processes itself or is processed by the listener. Nattiez actually supports, in some way, the idea of music as a mimesis of the narrative proper: not necessarily of an oral act of *telling*, as was proposed by Micznik's (2001) theory, but of a formal abstract design of an implied but untold narrative, a *showing*. As he affirms: "listening to a work, we recognise the evocation of actions, tensions and dynamisms analogous to those for which the literary work is a vehicle" (p. 248). This theory has affinities both with Newcomb's and Maus's, although Maus insists in finding more concrete references, and with Karl's and Almén's, specifically their concepts of isomorphism described above. But Nattiez doubts whether this resemblance "constitutes a narrative in the strict sense of the word" (p. 248). He points out that "the narrative, strictly speaking, is not *in* the music, but *in the plot imagined and constructed by the listeners* from functional objects" (p. 249). Again, Nattiez is merely stating what musical narrative theory also affirms: that musical narrative is a

perceiver's construct. But one could even go further and argue that the literary narrative is not also *in* the literary text, it too is built by the reader, for, as Roland Barthes (1975) says, "narration can indeed receive its meaning only from the world which makes use of it" (p. 264).

Despite Nattiez's concordance with some important arguments from music narratology theory, he refuses to conceive the possibility of narrative as an abstract design of non-referential sound. For him, narrative depends on the outward referentiality, hence, an abstract design cannot be, by itself, a narrative. He concludes:

> If one feels that music tells a story which is left untold to us, it is perhaps because, semantically speaking, music is capable of various forms of imitation, and that, among them, it is possible for it to imitate the outward appearance of a literary narrative. (Nattiez, 1990, p. 251)

An important issue that is uncovered by Nattiez's argument is that, even if one would accept the term narrative "to attempt to define the specificity of the unfolding of music in time" (Nattiez, 1990, p. 241), since all music unfolds through time, then, as Carolyn Abbate (1989) remarks "any music with sequences of events—thematic ideas, harmonic processes, cadences, instrumental exchanges—in short, almost all music, can be said to be 'narrative'" (p. 227). And so, before a characteristic that is evident in nearly all music, Abbate's (1991) succeeding question becomes more than pertinent: "What is the value of a critical methodology that generates such uniformity and becomes a mere machine for naming any and all music?" (p. xi). May then the term narrative in music really be nothing but a *superfluous metaphor*?

xi. *narrative music generalised*

This generalised view of narrative music, as characteristic of a vast majority of western music repertoire, is somewhat evident in several of the theories discussed above. Susan McClary somehow seems to corroborate this notion, not only when stating that music of the 1800s "all shared an investment in dynamic narratives of subjective struggle towards triumph" (Cox & Warren, 2008, p. 290), but specially in statements like:

> The music that narrates by itself is that very repertory celebrated for having transcended signification: the instrumental music, stretching roughly from Vivaldi through Mahler,

> that relies on what we call "purely musical" procedures for coherence - in other words, the European canon from 1700 to 1900.[10] (McClary, 1997, p. 22)

From this perspective, all western music with the specialised exceptions of ancient and modern contemporary music[11] can be said to be narrative. Hence, Nicholas Cook (2006) calls attention to the risk that such classifications can, through its all-embracing plurality, as Abbate had stressed, lead to theoretical uselessness. Abbate (1989) stresses that the problem goes even further because, once music narratology fails to give a substantial insight of music's content, once it resigns itself to simply exploring music's structural narrative design, then its function becomes meaningless. She states: "a formalist/absolutist could analyse all music as narrative, yet still view music as void of specific expressive content (not to mention cultural or referential or ideological content), this hints that evocation of literary-theoretical analogies is sterile" (p. 227).

But Abbate seems to be missing the reason for the narrative analogy in music. In fact, what music narratologists propose is not to analyse music in order to find it narrative or not. (Or more or less narrative, as in Micznik's (2001) case). What they seek is to use narrative as a tool for new ways of (eventually better) understanding music. As Anne Sivuoja-Gunaratnam (1997) argues:

> Is there a danger in having a very extensive paradigm of musical narratives and a very small number of pieces that can be categorised as non-narrative? I don't sense the danger Abbate warns about. In fact, there is nothing negative in the supposed 'interpretational promiscuity' of the term, because 'narrative' is not the end or the conclusion of any analysis or interpretation. On the contrary—it is just the beginning. (Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, cited in Meelberg, 2006, p. 93)

Narratology in music can be therefore extremely useful and interesting in its results, even when perceived as such an abstract formalist way as Abbate claims: it permits the unveiling of those elements that create the narrative feeling (or illusion), letting one understand better one's own forms of perception; it permits analysing those narrativising processes, not in a straightforward way, as in a tautological quest for translation of its meaning—which, should

10 Curiously, if McClary would have referred to Monteverdi instead of Vivaldi and (Richard) Strauss instead of Mahler, then this *European canon* would have coincided with the history of Opera in its four-hundred predominant years.

11 It should be stressed that some theorist consider modern and contemporary music also through narratological analysis. The book *Music and Narrative since 1900*, edited by Michael Klein and Nicholas Reyland in 2013 is a selection of such recent theories, and Vincent Meelberg's *New Sounds, New Stories: Narrativity in Contemporary Music* (2006) also presents an exhaustive reflection on the subject.

be stressed, doesn't also work in any referential narrative art-form—but through peculiar moments that may reveal specific narrative potential, very much in the manner that precisely Abbate and Kramer defend; it permits, finally, to recognise recent musical approaches that in fact attempt, through the analysis of the narrative phenomenon in music, to avoid its characteristic features, both in compositional processes and in listening stances. If nothing else, then, music narratology would be essential at least to conceive and understand non-narrative music, how it is *not* done and how it is *not* supposed to be perceived; because, *almost all music* can be said to be narrative but, in fact, *not all music* is narrative.

xii. *blocking music's narrativity*

What is common to all arguments regarding the music/narrative analogy, whether favourable or not, is that music tends to produce a perception of motion, a temporal dynamic that is felt as if things are happening, moving, or changing while one is listening. It is this element of movement that, although approached from very different perspectives, is discussed as being in some way analogous either to a narrative, to the following of a narrative, to the oral presentation of a narrative, or even to the experiencing of a narrative. Whether one considers the analogy as useful or not, the point is that music, or, at least, some music, appears as in motion, and composers organise its structures according to such motion, while listeners follow this motion when perceiving it. It is precisely this element of motion that is neither found nor intended in the music referred to, in this dissertation, as non-narrative.

The three quartets composed for the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferent Nada* will serve as an introductory example of how musical motion is avoided, rendering a non-narrative sonic ambience. As mentioned in chapter two, nine of the twelve scenes that make up the opera have, as accompaniment, a group of *sound pieces* that can be superimposed in different combinations. These pieces are three quartets—strings, clarinets, and sine-waves—and a group of six recordings. The main function of these pieces is to create a defining atmosphere for each scene.[12] Each combination of superimposed sound pieces results in a somewhat different atmosphere and at the same time guarantees a certain continuity throughout the opera. The recordings have a specific function that will be addressed, along with their compositional process, in chapter nine. For now, one will focus on the quartets and their relation with the ongoing operatic narrative.

12 Joseph Kerman (1988) states that the main functions of music in opera are "defining character, generating action, and establishing atmosphere" (p. 215). If for none of the others, at least for this last function non-narrative music is perfectly suitable.

The three quartets[13] were composed using specific techniques that avoid, or elude, the above mentioned sense of musical motion:

(1) no articulation: each note starts in *fade in* and ends in *fade out*;
(2) long durations: all notes have durations beyond the limits of short-term memory.[14]
(3) week pitch progressions: every new pitch distances itself a perfect fifth from the previous one.

In sum, all changes that occur in the main musical parameters of pitch and rhythm are, so to say, disguised within the sound of the piece. This way, they have no temporal impact, in the sense that they are not felt as change proper, but as part of the natural irregularity of sound mass. What is then heard is a continuum of sound with micro- and macro-nuances. This overall irregularity is immediately guaranteed by the specificity of each ensemble:

(1) the unsynchronised bow changes, necessary for the strings to maintain the notes for such long durations;
(2) the unsynchronised breathing of the clarinets between each note;
(3) the overlaying of the predefined envelopes of each sine-wave note.

One can say that these irregularities in the sonic fabric of each piece enrich the sound material but don't create a sense of progression because, in fact, they do not progress: they are simply a kind of micro variation within a sonic, indivisible and unstructured whole.

The sound material itself is the same for the three quartets. It is a sequence of perfect fifths in specific octave regions at double-octave distance (Fig. 27).

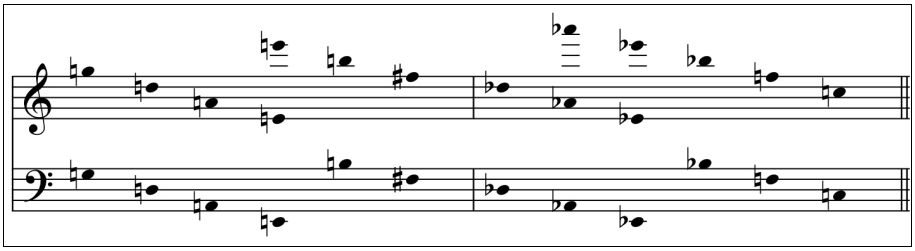


Fig. 27: The sequence of notes and possible octave regions for all three quartets.

The exact octave region for each instrument was chosen according to the range of the instrument. In the case of the sine-wave quartet, this choosing process is made randomly at each performance by an algorithm.

13 for the full score of the opera, see volume II.
14 On how the short-term memory span influences the perception of motion, see chapters five and six.

The temporal development of each piece was composed using slight variations of the same basic process—the same sequence of twelve pitches that fulfil the whole chromatic scale, realised in overlapping layers, within different time scales that are multiple of each other (Fig. 28).

0'00"													10'00"
1 x		*G*	*D*	*A*	*E*	*B*	*F#*	*Db*	*Ab*	*Eb*	*Bb*	*F*	*C*
2 x	1st	*G*		*D*		*A*		*E*		*B*		*F#*	
	2nd	*Db*		*Ab*		*Eb*		*Bb*		*F*		*C*	
3 x	1st	*G*			*D*			*A*			*E*		
	2nd	*B*			*F#*			*Db*			*Ab*		
	3rd	*Eb*			*Bb*			*F*			*C*		
4 x	1st	*G*				*D*				*A*			
	2nd	*E*				*B*				*F#*			
	3rd	*Db*				*Ab*				*Eb*			
	4th	*Bb*				*F*				*C*			

Fig. 28: Pitch sequence and resulting combinations from different durations in the three quartets.

The pattern that results from this process was strictly followed in the composition of the string quartet—i.e., violin I plays the first row; violin II, the second; viola, the third; and cello, the fourth. The order was also strictly followed, meaning that if the string quartet was to play in all the twelve scenes of the opera it would play exactly all possible harmonic combinations that the process permits. This, however, is not intended (see chapter two). Nevertheless, in each scene where the string quartet is chance-chosen to play, the specific combination for that scene will be played (Fig. 29).

0'00"	10'	20'	30'	40'	50'	60'	70'	80'	90'	100'	110'	120'
Scene:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Vno I:	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*	*G ...*
Vno II:	*G ...*	*Db ...*	*G ...*	*Db ...*	*G ...*	*Db ...*	*G ...*	*Db ...*	*G ...*	*Db ...*	*G ...*	*Db ...*
Vla:	*G ...*	*B ...*	*Eb ...*	*G ...*	*B ...*	*Eb ...*	*G ...*	*B ...*	*Eb ...*	*G ...*	*B ...*	*Eb ...*
Vcl:	*G...*	*E ...*	*Db ...*	*Bb ...*	*G...*	*E ...*	*Db ...*	*Bb ...*	*G...*	*E ...*	*Db ...*	*Bb ...*

Fig. 29: Group of twelve scenes and respective sequence combinations to be played (note: the quartets will not be played in the grey scenes).

This means that there is a specific harmonic combination for each scene that may or not be heard, depending on whether the string quartet plays or not.

Regarding the clarinet and the sine-waves quartets, some details were changed. These variations of compositional process are, in fact, adaptations to the characteristics of the instruments in use. In the clarinet quartet, the pitch sequence is guided by the length of breath for each note, and by its number of repetitions: less repetitions, and consequently more activity, in the high register; more repetitions, and consequently less activity, in the low register. Hence, what creates the desynchronising of the pitch sequences is the randomness in the length of the breath, and the number of times each pitch is repeated (Fig. 30).

	G	***D***	***A***	***E***	***B***	***F#***	***Db***	***Ab***	***Eb***	***Bb***	***F***	***C***
Cl1	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*
Cl2	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*
Cl3	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*
BassCl	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*

Fig. 30: Sequence of notes and corresponding repetitions for each clarinet.

Contrarily, the sine-waves quartet has no breathing and no bow changes. Each pitch has a precise duration and never repeats. Its major dynamism comes from the envelope of each pitch, being it also in sine form. This means that each sound never really stabilises: it grows from zero, reaches its highest amplitude at precisely the middle of its duration, and immediately starts fading out. It is this *constant inconstancy* that makes the overall sound relatively dynamic (Fig. 31).

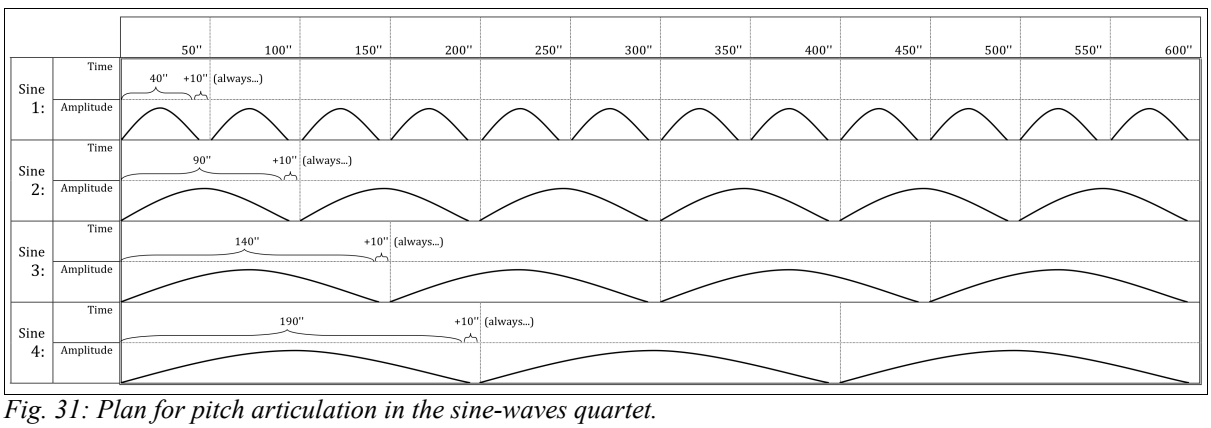


Fig. 31: Plan for pitch articulation in the sine-waves quartet.

Neither the clarinet nor the sine-waves quartets have any specific starting points. This means that other harmonic combinations besides those appearing in the string quartet become possible. It also means that, contrarily to the string quartet, there is no fixed harmonic combination to a particular scene—the specific harmonic atmosphere of the scenes where these quartets will play will be determined by the random choice of either each clarinet player, or the electronic patch. In fact, in these two quartets, all possible combinations of the pitch material may occur, albeit never within the ten-minute scope of a single piece.

The pitch and, consequently, the harmonic changes in all the three quartets can be said to happen within a macro time scale. The duration of each pitch—never less that ten seconds —surely exceeds an adequate time for melodic following, and perception is directed to the quality of sound at each moment rather than to a moving structure and its eventually dramatic unfolding. The main intent behind the composition is everything but narrative. In fact, as can be perceived by the compositional process, these pieces are not approached as temporal sequences with beginning, middle, and end. They are seen as whole sonic entities conceived through three simple ideas: (1) the idea of an almost static field with only micro variations in its sonic fabric; (2) the idea that this field gradually evolves in macro variations through different harmonic fields; and (3) the idea that these different fields would then position themselves in musical relationship with the other pieces with which they superimpose and, most importantly, in semantic relationship with the sung text to appear over it.

This last point is fundamental and is based on two antagonistic perspectives on narrative music: (1) that the 'voice' of music narrating is only heard when it contradicts what the text is 'speaking' (Abbate, 1989 and 1991; Kramer, 1991 and 1999); and (2) that listeners tend to always find narrative relations within the overall scope of what they are experiencing (Cook, 2006; Reyland, 2013). What can be inferred from these two perspectives, and this will be readdressed throughout this thesis, is that non-narrative music may, after all, have an important *narrative* function in an operatic context and that its use may in fact enrich that opera's interpretative possibilities.

chapter four: Narrative Impulse

"ninguém sabe o que vai acontecer seja a quem for, além dos trágicos farrapos do envelhecer"[1]

i. *intro*

On narrativity in music, borrowing from Jean-Jacques Nattiez's (1990b) three semiotic levels,[2] Michael Klein wrote:

> On the poietic level, a composer may wish to write music that narrates, focusing on musical attributes that signal narration. On the immanent level, the music may have such attributes, regardless of whether the composer intends to write narrative music. On the esthesic level, a listener may want to hear music as a narration, regardless of the composer's intent. (Klein, 2004, p. 24)

One understands that narrative can thus be found and studied at different levels of the communicating sequence. However, as has been shown, it is problematic to conceive categorical features of narrative within the text itself, separated from the act of perception. When this text is a musical piece this issue becomes even more evident. As Klein (2004) observes, "it may just as well be the case that we project these attributes and structures on the music, so that the immanent level collapses into the esthesic" (p. 24). In fact, narrative in music may simply be a perceiver's construct, a human instinct for dealing with temporal sequences. However, Nattiez (1990a) refers to this instinct as a "narrative impulse" driven by recognised "returns, expectations and resolutions" in the "musical discourse" (p. 245). So, even though musical narrative is built through the listener's impulse, something seems to exist in the musical piece itself that stimulates this impulse: the musical discourse. David Beard and Kenneth Gloag (2005) explain: "the fact that objects follow one another in succession is an invitation to compare music to narrative" (p. 86). Musical discourse may thus not be a narrative but possess a kind of narrativity. Through this conception, one may still conceive a link between the composer and the listener; something that would not be possible if one would completely exclude narrativity from the musical text. It is this idea of *invitation to narrativise*, of something that stimulates a narrative impulse, as opposed to something that

1 [Nobody knows what will happen to anyone, besides the tragic shreds of ageing. (trans. by author)]

2 Nattiez considers three levels of meaning in semiotic analysis: the *poietic* and *esthesic* levels refer, respectively, to the productive intentions and to the perceptive constructions of communicating agents—the transmitter and the receiver. The third level, the *Immanent* level, has to do with the text, the *trace*—the communicated object (Nattiez, 1990b).

seeks to block it, that maintains the communicative aspect of music—a notion of author, work, and receiver—even if one assumes that, in the end, everything will depend on the perceiver. As Walter Benjamin (1963) stresses, "the traces of the story-teller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (p. 87).

Actually, to narrativise may be just as much a composer's as a listener's impulse. One must not forget that, before composing, a composer was also a listener; and his work, the musical trace that he leaves behind, must carry that evidence. But is this narrative impulse a compulsory condition in music, the result of narrative impulses coming from both composers and listeners, turning all music into narrative and simultaneously, as Carolyn Abbate (1991, p. xi) suggests, devaluating the use of narrative as an analytical tool? It has been suggested that not all music possesses the attributes that invite a narrative stance towards it (see chapter three). In fact, there is music that tries to diminish or obliterate the listener's narrative impulse and proposes other listening postures. Talking about how he wished to free his music from western music's unidirectional communicative perspective, John Cage says:

> When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking, and talking about his feelings or about his ideas of relationships. But when I hear traffic, the sound of traffic (here on 6th avenue, for instance), I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking, I have the feeling that a sound is acting. (in Sebestik, 1992)

Cage's statement hints at how music may block the narrative impulse. Cage proposes that it is the active presence of the composer in the composition that enhances music's discursive nature, i.e., music's narrativity; or, on the other hand, that it can be the erasure of narrativity itself that erases the author's presence.[3] Whatever the case, the music that radically follows an ideal of non-narrativity, being Cage's work a fundamental example, seems to prove that the listener's 'narrative impulse' can be in fact blocked; and this blocking inevitably affects the whole concept of music as an unidirectional communicative act, as a message from the composer to the listener. Again, this leads to the idea that narrative, although unquestionably a perceiver's construct, depends on the specificity of musical material. Or, more correctly put, because of an almost irresistible urge for narrative perception, it is the non-narrative approach to music that needs to create the peculiar conditions that inhibit or cease the instinct to narrativise. As Hayden White (1987) remarks,

3 Cage's perspective on music as being the composer's speech seems to be engraved on western art music tradition. Edward Cone's (1974) claim that "each art in its own way projects the illusion of the existence of a personal subject through whose consciousness that experience is made known to the rest of us" somewhat demonstrates this point while extending it to all art manifestations (p. 3).

> so natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way things really happen, that narrative could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent—or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused. (White, 1987, p. 1)

This chapter focuses on music's narrativity—on the ways through which music creates the illusion of narrative. It argues (1) that narrative music results from human's natural instinct to narrativise temporal events; (2) that these events have specific features that potentiate that instinct; (3) that these main narrativising features appear in both music's micro- and macro-scale; (4) that these specific features are themselves composed obeying the same narrative impulse; (5) that this narrative impulse influences not only music listening and musical composition, but also musical analysis; (6) that this instinctive process can be blocked in the compositional act; (7) that the use of verbal text in music makes this narrative blocking problematic; and, finally, (8) that such blocking has profound implications for the act of listening to music.

ii. *narrativity in musical discourse*

What is somehow implicit in the concept of musical narrativity is that music's discourse is itself narrative, meaning that it possesses narrativity. In his essay *Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative*, Jonathan Culler states that the "logic by which event is a product of discursive forces rather than a given reported by discourse is essential to the force of the narrative" (p. 175). This means that it is *through* discourse, and not *in* itself, that events tend to emerge. And these events can be seen as narrative embryos: identifiable entities that can be linked through logical intuition to other identifiable entities thus building a narrative structure. Roger Scruton (1999) considers these discursive constructions in music as specific human intuitions. The grouping of notes, melodically or harmonically; the grouping of durations, which may influence or be influenced by note grouping; the structural grouping of phrases and other complex elements; the hierarchisation of these structures, leading to expectations of continuity or closer; and the global structural notion, where closed sections are perceived as interdependent and bound by a specific sequential order (pp. 187-188); all these traits, once understood this way, become meaningful temporal perceptions, thus, narrative perceptions (Fig. 32).

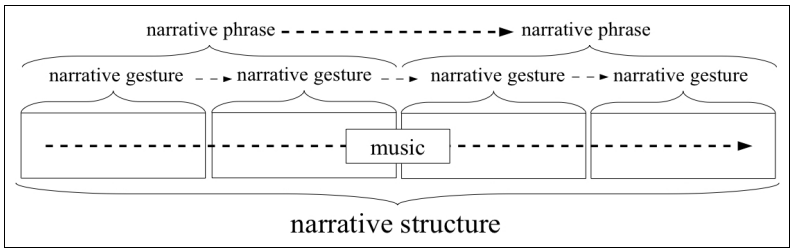


Fig. 32: Linear construction of music resulting in a narrative structure.

In other words, as soon as one perceives a simple grouping of sound elements in succession a suggestion to narrativise occurs. Contrary to what Nattiez claims (1990a, p. 245), these events are not neutral entities waiting for some logical relation to be established with some other neutral entity still to come. They are in themselves musical units, as syllables in words, already logically glued by what Scruton (1999) calls "musical intuition" (p. 187) and Nattiez (1990a) himself calls the "narrative impulse" (p. 243).

Hence, when one speaks of narrative music, one is referring to its narrativity, i.e., to music's ability to stimulate a narrative impulse through its discourse. This way, music is narrative without being necessarily *a* narrative, meaning that it can have narrativity and still not create a narrative. Lawrence Kramer (1991) considers narrativity "the dynamic principle, the teleological impulse, that governs a large ensemble of all narratives, up to and including the (imaginary) ensemble of all narratives" (pp. 143-144). Narrative music is then the music that exhibits this teleological impulse. On the other hand, as has been shown, the musical narrative proper is either "a kind of prelinguistic syntax of mental representation" (Snyder, 2001, p. 23), hence, impossible to translate into verbal language; or the result of an interpretive act that conceives a more concrete but still subjectively fragile narrative object through external inputs—verbal text being one of them. Music's narrativity, its teleological flux evinced in its discourse, is therefore the graspable element of narrative music.

iii. *narrativity in teleology*

The concept of teleology deserves further discussion. In musical perception, teleology creates the notion that what links successive elements is not merely temporal proximity but an intention. A *crescendo* is an example: although several musical notes, harmonies, and timbres may be changing the listener perceives a unique force building up into a climatic point as if, transversally to all musical structure, a simple intentional gesture was made present. Its is not only because instruments are playing louder at every new note, it is because the listener

groups these separate articulations into a meaningful intention of loudness. This is a perceiver's construct that is nevertheless dependent on musical features—i.e. on the fact that the instruments are playing louder at every new note (Fig. 33).

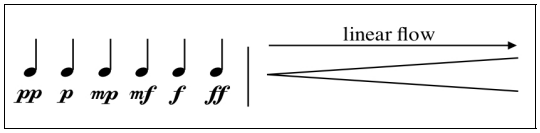


Fig. 33: Linear perception of discrete events.

Describing how the listening process of teleological music functions, Wim Mertens (1983) remarks that "a directionality is created that presumes a 'linear memory' in the listener, that forces him or her to follow the linear musical evolution" (p. 17, emphasis in original). Having in mind human's instinctive tendency to group perceived events into linear constructs, it should be stressed, however, that linear perception is actually more natural than forced upon. Abbate (1991) stresses this point, embracing the whole concept of narrative, when stating that "given any situation in which narrative is expected**,** the impulse to construct tales from the sequence of single objects is human and irresistible" (p. 36). Linked with a situation of transmission created by the sheer act of music's materialisation,[4] elements of linearity and the listener's narrative impulse are the basis for musical narrative expectancy: an almost unavoidable imprint of perceptual rules that are instinctively followed by all those involved. Teleology in music seems simply to accompany the listener's natural instinct, rather than being forced upon. Hence, Mertens's concept of 'forced' linear listening should be interpreted oppositely: in fact, it may be non-linear listening that needs to be forced upon the perceiver.

iv. *narrativity in musical gestures*

Following Abbate's statement above, one understands that expectation is the key element for music's narrativity. The external conditioning rendered by the musical monological transmission paradigm is one of its providers;[5] the musical material itself, through teleological discourse, is another. The musical ideas of antecedent and consequent, for instance, imply a teleological notion of the musical flux. Each part of the dichotomy owes its meaning to the other because the first, not being conclusive, depends on the second for

4 The basic elements of the musical act are the implicit composer, the musician, and the stage (or the cd-player).

5 Barthes (1975) insinuates such relation when stressing that "it can reasonably be argued that narrative is contemporaneous with monologue, whose emergence seems to be posterior to that of dialogue" (p. 272).

closure, while the second, voided of initial stability, depends on the first for its plausibility. The sense of inevitability that arises from the first to the second portion creates the musical narrative paradigm—the chain of sounds starts to make sense, it becomes meaningful (Fig. 34). As Bob Snyder (2001) remarks, "maximum points of stability can be thought of as 'goals' in that the structure of the more intense music preceding them is determined by the possibility of eventual arrival at those points" (p. 62).

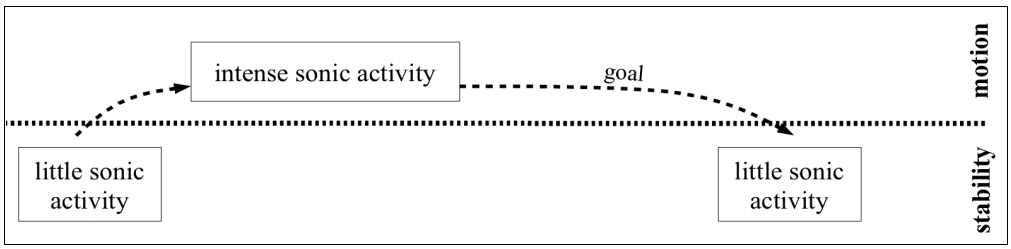


Fig. 34: Musical expectation derived from sonic activity.

But single musical gestures—sound fluxes that are heard as coherent and directed in themselves—are also understood teleologically: once started, there is an intuited anticipation of how it is going to proceed and where it is going. It is this perceptual expectation mode that actually permits the identification of a musical gesture as such or, to put it more neutrally, as a sound event with stable beginning, rising middle, and descending end. As Snyder states: "If we think of musical phrases as gestures metaphorically related to actual physical gestures, we see that many types of physical gestures are cycles of energy that also move to reach their 'lowest' point at their conclusion" (p. 63).

Snyder attributes much of this dynamic meaning to the combination of the principles of *closure* and *continuity*, elements that are essential for both subdividing and grouping music into memorable portions or chunks (pp. 62-65). For him, "different degrees of closure articulating phrasing on different hierarchical levels can create a chain of ongoing expectations" (p. 61). Closure's main factor is, according to Snyder, the absence or diminution of change. Change in any parameters of musical material is thus a factor for musical tension or, as Snyder puts it, musical *intensity* (p. 62). These elements of closure and tension seem to be bi-polarised: for one part, it is the expectancy of closure that contributes to the building of tension; for the other, it is the building of tension that makes closure possible. On the other hand, the hierarchical linking of each portion of tension and closure is established through continuity, a principle that creates the expectation that once a certain direction is established elements will continue to proceed accordingly (p. 64). All musical parameters can be

understood in such a way, as drawing linear progressions. Snyder stresses: "This expectation [of continuity] is what makes linear motion seem dynamic, because it ties events together into a progression, and makes later events seem to be the result of earlier ones" (p. 64; Fig. 35).

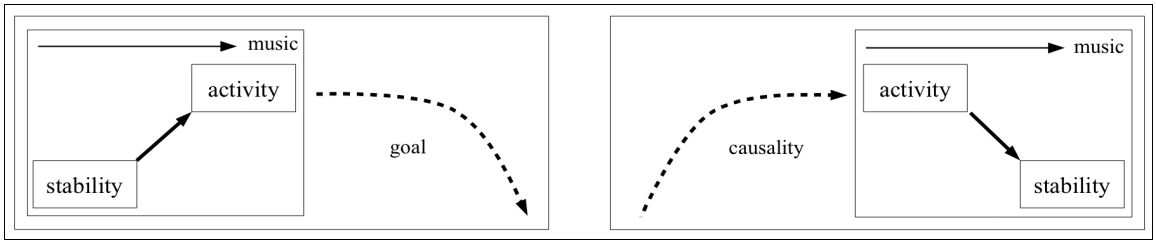


Fig. 35: Expectation and causality in musical perception (based on Snyder's theory).

It is interesting to realise how Snyder's concepts of musical gesture have affinities with the very definition of narrative design. Tzvetan Todorov describes the ideal narrative as beginning with

> […] a stable situation that some force will perturb. From which results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in a converse direction, the equilibrium is reestablished; the second equilibrium is quite similar to the first, but the two are not identical. (cited in Maus, 1988, p. 71)

Such description is strikingly analogous to the dynamic of phrases, melodic lines, and the overall hierarchical structure of music from western tradition. Through this similarity, Snyder's (2001) theory seems to confirm implicitly music's narrativity and explicitly how this is both a perceiver's construct and a trace found in the musical material itself. As he states:

> Because some aspects of memory appear to have a hierarchical structure […], music that is hierarchically organised (by multiple closure levels) tends to be retained in memory with maximum efficiency: it is actually reflecting an aspect of the nature of human memory. (Snyder, 2001, p. 66)

v. *narrativity in the whole musical piece*

In general, melody and music that is structured around melodic principles tend to be conceived in linear sequence. This means that each element seems to have sufficient relation with its surrounding elements in order to be perceived as deriving from them. This linkage can be intuited as a kind of internal logic derived from the temporal flow of a musical piece.

As Fred Maus (1999) puts it, "'logic' […] suggests a temporal quality, an orderly relation of earlier and later events; one can follow a logically ordered succession through time" (p. 186). Alan Street (1989) stresses that "the idea that one thing might lead to another had been the guiding principle of western music in its entirety prior to the dissolution of tonality" (p. 78). But, beyond tonality, Arnold Schoenberg's twelve tone revolution also maintained much of the same unitary principles. Anton Webern's (1963) statement that "in music, as in all other human utterance, the aim is to make as clear as possible the relationships between the parts of the unity; in short, to show how one thing leads to another" (p. 42), coming from one of the major advocates of the twelve tone system, precisely proves this point. In fact this system seeks to regain the musical coherence that tonality provided and therefore seeks to provide structural relations between its components, although increasingly more complex and consequently difficult to perceive.

Western music's linking techniques have been based on the unitary concept of continuity, of causal relations between elements. An idea that leads to understanding a whole piece as a full transmission of an explored, developed, and thoroughly demonstrated musical reality that cannot be understood separately. One can find certain closed melodies separated from there original structure, and evidently some sonata movements are heard separately from the whole piece; but it is uncommon to hear a certain unclosed or incomplete passage from a musical piece for pure musical enjoyment only. There is something in the music itself that says that it has not finished, that makes one know it is still 'talking', that it hasn't reached the end.

One can say that there is a plane *phrase-narrative* or *gesture-narrative* level that the listener builds, through the internal logic of the musical material (usually pitch and rhythm or other parameter), and then there is a *structural-narrative* level built up from the previous level and its embracing linear logic. There is a feeling that each group of sonic events has its internal sense and is glued through discursive logic with its neighbours. Snyder (2001) affirms that "linearity is a way of constructing music so that events in a sequence seem connected to and to grow out of each other" (p. 63). The linearity creates expectations that may be manipulated, creating feelings of resolution or of deviation. The organic logic that ties events together draws attention upon itself and away from the events proper. The listener becomes entangled in the development of the whole and thus perceives the fragments as incomplete and lacking resolution. This notion that a piece of music needs its wholeness to complete its expressive intent makes music more talkative. Earle Brown referred to this ongoing flux as

"goal oriented functionalism," and considered it "based on an acceptance of the idea that we [the composers] know something and know how to make someone else know it" (Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 193).

vi. *narrativising as a human instinct*

Narrative impulse in music seems to be merely the extension of a human impulse to narrativise temporal perception, that is, to try to perceive meaning in the succession of experienced events. This derives from what Jerome Bruner (1991b) calls "narrative accrual," a characteristic perceptual mode that establishes "*coherence by contemporaneity*: the belief that things happening at the same time must be connected" (p. 19). Such understanding is more than common in music listening. In fact, some theorists consider it part of music's essence. Roger Scruton (1999), for instance, points out that "the order that we hear in music is one that is familiar to us from our own lives: the order of intention, in which one thing serves as the reason for another" (p. 79; Fig. 36)).[6]

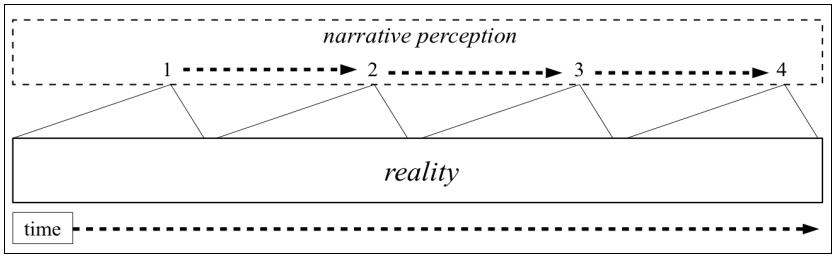


Fig. 36: Dividing and ordering of perception as narrative.

But this causal interpretation may be more humanly natural than music theory tends to suggest. It seems embedded in human modes of perception, and music may simply tend to stick to it.

Paul Ricoeur (1991) considers "narrative mediation"—the process by which one makes temporal experience understandable through the establishing of causal relations or narrative logic between perceived events—so crucial to perception that it actually may build one's self identity. As he states, "narrative mediation underlines this remarkable aspect about knowledge of the self as being an interpretation" (p. 80). According to Ricoeur, even one's conception of self is an interpretation and is based on a personal narrative construct. This stresses the importance of narrative in the way humans perceive reality and how they build a meaning that

6 Again, Scruton's theory leaves one with the impression that without this causal understanding music would simply fail to be (see chapter two).

extends to their own perceived temporal identity. As Ricoeur emphasises "narrative constructs the durable character of the individual, which one can call his or her narrative identity" (p. 77). The self is part of the experienced world and therefore also permeable to its own interpretation. And, being a temporal being, so to say, the self narrativises its own existence (Dennet, 1992).

But, another point should also be stressed. Being a human instinct, the narrative impulse should be understood as a tendency for building meaning both *out of* temporal experience and *into the* temporal experience. This means that the ordering of expressed temporal elements also tends to follow a narrative instinct. William James, in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1893), says that "the world is accessible as a buzzing, pulsating, formless mass of signals, out of which people try to make sense, into which they attempt to introduce order, and from which they construct figures against a background that remains undifferentiated" (cited in Czarniawska, 1998, p. 1). Narrative impulse is therefore realised as impression and expression. The progressive acknowledgement of this fact explains narrative approaches in several fields of temporal perception. As Vera Micznik (2001) remarks, one justifies the growing of narratology in the last two decades through "the belief that the narrative mode of thought is a common trait of most human cultures which amounts to a natural impulse to impose a certain kind of order upon the perception and representation of the world" (p. 193). Music narrative theory is one particular example. One may conclude that the narrative impulse in music listening is simply one manifestation of a narrativising instinct; the very creation of narrative music would be another; and the narrativising of the self, of one's sense of identity, as Ricoeur suggests, would be the highest expression of this instinct.

vii. *narrativising as a listening stance*

Music listening, like music itself, does not obey a clear, predetermined and specific goal. Thus, there can be several different listening stances towards music. The fact that music can be listened to through disparate media and in radically divergent situations is an example. In his work on contemporary music narrativity, Vincent Meelberg (2006) defends that narrative listening is merely one of several possible listening stances. He defines the listener as a 'function' that can have several 'stances' or attitudes towards the object being listened to (p. 2). However, Meelberg is critical of the assumption that music listeners instinctively assume a narrative stance. He inclusively states that a narrative listening stance, which, according to him, might enrich "the listener's possibilities to comprehend contemporary

music" (p. 2), is not instinctively the first to be assumed and needs, therefore, to be stimulated. For him, listening stances may be optional decisions made by the listener, somehow independently from the musical material s/he perceives.

Despite his important insight into how listening stances influence music's perception, Meelberg seems to neglect the importance of the narrative impulse in the adoption of such postures. Listening derives from the use of human perceptual mechanisms adequate for the perceived sequence of events. As Fred Maus (1988) remarks, "a listener follows the music by drawing on the skills that allow understanding of commonplace human action in everyday life" (pp. 65-66). Marion Guck (1981) drew a similar conclusion when stating that "we interpret pieces using basic thinking processes like recognition of identity, similarity, and change to understand music as we understand other things" (p. 41). Thus, when musical elements are perceived within the dynamics of short term memory, the listener tends to use the same perceptual tools employed in other everyday life perceptions that use the same memory mechanisms, for instance, language and physical motion.[7] S/He positions her/himself accordingly, and expects similar meaningful results. In other words, if one's perceptual posture towards witnessed events is tendentiously narrative, here simply meaning that it seeks to relate events causally or teleologically, our listening posture will possibly be ruled by the same objective. Hence, narrativising the listening experience is a basic human instinct, and to withhold it requires the use of specific musical tools (Fig. 37).

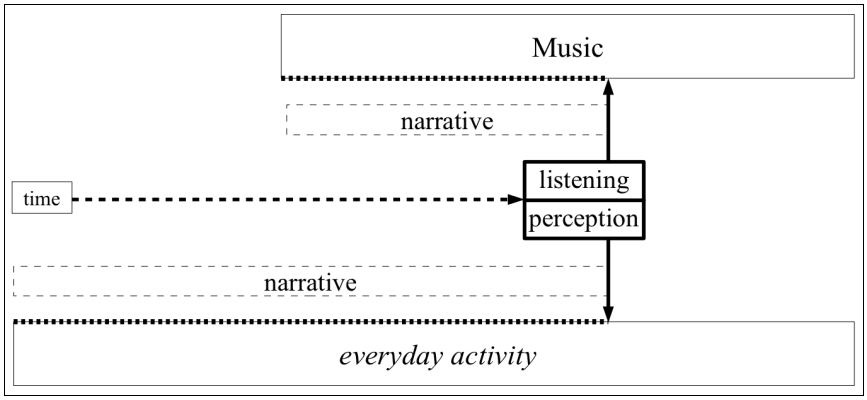


Fig. 37: Narrative listening paralleling narrative perception.

So, when Meelberg states that, in a certain listening stance, there might be a will to hear "organising principles" instead of "narrative paradigms," it seems unlikely that any temporal search for such "organising principles," as suggested by Meelberg, would not lead exactly to an impulse to narrativise. And more, regarding Meelberg's claim that a narrative listening

7 Bob Snyder (2001) stresses that "short term memory processes may exist at least for language, visual object recognition, spatial relations, nonlinguistic sounds, and physical movement" (p. 47).

stance needs to be stimulated in order to better appreciate contemporary music, it should be said that much of new contemporary music purposely limits or obliterates the listener's possibility for narrative perception, seeking a less talkative aesthetic or simply searching for a more sound based, less communicative, musical experience (see chapters six and seven). Then, in such cases, notwithstanding the unveiling of some analytical curiosities, adopting a narrative listening stance can be highly frustrating for the listener. In fact, contrary to what Meelberg argues, it may be the persistence of such listening instinct or paradigm that makes new music more difficult to listen to.

viii. *narrativising as an analytical stance*

Jean-Jacques Nattiez, as Carolyn Abbate (1989) explains, considers that "music analysis is itself born of a narrative impulse, that we create fictions about music to explain where no other form of explanation works" (p. 228). Besides being a listening instinct, the narrative impulse towards music would also be present as an *a posteriori* interpretative act. However, it is important to distinguish the analytical from the listening posture. Music analysis and music listening centre themselves on the musical text, and both use, consciously or unconsciously, external knowledge to derive adequate positioning towards it. The listening act is an individual self-defined subjective decision. Although inevitably somewhat present in the listening process, the analytical act, understood as a branch of musicology, has collective implications, hence its methods, formats, and scopes are polemically disputed (Beard & Gloag, 2005, pp. 8-12). For what matters in the present dissertation, the main difference between listening and analysing music is the immediacy of the former as opposed to the distance from the actual moment of experience in the latter. One can even postulate that post-listening experiences, such as conscious musical memories or revisitations, are already analytical preambles (Fig. 38).

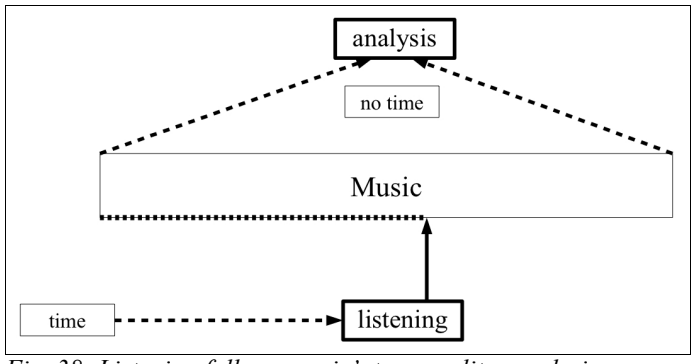


Fig. 38: Listening follows music's temporality; analysis dispenses with temporality.

So, when musical analysis responds to a narrative impulse, what is implicit is that the interpreted understanding of the musical piece will also tend to reflect a narrative. Fred Maus (1991) confirms precisely this, when stating that "tonal music, as depicted by conventional analysis, resembles narrative, as depicted by formalist and structuralist writings" (p. 3). Hence, the analytical stance towards the musical text seems to import the narrative impulse that might have been present in the listening experience, and tends to express itself inducing such listening approach. It is interesting that this happens apart from the experiencing of the flow of events, apart from short-term memory processing, that, as has been shown, leads to the narrative impulse through causal perception. Narrative impulse in analysis happens in long-term memory and seems derived from an overall formal understanding of a musical piece. As Snyder (2001) explains, "large groupings of events that occur over a time span longer than the limits of short-term memory constitute the formal level of musical experience (p. 14).

Because music's classical forms are somewhat similar to those of literary narratives, Nattiez (1990) proposes that a formal analysis—a typical analytical approach that being distanced from the moment to moment music experience manages to have a complete overlook of the piece's complete structure—tends to imply music as having a specific narrative (p. 247). But although one could expect some insight into what is narrated, since that is what happens in literary analysis, music narrative analysis seems to be unable to unveil narrative beyond its mere finding because of music's chronic absence of external referentiality. As Abbate (1989) suggests: "Perhaps the idea of narrative is so central to human rationalisation of experience that we cannot resist pursuing the analogy of narrative and music, no matter how arbitrary and fruitless it might be" (p. 228).

ix. *narrative impulse threatened*

At the beginning of 2013, Michael Klein and Nicholas Reyland edited a collection of essays around the suggestive title *Music and Narrative since 1900*. In it, several music theorists commented on how western art music from the twentieth-century maintained several elements of its narrative paradigm after the dissolution of the tonal harmony system. It is implicit, in the theme of the book and in its pertinence, that (1) tonal harmony by itself, through its rules of progression, was a major contributor to music's ongoing motion and consequent narrativity; and that (2) post-tonal music's narrativity, in the absence of tonal progression and because of structural factors raised by its new strategies for temporal denouement, became severely problematic.

Of all the music composition systems appearing shortly after 1900, the serial dodecaphonic system is the one less goal-oriented—in the sense that its music seems to move to a lesser extent into one expected or desired ending point. This is not to say that other techniques, like neo-modal or poli-tonal, do not question or threaten music's narrative potential, but that the sonic chaining of events, as perceived by the listener, is tendentiously more straightforward in these latter systems than in the more abstract layout of tone-row music. This can be somewhat explained through the very basic principles and ideas that gave birth to the twelve-tone method. Arnold Schoenberg (1984), in his explanatory text on this method, *Composing with Twelve Tones* (pp. 214-245), emphasises that "the unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception. In this space," he continues, "there is no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward" (p. 223). Schoenberg's words evince that, instead of being goal-directed, music became goalless in its temporal flow. This way, musical perception was submitted to an ideal of formal unity. Causal harmonic successions, where specific harmonies appeared as resolving previous harmonic disturbances, gave way to a structural, nearly timeless, consistency, where "almost everything that used to make up the ebb and flow of harmony […] is, as far as possible, avoided" (p. 207).

However, despite this tendency for a directionless time in serial music, several features preserved the impulse towards focussed ongoing musical motion. As has been seen, Bob Snyder (2001) considers that musical motion derives from the perception of more intense sonic activity, and it is its complementary notion of rest, of music stability, that gives that motion a sense of goal (p. 62)—i.e., the listener understands musical stability as the goal of musical activity. These "maximum points of stability," to use Snyder's term (p. 62), are either rare, difficult to perceive, or simple absent in much serial music (Fig. 39).

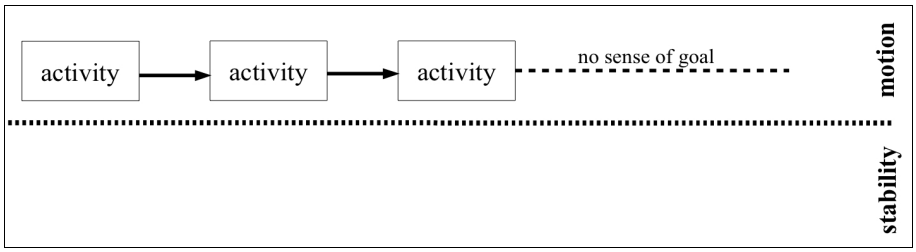


Fig. 39: The absence of stability points eliminates a sense of goal directed motion.

This lack of directionality in serial music is evident when one focuses on the main elements of tonal music—melody and harmony. However, if one turns one's attention towards other traditionally less present musical parameters, as loudness, texture, rhythmic density, or even timbre, serial music may regain some sense of goal-directed motion. As Vincent Meelberg (2006) states, "[Serial music] might also be regarded as 'going somewhere' and 'coming from somewhere else,' as long as the listener does not limit his/her focus to melody and harmony only" (p. 27). The main reason for this is that, initially in the development of serial music, these secondary musical parameters were not serially treated: their organisation was still one of *continuity*,[8] where linear motion is perceived through the understanding of gradual increase or decrease of a specific musical parameter (Snyder, 2001, pp. 64-65). Thus, focusing on these remaining elements of linearity, serial and much of post 1900 music can still be perceived as narrative or, at the very least, as a residue of organic expression.

x. *narrative impulse blocked*

It has been shown that narrative impulse results from the perception that something is being told or shown ('sounded') to the listener. This, on the other hand, is intuited in music's temporal articulation: a motion that stimulates through its isomorphism the same human perceptual processes of language, physical movement, and human expressions in general. From this perspective, twentieth-century music can be said to maintain a certain narrativity whenever some kind of linear motion can still be perceived. It is only when serialism, aleatory operations, and other tendentiously abstract music techniques are radically extended to all musical elements, questioning any sense of continuity, that music becomes essentially non-linear, goalless in its movement, and consequently non-narrative. Through such methods, music's perception is overstimulated by a constant change in all parameters and no specific

8 Bob Snyder considers continuity "a special case of similarity, where successive events display a similar interval of motion" (p. 64) leading to the idea of continuous linear progression.

goal can be clearly intuited, resulting in a "situation," as Snyder (2001) puts it, "of unprocessable complexity" (p. 202).

The idea that non-narrativity is obtained through specific compositional techniques should be stressed. Since the narrative impulse is a human instinct and is easily activated before the usual melodic and gestural material of music, to conceive non-narrative music the composer must consciously avoid these elements or treat them in such a way that their linearity will become blocked. An intuitive approach to non-narrative music composition will likely not work or may require extreme care in every sequential detail. Instead, composers tend to find processual systems that create non-instinctive perceptual effects.

Olivier Messiaen's second movement of *Quatre études de rythm—Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*—is an example of how linearity is broken through processual methods. Composed in 1949, this piece for piano solo is considered to be the first European composition using abstract 'quasi-serial' methods for organising the parameters of pitch, duration, dynamic, and attack (Toop, 1974, p. 142). The work is not a serial composition in its true sense, since it uses a sequence of 36 notes divided into groups of 12 with fixed register. The pitch sequence is not therefore transposed, inverted, or retrograded, which are typical serial procedures. Nevertheless, what is fundamental is that the whole musical material is treated as completely individualised musical parameters layered over each other, without any other direct connection besides the abstract process that ordered them.

It should be stressed that this was not simply a new way of building up music. In fact, it was a way of deconstructing the very element that traditionally forms musical ideas—the motif. The musical motif that serves as the original building block in tonal music discourse, what Schoenberg (1970) considers the smallest element of musical composition, "the 'germ' of the idea" (p. 8), is from the start a characteristic entity of pitch and duration, and already possesses a specific dynamic design, a narrative embryo. The elements of *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* are atomic fractions of such musical material—fragmentary parameters whose identity does not yet exist, that are distributed throughout the musical space without yet having that identity. Such a procedure destroys continuity in the very act of composition. Causal relations are simply unidentifiable and, in the true sense of perception, inexistent (Fig. 40).

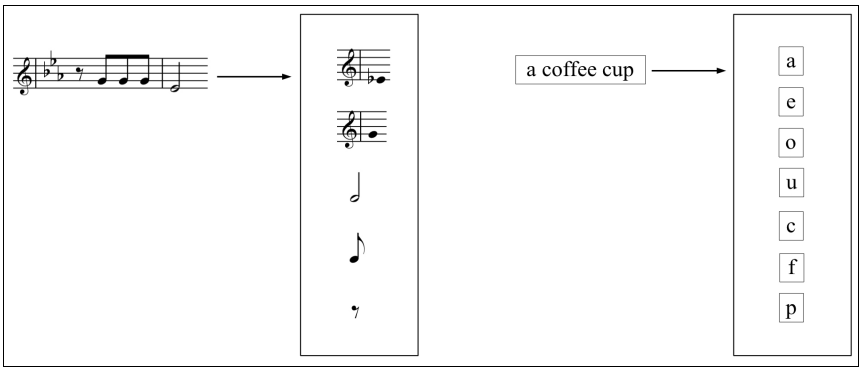


Fig. 40: Process of deconstruction in music and in text: how narrative elements become meaningless entities.
[*musical excerpt from: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, C minor, Op. 67, beginning of first movement.*]

Musical change ceases to be motion because it is felt as being goalless. Although the piece earns a very strong individuality, this comes not from characteristic melodic lines or clearly recognisable motifs. Its identity is in fact its disperse character and the minute elements that the listener may or may not highlight in the flux of his scattered perception. As Snyder (2001) points out, "the difference between linear and nonlinear is the difference between an ongoing and developing set of expectations and a fixed set of static assumptions or conditions" (p. 65). The listener is faced with a sequence of discontinued elements and any narrative impulse fades into a mere motionless aural experience.

xi. *narrative impulse blocked in an operatic scene*

When Susan McClary (1997) remarks that ancient music for sung narratives had "its own structure confined to strophic repetitions to keep it from competing with the verbal act of narration" (p. 20), she is already hinting that music possesses a certain narrativity that can somehow threaten verbal narrative. She is also implying that there are ways to avoid music's narrativity and that these techniques were consciously used long before the twentieth-century. These cases are, of course, much different from non-narrative postures in recent music. It must also be pointed out that, in the operatic genre, which is after all the main genre in discussion throughout this dissertation, music's function is not secondary to that of text. As Bernard Williams remarks, both elements must contribute to the dramatic whole of an operatic work (Williams, 2007). Therefore, one can not say that music interferes with the narrating text, as in McClary's ancient music examples, but that music works along with the text. Operatic music doesn't stop its narrative flux in order to free the verbal text's narrative; quite the opposite, music follows the text's discursive motion, consequently increasing, if

anything, its own dynamic narrativity.

As has been stressed, this is, in fact, one of the main challenges of the present thesis: to compose an opera with non-narrative music without, however, loosing the verbal text's narrative input. One has seen how approaching the compositional process of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* in separate layers of musical functions—that is, composing the instrumental elements apart from the vocal elements—permitted the creation of a group of *sound pieces* that in themselves avoided narrativity and, as a result of that, blocked the listener's narrative impulse. But, how can the sung text flow along with such static music?

Before approaching this compositional problem in its entirety one will first look into an example of a quite radical solution adopted in two vocal pieces for the opera, or more correctly, one piece with two variants: (1) for vocal quartet, violin, and video projection; and (2) for vocal quartet, two clarinets, and video projection (see volume II for full score).

The vocal quartets function by the same structuring process as that of the clarinet quartet (see chapter three). That is (Fig. 41):

(1) each voice follows a pitch sequence, starting at any chosen point, and looping until the ten-minute duration is reached;
(2) the voices desynchronise by differences in breath-length, and in number of repetitions per pitch.

	note 1	***note 2***	***note 3***	***note 4***	***note 5***	***note 6***	***note 7***	***note 8***	***note 9***	***note 10***
Voice1	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*	*2x*
Voice2	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*	*3x*
Voice3	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*	*4x*
Voice4	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*	*5x*

Fig. 41: Note sequence and corresponding repetition for each voice.

Nevertheless, both the duration of each breath and the pitch sequence were adapted to the specificity of the vocal instrument:

(1) the duration of each note goes from eight to sixteen seconds, instead of ten to twenty seconds;

(2) the pitch sequence for each voice is only of ten notes, instead of twelve, to keep within a comfortable vocal range without changing the sound material, (Fig. 42).

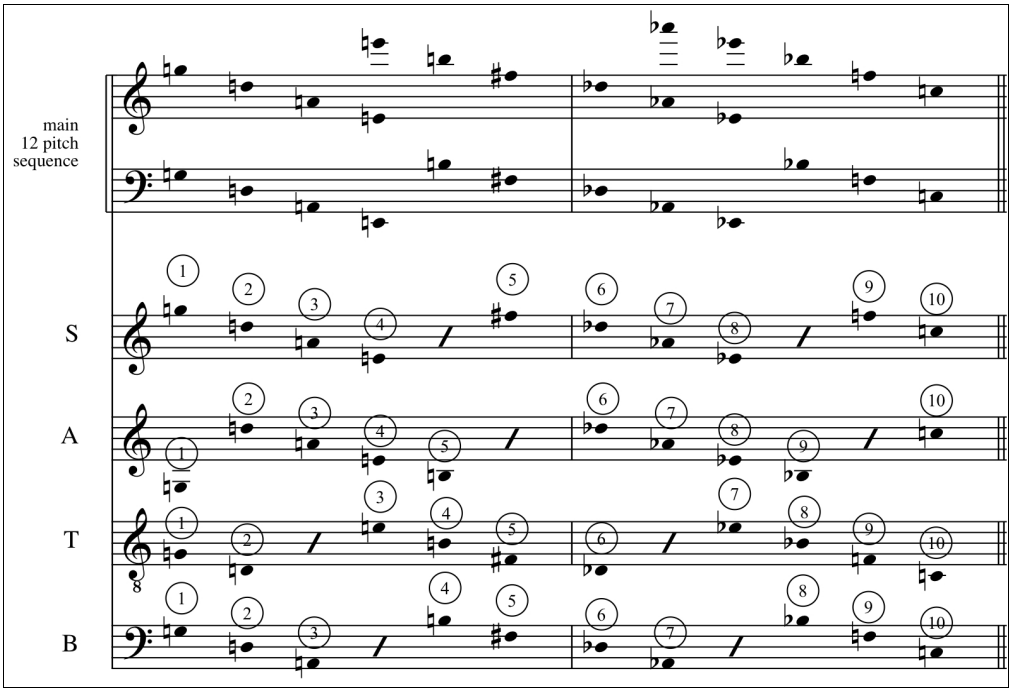


Fig. 42: Ten-pitch sequence for each voice, adapted from the main twelve-pitch sequence.

Being based on the same processual methods, the indeterminate features of the instrumental pieces persist in the vocal quartets. Still, two more details were aded:

(1) each singer can choose a different vowel at each performance, conferring a different timbre nuance to the ensemble;

(2) the ensemble should be a vocal quartet but of any of the main voice types. Meaning that whatever combination of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, and in whatever proportion is possible.[9] This permits very different results at every new production—the pieces can be sung by such different combinations as four sopranos or, for instance, two tenors and two basses.

Naturally, using such identical processes as used in the instrumental pieces guarantees that these vocal quartets will produce a similar aural effect: long notes, slowly and not so evidently changing within a relatively constant sound flux. As with those instrumental pieces, the listener will not perceive any motivic or discursive feature to stimulate her/his narrative

9 It is important to stress that the indeterminacy in voice types facilitates production, permitting different combinations of available voices. This same idea was kept, as will be seen in chapter eight, in the soloists' parts, allowing any main voice type within a not so large vocal range. In fact, since the maximum number of voices needed in ensemble, in any particular scene of the opera, is four, it is possible, although not mandatory, for the two soloists to fulfil two of the vocal quartet's voices.

impulse and will tend to concentrate on the overall sonority. The main difference between the instrumental quartets and these vocal quartets is that the vocal quartets represent a character of the opera, they are sung by one of its personages—*Narrativa*.

The fact that this character, represented by four singers acting as one, has a verbal text to be sung poses several problems. As already suggested, articulating text in non-narrative music creates a paradoxical conflict: a discursive motion articulated by a static sound. This subject will be discussed thoroughly in chapter eight. For now it suffices to remark that text articulation, with its syllabic contingencies, contradicts the non-narrative effect of long notes, tending to create rhythmic patterns that turn music discursive, i.e., narrative.

So, the main problem in composing the vocal quartets was to add text to it, while maintaining its static, non-narrative essence. Two possible and simple solutions were immediately discarded: (1) keeping the duration of notes and distributing the syllables accordingly would result in excessively long scenes (the text for the first vocal quartet has 196 words and for the second 121); and (2) dividing the text between the four voices would create a sonic/semantic cluster, rendering the text impossible to understand—a solution that may not be bad in itself but contradicts a main, self-imposed objective of trying to maintain the *libretto* intelligible.

The solution was found not in music but in the more general concept of opera, that is, in the sense that there are other operatic resources besides music. Based on the idea that vocal speech functions in two layers—that of the word and that of its expression—that together contribute to its overall meaning (Mithen, 2006, pp. 24-25), these two elements were separated into the two sensorial planes of opera—the aural and the visual. In concrete terms: the text is to be video projected simultaneously with the singing of the vocal quartet. It should be remarked that such semantic bifurcation already happens in contemporary stagings of foreign language operatic repertoire, where *overtitles* are synchronised with the singing of the characters. In this case, however, the whole was composed as one aesthetic entity, obeying eight basic ideas:

(1) the discursive motion of the verbal text is maintained by its *left-to-right* and *right-to-left* motion in the projection (see demo in attached DVD), just as the non-discursive music is maintained by its quasi static process (Fig. 43);

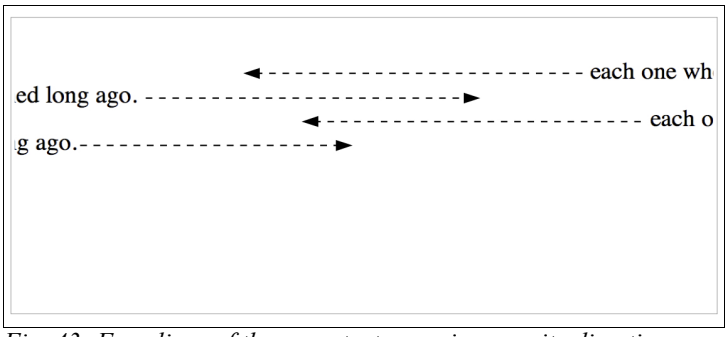


Fig. 43: Four lines of the same text move in opposite directions.

(2) the four voices are connected to the four projected lines of similar text, each line representing one singer;

(3) the articulation of each singing voice, through electronic processing, illuminates its part of the screen, creating a direct relation between sound and image (Fig. 44).

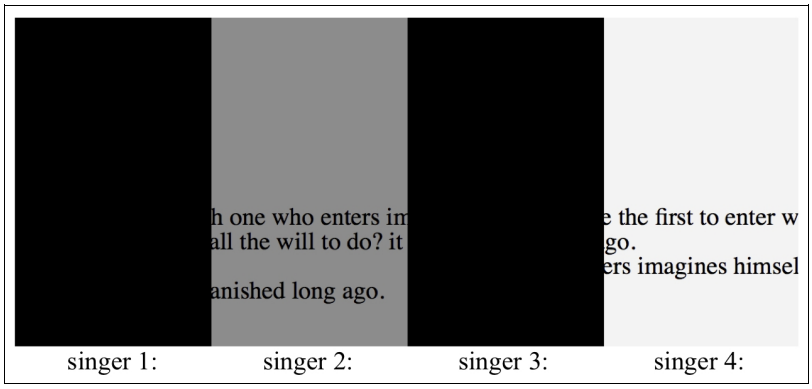


Fig. 44: Singers 2 and 4 are singing while singers 1 and 3 are silent.

(4) the text is seen as a whole that passes in both directions through the screen, just as the sound is seen as a whole sonic entity throughout the duration of the scene.

(5) nevertheless, each singer is seen as contributing individually both sonically and visually to the overall outcome.

(6) the indeterminate outcome of the vocal quartet is paralleled visually by the positioning of the text within the screen (Fig. 45).

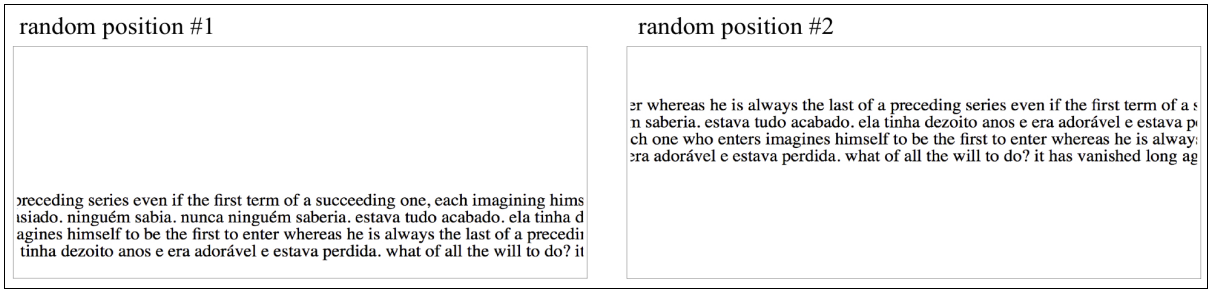


Fig. 45: Two possible positions of the projected text.

(7) more or less in the middle of each scene, a continuous instrumental note is played, lasting approximately two minutes, and projecting a small but important sentence from the text (Fig. 46).

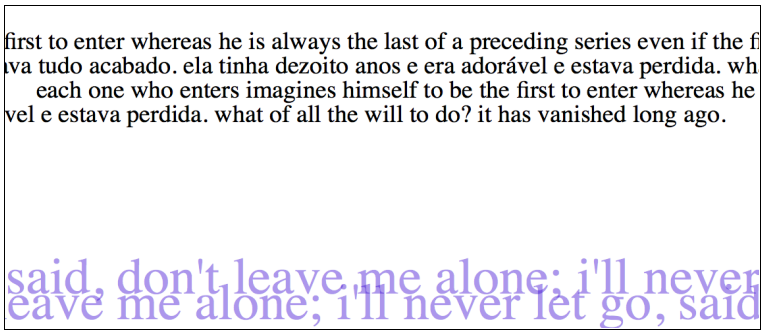


Fig. 46: Instrument projecting text below vocal quartet's projection.

(8) this instrumental appearance simultaneously highlights an important sentence from the monological text, and presents the two instruments as the characters that will perform the only unsung scene of the opera: the fourth scene of act III, for clarinet, violin, electronics, and video projection (see chapter five).

The two vocal quartets differ from each other in their indeterminacy, reflected at each new performance, and in three important details:

(1) the video reverses its colours in the second scene (Fig. 47);

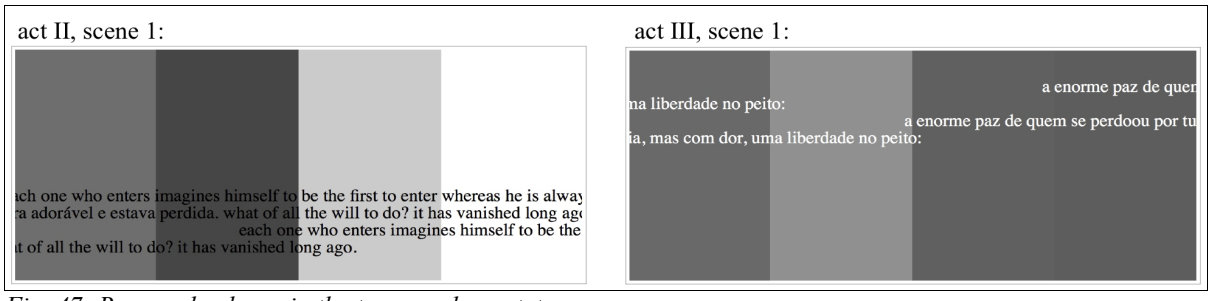


Fig. 47: Reversed colours in the two vocal quartet scenes.

(2) the number of pitch repetitions per voice is reversed.

(3) the instrumental note in the middle of each scene is performed by one violin in the first scene and by two clarinets in the second.

Finally, it should be stressed that contrary to the *sound pieces* referred to in chapters two and three, these vocal quartets were composed for specific scenes and, along with the above mentioned piece for clarinet, violin, electronics, and video, constitute the only instrumentally fixed scenes in the opera. They are formally specific, meaning in this case that each vocal

quartet piece functions, both in its text and in its music, as an introductory scene for the two main acts of the opera—*uma história de amor*[10] and *uma história de solidão*[11] (see chapter ten).

The two vocal quartets demonstrate a possibly extreme solution for articulating verbal text with static music. Sonic narrativity is blocked by an unarticulated music that, nevertheless, establishes a relation with a visually articulated verbal text. The listener should simultaneously fall into sonic contemplation, as with the instrumental quartets, and attentively follow the projected text that, through its evident sound-image relation at each sung note, is felt as a direct consequence of that contemplated sonic body. Narrativity and non-narrativity become fused into a single perceptual act.[12]

xii. *non-narrative listening stance*

Motionless music must be perceived as such. The listener should not seek, at the risk of frustrating failure, to find motion or goal-oriented directions. Jeffrey Kallberg, when explaining the implications of genre in music, states that

> a kind of 'generic contract' develops between composer and listener: the composer agrees to use some of the conventions, patterns, and gestures of a genre, and the listener consents to interpret some aspects of the piece in a way conditioned by this genre. (Kallberg, 1988, p. 243)

This means that there are signs in the musical work that hint at how the listener should position her/himself towards what s/he is listening. This extends to all genres and sub-genres of music. It is relevant however that, owing to western music tradition or to the characteristics of human perception (or both), narrative music genres are usually easier to intuit. In other words, the narrative impulse in the listener tends to direct her/him to immediately expect narrativity or some kind of sequential order of events from which to build a temporal meaning. As Roger Scruton (1999) explains: "We seem to hold a piece of music together in our memory and attention as we listen: as though we were attempting to find the structure from which the whole is derived" (p. 186). This attentive stance towards the ongoing structure

10 [A story of love.]
11 [A story of solitude.]
12 The attached DVD contains two different simulations of scenes II.1 and III.1. In these simulations it is possible to perceive both how the whole concept functions and the sonic and visual differences resulting from the indeterminate characteristics of the score.

may be considered a narrative impulse—a will to make temporal sense out of temporal perception. Non-narrative music deceives this instinct and may leave the listener without tools as to how to position her/himself towards it. It is, as far as western tradition is concerned, an unnatural form of music that challenges several preconceptions about the musical art itself.

Narrative music is thus all music that does not, through its constituent elements, interfere with the perceptual narrative impulse. The listener's short- and long-term memory are stimulated to decipher and store a flux of sonic information that is rendered meaningful (Snyder, 2001, p. 54). This memorising of structures is built up from a narrative impulse and becomes itself a narrative memory (Bruner, 1991b, p. 4). Non-narrative music avoids all these basic elements. The listener is confronted with a different paradigm. S/he ceases to follow the teleologic flow of melodic and harmonic progressions, or even to perceive them as such, and focusses on directionless and meaningless sonic events. Remembering Scruton's (1999) idea that music seems to push the listener away from sound, hearing it apart from the material world, as an intentional object (p. 221)—a theory already questioned in chapter two—one must conclude that non-narrative music, avoiding all meaningful relations between sounds, escapes such intentionality and seeks essentially to remain in that flat material world of motionless sound perception.

chapter five: Musical Motion

"estes rios vão depressa, vertem como se a terra se inclinasse"[1]

i. *intro*

In his aesthetic treatise, *On the Musically Beautiful: a Contribution towards the Revision of Aesthetics of Music* (1986, first published in 1854), questioning the content of musical expression, Eduard Hanslick wrote:

> A musical idea brought into complete manifestation in appearance is already self-subsistent beauty; it is an end in itself, and it is in no way primarily a medium or material for the representation of feelings or conceptions. The content of music is tonally moving forms. (Hanslick, 1986, pp. 28-29)

For Hanslick, the essence of music seems to be tones, forms, and motion. But to consider these elements as content is to consider that they are perceived through interpretation, that they are not there to begin with. This is in fact a pertinent issue since any motion in music seems to exist only in the listener's perception.[2]

Musical motion is not merely a metaphorical concept used to interpret some sonic experience one is unable to express in any other way; motion in music is concretely experienced in the act of listening. It is therefore a metaphorical perception. It is perceived as happening even when knowing that it is not really there. In an essay where he strives to find alternative metaphors for temporal phenomena besides those of motion and space, Robert Adlington (2003) stresses that "our concepts of time tend to work against a reflective acceptance of alternative ways of making sense of change" (p. 311). This means that, although one may not feel some experiences as path-like oriented motion, an assimilated concept of time as a straightforward motion forces itself over the perception. In other words, because time is usually understood as a directed linear movement through a spacial path, temporal experiences, regardless of their specificity, tend to follow this metaphorical paradigm. Hence, for Adlington, the metaphorical perception of musical motion may then be the simple result of a metaphorical perception of time itself in motion.

In chapter four, it was shown how a narrative impulse arises in the perceiver through a perception of motion. Motion seems to invite a narrative interpretation. The simple perception

1 [These rivers go fast, they shed as if the earth tilted itself. (trans. by author)]

2 One has seen that Roger Scruton (1999) has appropriately questioned the concept of motion in music, since nothing really moves (p. 51, see chapter two).

of something that goes from one point to another during a certain time span is in itself a meta-narrative—i.e., to understand this movement, to intuit it logically is to make sense out of a temporal event, hence, to have already some kind of narrative perception. A movement is a kind of meaningful event, something that gives sense to time. David Epstein emphasises this point when stating that "motion is the very stuff of time itself," and that "the reverse of that correlation is equally true: time is only experienced, and thus understood, through motion" (cited in Adlington, 2003, p. 299). Time alone creates no narrative. Time passes. By it, nothing really seems to happen. There is a narrative promise—the time passing—but there is no narrative object, no event, no story happening or to be told. Only through motion is time narrativised and, this way, made concrete. The perception of musical motion may then be intimately linked with the perception of music's narrativity. The latter may not be possible without the former. Musical motion animates time and through it becomes narrative.

The experimental artist Tony Conrad states that "western music … animates a sense of absence—of suspension or expectation." According to him "this irresolution corresponds to the conflict that provides a forward impetus in narrative story telling" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 315). Therefore, from Conrad's point of view, music and story telling give sense to time in a similar way: by creating a sense of change and motion within themselves, inside their very materiality. Motion may then be the common element between verbal and musical narratives. In fact it may be the very essence of narrative.

Throughout this chapter it will be shown how the perception of motion in music happens, what are its conditions and outcomes, and how it induces narrativity in music listening. It will also be seen how the human mechanisms for the perception of musical motion are similar to those used in perceiving both physical motion and spoken language; or, from the opposite perspective, how all these phenomena deal with time within a similar temporal scale, stimulating this way a similar perceptual mechanism. Through the unveiling of these links between music, motion, and language one may understand how the narrative impulse in music seems so unavoidable; but also, and most importantly for this dissertation, one realises: (1) how a careful avoidance of musical motion—more correctly, of the musical elements that induce the feeling of goal directed motion—may result in musical stasis and in its consequent non-narrativity; and (2) how oral language, also linked to motion by the same perceptual mechanisms, is inevitably perceived as a goal-directed sonic motion—i.e, how music's ability to free itself from motion is not shared by language, creating thus a problem for the composition of non-narrative sung music.

ii. *motion in time*

Motion in music may simply be a metaphor for change. But change itself in music is metaphorical. What really moves and what really changes? Movement is a spatial reference of change. David Mellor (1993) states that change "is having a property at one time and not at another. More specifically, it is something having incompatible properties—such as being at different temperatures or in different places—at different dates" (p. 47). Motion and change are, thus, time dependent. To study them implies studying time.

Martin Heidegger, as explained by Paul Ricoeur (1980), considers that "it is our preoccupation, not the things of our concern, that determines the sense of time" (p. 173). Hence, temporality is perceived through the attention put on the events of one's surroundings, and to refer to it is to refer to our preoccupation. So, dynamic perception leads to perceiving time as dynamic and, oppositely, static perception creates a feeling of frozen time. In his article, *The Experience and Perception of Time*, Robin Le Poidevin (2011) agrees with the Heideggerian idea that time itself is not perceived. He states that "we do not perceive *time* as such, but changes or events *in* time." It is in one's perception of change that time is objectified. So, to study time is then to study the perception of temporal events. As Ricoeur explains, "the description of our temporality [is] dependent on the description of the things of our concern" (p. 172).

Perception happens through what Bob Snyder (2001) calls a "window of consciousness" which has in itself a temporal dimension (p. 9). This idea is quite close to William James's notion of *specious present* as interpreted by Le Poidevin (2011): "the duration which is perceived both as present and as extended in time." Le Poidevin explains with a musical example:

> If we hear a short phrase of music, we seem to hear the phrase as present, and yet—because it is a phrase rather than a single chord—we also hear the notes as successive, and therefore as extending over an interval. (Le Poidevin, 2011)

Such an idea permits two completely different conscious perceptions of time: one of time as *happening* and another of time as *having happened*. Le Poidevin uses Charlie D. Broad's description of motion perception in a clock to clarify this point. Broad states:

> To see a second-hand *moving* is a quite different thing from 'seeing' that an hour-hand *has* moved. In the one case we are concerned with something that happens within a single field; in the other we are concerned with a comparison between the contents of two different sensible fields. (Broad, 1923, p. 351)

Hence, motion is something that is only perceived immediately, in the *specious present*. If one detects a difference in location through a temporal span longer than this specious present, one can say that the motion was detected but not perceived. Thus, through the perception of motion and other forms of change one realises that what is perceived as present is in fact, paradoxically, a portion of time where the concepts of before and after must still apply. Le Poidevin (2011) concludes this line of thought with a syllogism: "(1) What we perceive, we perceive as present. (2) We perceive motion. (3) Motion occurs over an interval. *Therefore*: What we perceive as present occurs over an interval."

Finally, if this portion of time, this *window of consciousness* where the present is grasped, to use Snyder's concept, has a temporal dimension, an element of memory has to be involved. The perceiver must be able to hold on to what s/he grasps, despite it being understood as present, in order to organise it in succession. This memory function is known as short-term memory (Snyder, 2001, p. 47). In other words, short-term memory is Snyder's *window of consciousness*, and because it is in constant actualisation, it too can be perceived as moving, constantly shifting focus to the next events. As Snyder (2001) puts it, "because the front edge of consciousness is always moving forward in time, the time limit of short-term memory forms a continuously moving window" (p. 60). In sum, motion is perceived in time, through a moving window of consciousness that is the short-term memory (Fig. 48).

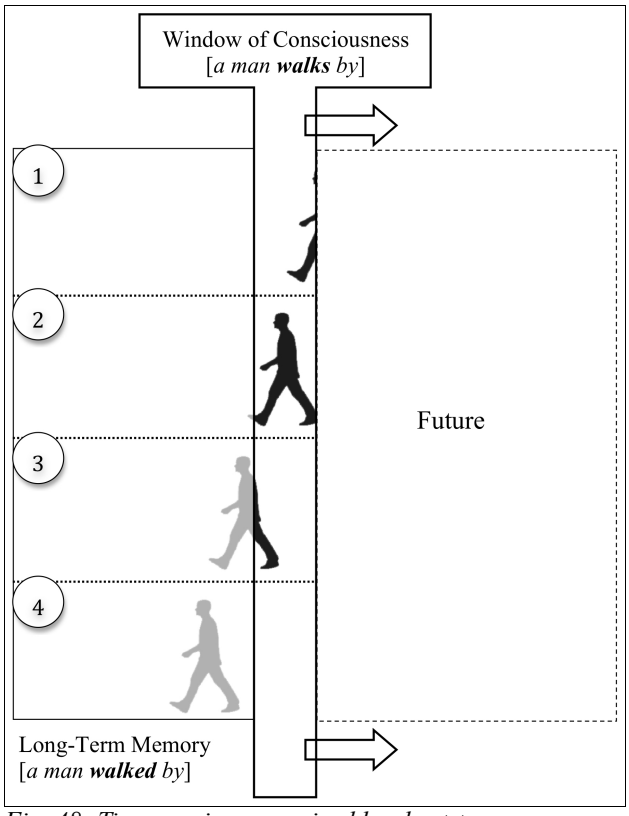


Fig. 48: Time passing: perceived by short-term memory and stored by long-term memory (based on Snyder's theory of window of consciousness).

iii. *time scales*

Music is a temporal art. All elements in music's realisation, whether narrative or non-narrative, are time dependent. Naturally, all human experience is also dependent on time; but music works with time as one of its basic materials. One has seen that the perceived present is in itself a temporal scale.[3] Things happening in this temporal frame have a peculiar way of being perceived. They are understood as happening in the moment and are linked or grouped in the act of perception (Snyder, 2001, pp. 31-46). This temporal frame is, therefore, fundamental for most western music, and essential for the perception of musical motion and consequent narrativity.

But other time scales are equally essential for musical perception. Curtis Roads (2004) mentions as an extreme example of musical time scale Karlheinz Stockhausen's opera *Licht*, which spans through seven days and nights (p. 11). Nevertheless, however long the musical piece may be, short time scales prove to be fundamental in shaping the way one perceives

3 Snyder (2001) considers the duration of the perceived present as being between 3 and 5 seconds (p. 13).

music's most recognisable elements. Roads refers to these smaller scales as: *Meso Time*, where musical events unfold as phrases and motifs; *Sound Object Time*, where the sensation of tone occurs; and *Micro Time*, where elements affecting timbre can be manipulated (pp. 14-28). Throughout all these scales, although time is always present and essential, one's perception intuits extremely different realities. Musical motion is one of such intuitions. It is intuited through perception occurring in the *Meso Time* scale, precisely the same temporal scale where physical motion is perceived.

Like Roads, Bob Snyder (2001) also defines different time levels according to perception. However, instead of focusing on scales for sound manipulation, his division is determined by human memory processing mechanisms. Hence, *early processing* is the level of event fusion, where frequency and timbre are perceived; *short-term memory* is where melodic and rhythmic grouping occur, with its consequent sense of motion; and *long-term memory* is where the notion of form is built (pp. 12-15). Through Snyder's approach, one can see that musical features are in fact the result of different modes of perceiving time.[4] So, when he states that events processed in short-term memory "constitute the *melodic* and *rhythmic* level of musical experience" (p. 13), considering the importance of these elements in western music tradition, one can conclude that this music deals essentially with short-term memory processing. Finally, when Snyder remarks that in this time level the "differences in the frequency of events are metaphorically described as 'faster' and 'slower'" (p. 13), the concepts of melody and rhythm become linked to that of motion through their use of the same memory tools.

iv. *goal directed musical motion*

Musical motion may be perceived in two different ways: (1) that which refers to its points of agitation or rest—more or less motion; and (2) that which refers to the somewhat traveling movement between those antagonistic moments—linear motion. It is this last concept that gives rise to the notion of goal directed motion perceived in music from the western tradition. Through linear motion, music seems to be moving from one point to another, and not simply shifting chaotically. Its perception is linked to an activity that, instead

4 It is relevant that any rhythmic pattern can be perceived as pitch, as rhythm proper, or as form, depending on the temporal scale where it happens, and the consequent memory system used for its processing. Karlheinz Stockhausen (1958) referred to this issue as a "a continuous transition between what might be called durational intervals which are characterised as rhythmic intervals and durational intervals characterised as pitch levels" (p. 48).

of being understood as disperse, seems to glue its elements, conferring unity and identity to the whole experience.

It is implicit that linear motion in music implies music's divisibility into discreet events. The idea that some music fails to be clearly divisible is mentioned in Robert Adlington's text, *Moving Beyond Motion: Metaphors for Changing Sound* (2003). Here he says that "the relative absence in some post-tonal music of psychologically discrete 'events' (as opposed to ongoing states or processes) […] works against the mapping of distinct locations onto the musical sound" (pp. 312-313). This discreteness is in fact part of Vincent Meelberg's (2006) very concept of musical motion. Meelberg states that "movement, i.e. going from one (discrete) moment to the next, implies discreteness" (p. 114).[5] Since the true perception of motion is limited to short-term memory, goal-oriented movement needs to be happening in compatible temporal units. As Snyder states, "short-term memory imposes limitations on the size of musical units, and … musical structure is often tailored to these limitations" (p. 59).

Just as in spoken language, music tends to be divided into meaningful units—phrases—connecting to each other through streams of motion and closure. Snyder explains: "When phrases are related to some larger-scale pattern of musical motion, ending boundaries may have various degrees of finality—i.e., create more or less stasis—in relation to that motion" (p. 59). It is through these elements of closure that music is subdivided into the necessary discrete events. So motion and rest are inseparable features that are instinctively found and, needless to say, created in music of western tradition until the beginning of the twentieth century.

It is implicit, in both Adlington's and Meelberg's theories, that motion is perceived as path-like, not as a mere changing of the sonic surface, but as a specific transition from one musical moment to another. From this perspective, the listener can anticipate the point of arrival and, thus, understand it as the goal of the perceived movement. And, "although our predictions may be wrong," as Bob Snyder (2001) remarks, "the very fact that we can have expectations creates a tension that carries us through a sequence and makes closure possible" (p. 61). To a certain extent, one can define musical motion's goal as its need to end. In other words the finality of musical motion is to reach a rest, a musical stasis. Naomi Cumming, in her essay *Metaphors of Space and Motion in the Linear Melody* (1990), considers as symbolic the use of graphic lines in analytical approaches to tonal melody analysis, both demonstrating and reinforcing this notion. She describes how this line, as a representation of formal division

5 It is important to conclude also the inverse: that music that does not permit clear formal divisions is, by consequence, devoid of motion.

and directness, specifically in the works of Heinrich Schenker and Leonard B. Meyer, is intrinsic to tonal melody theory and, unavoidably, alludes to musical motion through its implied spacial metaphor. For her,

> a person perceives an invariable property of motion in the line and actively seeks out a confirmation of that perception. His or her perceiving has the quality of 'expecting' and confers upon the line a motion which it cannot literally possess. (Cumming, 1990, p. 149)

Musical expectation may then be the motor of music's linear motion. Adlington (2003) explains that "tonal relations permit a measure of accurate anticipation of future events; these events can then be conceptualised as 'lying ahead', as 'approaching' (or being approached), and as 'arriving' (or being arrived at)" (p. 312); Cumming's concept of *line* would then represent nothing more than this notion of goal, that music's motion is directed towards that moment. And that moment simultaneously stops music's motion and divides its perception. Hence, every moment of motion contains an expectation of rest; and every moment of rest closes and forms a discrete musical event (Fig. 49).

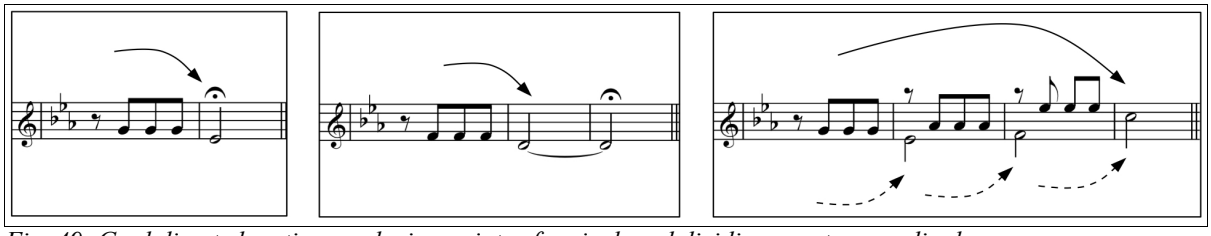


Fig. 49: Goal directed motion producing points of arrival, and dividing events accordingly.
[*musical excerpt from: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, C minor, Op. 67, beginning of first movement.*]

v. *motion in musical gestures*

Although tonal melodies seem to be the fundamental elements of linear motion, atonal and even serial melodic sequences can still produce in the listener some perception of directed movement. Patrick McCreless (2006), searching for connections between temporal dynamism in repertoire spanning from Chopin's piano pieces to recent experimental electronic music, prefers to abstract such instances of motion from the limiting concept of melody. This way, he considers movement as a more general energetic flux—a gesture—that englobes not only melodic traces but also the whole musical structure that follows it. Reflecting upon the intuitive perception of such moving elements McCreless considers that "it is at least in part

the sheer physicality of the gestures that binds us to them" (p. 13). This concept of musical gesture can, therefore, go beyond tonal elements of voice leading and harmonic progressions, and link musical motion to more organic parameters such as rhythm, articulation, and loudness (p. 35). Atonal or even toneless music—such as noise directed electroacoustic experiments—becomes, as McCreless explains, "gesture as gesture, as abstract musical motion disembodied from the moorings of pitch" (p. 40). The gesture is thus seen, through McCreless's perspective, as an evolving element or tool in the history of music: "What began its life as a rhetorical articulation of tonal content ends up as rhetoric pure and simple: the rhetoric is the content" (p. 40).

The musical gesture is also an important feature in Vincent Meelberg's writings (2006 and 2009). For him, there is a profound link between the notion of gesture and its apprehension in the physicality of the listener. Drawing from Rolf Pfeifer and Josh Bongard's (2007) cognitive theories, which consider that the perception of motion "can lead to sensing this movement within the subject's own body, as if the subject is actually performing this movement" (Meelberg, 2009, p. 326), Meelberg (2009) postulates that, likewise in music listening, the perceiver's "body mirrors the movement of the music" (p. 326). But this is more than just a sympathetic reaction to some danceable rhythmic pattern. As Pfeifer and Bongard remark, "the body is stimulated in very particular ways, and this stimulation provides, in a sense, the raw material for the brain to work with" (cited in Meelberg, 2009, p. 326). So, for Meelberg, the actual detection of musical gestures comes from a physical empathy with the sonic stimuli. This bodily perception actually enframes the musical gesture from received formless information, turning it into its apprehensible form. As Meelberg stresses, "information only constitutes meaning if it is enframed" (p. 326). Once perceived this way, the musical gesture becomes the semantic unit of a musical structure.

Edward T. Cone (1974) says that "if music is a language at all it is a language of gesture" (p. 164). Joining to this claim Walter Benjamin's intuition that "in genuine story-telling the hand plays a part which supports in a hundred ways what is expressed with its gestures trained by work" (p. 101), one realises that McCreless's and Meelberg's theories of musical gesture go far beyond the mere recognition of motion in music's structure. Turning this motion into meaningful moving units, musical gestures have in themselves strong semantic implications for a narrative interpretation of music.

vi. *motion and causality*

The perception of musical motion is directly linked to the concept of *causation*: the idea that moving groups are *derived from* or *lead to* other moving entities which are close or similar to them (Snyder, 2001, p. 113). This concept also ensures that motion is perceived as path-like and ongoing, and not as a mere chaotic, goalless agitation of elements. However, as Snyder points out, causality in music, like motion, must be understood as metaphorical, "because musical events do not actually cause each other in the way that other kinds of physical events do (although they can imply each other)" (p. 113). Hence, both motion and causation are perceptual illusions. Nevertheless, both illusions are essential for the perception of music and are implied in the way music is presented and listened to. Through causation, the whole musical discourse seems to be chained by an intuited logic. Or, probably more correctly said, it is the metaphorical perceptions of motion and causality that actually guarantee the sonorous sequence of events as a musical discourse. Snyder summarises the process:

> Similar successive musical events changing in some parameters in similar intervals give rise to the idea of 'motion,' wherein these separate events are seen as more or less 'connected' or 'linked' in a way that implies the earlier ones have moved toward and 'caused' the later ones. (Snyder, 2001, p. 114)

Snyder has noted too that the causation concept, which unifies musical motion along its whole structure, "is also an important factor in the construction of linear verbal narrative." As he explains, "sequences of narrative events are also often linked by chains of causation" (p. 114). The temporal flux, in narrative as in music, is thus joined in logical sequences that seem to relate causally. Each element appears not to be possible without the other. All this seems to reinforce the impulse to experience music as narrative—i.e., the design of music's motion, with its linking structures of causality and its specific temporal dynamism, can be understood through the same principles of story-telling. In fact, since music's motion is designed for one's perception, one may tend to interpret music as a dramatic telling: a transmission of a temporal object where moving sound structures are dynamically and teleologically connected along the sonic discourse; a closed, enframed, and temporally meaningful form; in short, a musical narrative. After all, as Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) states, "drama means a flow of time, controlled and surveyable" (p. 40).

vii. *motion in short- and long-term memory*

It has been seen that the concepts of motion or change imply the existence of recognised entities. In other words, change or motion need to be attributed to something, to an entity. In music, as also mentioned, entities can be groups of events, either (1) joined in short-term memory perception according to Snyder's (2001) three main principles of *proximity*, *similarity*, and *continuity* (pp. 39-43), or (2) *recollected*, *reminded*, or *recognised* rhythmic or melodic patterns, cued in long-term memory, that may be understood as reoccurring in music's formal structure (pp. 69-72).

In the first case, a stream of sound is created by the credible relation between the individual events that form it—the temporal proximity, the similarity of sonic characteristics, and the progressive continuity of some constant degree of change (Snyder, 2001, pp. 31-46). The listener holds on to some consistency in the presented events in order to link them in one unit, considering each element as a different stage in that unit's motion. This idea of sound stream is itself a motion metaphor. David Lidov (2004) states that "a sound stream may be regarded as continuous 'by definition' … insofar as the sound stream is correlated with a stream of attention" (p. 3). Hence, in short-term memory, motion is perceived because an ungraspable intuited entity is constructed by the consistency of temporally sequenced events and by the persistence of attention towards them—i.e., the unity between articulated elements tends to become the motion itself.

In the second case, musical entities are perceived through long-term memory. This process is what permits the listener to hear 'the same again'—an 'intentional identity' conferred to a recognised music pattern (Scruton, 1999, p. 106). Besides the fact that this recognisability is dependent on practice—the repeated listening—and preexisting knowledge—the culturally built memories—(Snyder, 2001, pp. 71-72), it is fundamental to understand that the changes affecting entities recognised through long-term memory seem not to be perceived as motion. In other words, a musical theme that reappears with some variations in its content—enough to be understood as different but not so much as to be perceived as another entity—tends to be heard as having changed but not as having moved; even if what happened between both presentations of that theme was somehow perceived as a path-like movement. What is perceived is not that an entity shifted from one place to another, but that that entity itself changed part of its essence (Fig. 50).

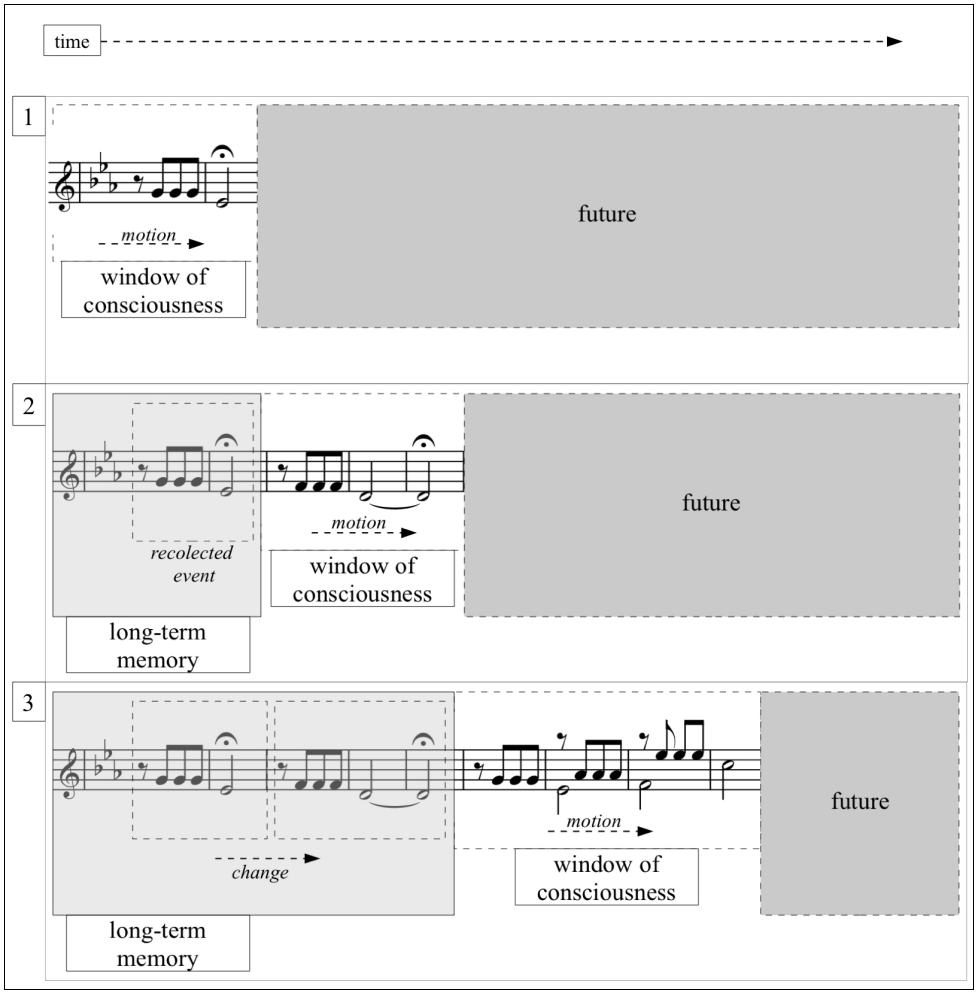


Fig. 50: Perception of musical motion in short-term memory, and perception of musical form in long-term memory.
[*musical excerpt from: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fifth Symphony, C minor, Op. 67, beginning of first movement.*]

In sum, long-term memory units may be subjected to change but fail to move. Despite that they may be understood as being in different 'places' of the musical form. Short-term memory units, on the other hand, are perceived as in motion, whether as creating memorable entities or as moving from one of these entities to another.

viii. *form and motion*

Snyder (2001) considers that the temporal level processed by short-term memory in music has the peculiarity of grouping separate events together (p. 13). This happens in two dimensions: that of melodic grouping of pitches; and that of rhythmic grouping according to temporal disposition (pp. 13-14). Since pitches also require a temporal disposition, one can say that the first dimension is somewhat dependent on the second. Rhythm can become pitch

simply by an acceleration into the temporal scale of event fusion. Inversely, instead of accelerating, when decelerating rhythmic articulation, the events tend to fall outside the scope of short-term memory, being stored in long-term memory. Rhythm then is perceived as form. As Snyder remarks, "large groupings of events that occur over a time span longer than the limits of short-term memory constitute the formal level of musical experience (p. 14)—a similar physical occurrence becomes perceptually different simply because its time scale was altered.

If rhythm deals with temporal sequencing, form is no different. However, formal units are memory stored groups of events and seem to become placed as specific points in a musical piece and, in consequence, loose their motion. Snyder remarks that "events on the formal level are usually described as 'earlier' and 'later'" (p. 14), which, comparing to the 'faster' and 'slower' descriptions of rhythm (see above), reveals a fundamental difference between rhythmic and formal perceptions. As Joshua Mailman (2012b) remarks, since "listening is in a sense inseparable from its flow," formal perception of music maintains a certain moving character. But it is no longer a perception of motion. Just like in Charlie Broad's clock example, to understand that a piece of music moved from one specific section to another is substantially different from perceiving its motion in a melodic line or a harmonic progression. Curtis Roads (2004) explains that "unless the musical form is described in advance of performance (through program notes, for example), listeners perceive the macro time scale in retrospect, through recollection" (p. 11). This means that, because of the way long-term memory functions, the flow of events becomes non-linear and is only obtained through careful reconstruction, "it is not a given, as in short-term memory" (Snyder, p. 15). Motion ceases to be perceived, it is merely recollected.

ix. *motionless timelines*

Timelines (2004), a piece by the experimental musician and sound artist Jason Kahn, is a good example of a musical work that seems to deal almost exclusively with change in a motionless plane—i.e., in the macro time scale. Composed for a specific sextet of basically electronic device performers plus double bass and electric guitar, it is a graphic score where each intensity (loudness), on a *y* axis, is disposed in straight lines over a temporal 70 minute *x* axis surface divided in 5 minute portions. Other indications of frequency and technical elements are sparse and written over the intensity lines. Such a strict score can be partially explained by the fact that the piece was written for a group of improvising musicians with

whom the composer was well acquainted. Apropos *Timelines*, Kahn said: "I see it not so much as a conventional composition for anonymous players but more as a live mix of my friends, as one might do on the computer in a mix program" (Warburton, 2004). However, the straight lines impose their own strictness, which is perceivable throughout the whole piece. They either remain absolutely parallel to the time axis, or indicate linear fade-ins and fade-outs spanning over more than 5 minutes. (Fig. 51).

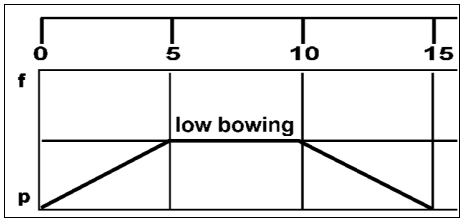


Fig. 51: Excerpt from Jason Kahn's Timelines (Contrabass part); numbers correspond to minutes.

Because of those straight lines, an accurate interpretation of such a score implies that each sonic element, the duration of which can extend from 10 to 30 minutes, must be a constant, even if rich, sound drone.

Michael Imberty (1993), studying the impact of atonal music on the listeners perception of form, states that "every [musical] work listened to is segmented into units or *groups* of varying length, relying on the perception of qualitative changes, or events of varying significance in the musical temporal flux" (p. 333). However, in *Timelines*, each sound block extends way beyond the capacity of short-term memory, and is not divisible within this time span. Inside each sound block of the piece, some minor rhythmic and dynamic irregularity can be perceived, more as a constant agitation than as motion proper. This seems to be directly related to the type of 'instrument' being used. Thus, it may be understood more as a characteristic of timbre, in a broad sense, than as hypothetic melodic or rhythmic lines. And still, the constancy of this agitation seems to limit any sense of progression and, consequently, any persistent attention. As Snyder (2001) remembers "it is hard to remain aware of that which we already know" (p. 25). Because each sound block enters either in long fade-ins or in moments where the overall loudness masks their appearance, meaning that sounds are usually perceived after already being somewhat present; because all significant changes occur over temporal spans much longer than short-term memory capacity, meaning that changes are noticed but not perceived as they happen; the listener is left with a retrospective memory of a

70 minute long unique sound that very gradually changed along the course of its existence. An entity was created in the listener's perception merely by timbre continuity. Significant changes do happen, but they appear so gradually that the listener is unable to intuit new identities out of them. Defying Imberty's above stated claim and Vincent Meelberg's notion that "the whole cannot be retained as a continuum: one can only grasp the continuous whole by dividing it into parts, by constructing successors through time, which are by definition discrete" (p. 110), Kahn's *Timelines* seems to stretch time indivisibly—all the piece is perceived as one sound in a constant and very slow change.

Referring to a different version of the piece *Timelines Los Angeles* (2008) that nevertheless preserves the same basic temporal characteristics of its precursor, Kahn states:

> There is a darkness and weight to the music but also, towards the end, an airiness and sense of lifting and release, much as I used to feel at the end of the many long, hot Los Angeles days when the sun had finally begun its descent and the city's heat drifted on desert winds slowly out to the sea. (Kahn, 2009)

It is remarkable how still in such a motionless piece, the composer himself alludes to motion metaphors, even when such movements are those that, escaping one's immediate perception, are only retrospectively understood in memory. This, and the whole of Kahn's description, subtly links motion to narrative, and reminds us of Paul Ricoeur's idea that "a plot establishes human action not only within time … but within memory. Memory, accordingly, repeats the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of time as 'stretching-along' between a beginning and an end" (p. 180).

x. *musical motion as metaphorical perception*

Although the motion metaphor is quite useful when trying to verbalise the sensation of experiencing music through time, it must be stressed that it is still a metaphor. Nothing really moves in music, at least not in the way it seems to move. But the perception of motion is so strong that it is hard to imagine certain musical elements without it. Roger Scruton argues that "metaphor cannot be eliminated from the description of music, because it is integral to the intentional object of musical experience" (cited in Cumming, 1990, p. 159). This means that the metaphor is not a simple verbal way to express that which has no word. It is contained in the act of perception. In fact, musical motion seems to be present in the very act of listening, whether or not one decides to describe it—it is, so to say, metaphorical from the very start. In

her essay, *Metaphors of Space and Motion in the Linear Melody*, Naomi Cumming (1990) stresses how metaphor needs to be present in musical perception. She states that "in order to recognise a series of pitches as a melody a listener must hear in them a quality which they cannot literally possess. This is the quality of movement through space" (p. 143). It does not mean that the listener thinks this motion is really happening, s/he simply uses metaphor as a way of perceiving it. From this perspective, metaphor is much more than a form of expression. It is present in each person's grasp of her/his surrounding reality.

Recent theory of metaphor has in fact moved away from the mere literary interpretations of the concept. As Robert Adlington (2003) points out, "contrary to the traditional understanding of metaphor as an essentially poetic or figurative linguistic device, theorists have stressed the centrality of metaphor to cognition and experience" (p. 301). Hence, it seems that metaphor helps categorising experience, relating abstract perceptions to more physical intuitions. Again, Bob Snyder explains that these "metaphorical mappings are not arbitrary, but are grounded in fundamental embodied cognitive structures generalised from recurring physical experiences, especially the experience of our own bodies" (p. 108). What is fundamental in this perspective is that metaphorical descriptions—like musical narrative or motion—may be previously present in the grasping of the experience (Fig. 52).

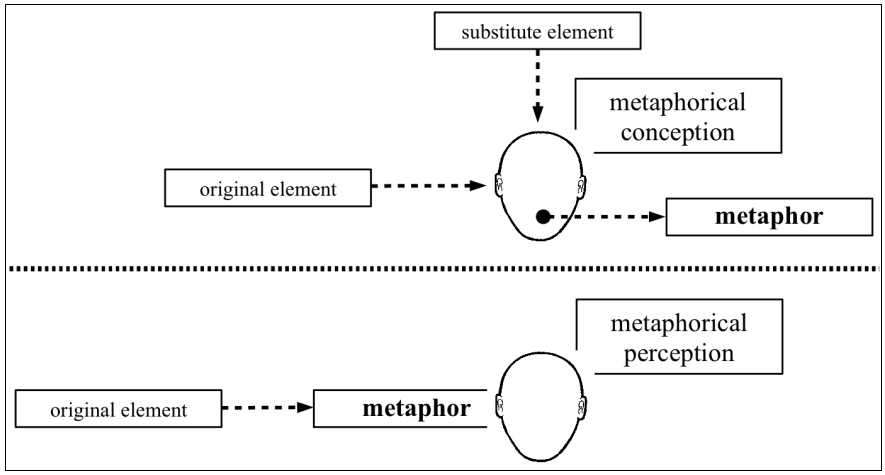


Fig. 52: Schema of metaphor as a perceptual experience (below), as opposed to metaphor as conceived concept for expressive needs (above).

Raymond Gibbs (2008), in his introduction to *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, clearly supports this idea when stating that "in many instances […] creative, poetic metaphors are extensions of enduring schemes of metaphorical thought and not necessarily created de novo" (p. 5).

Through the exposed one can understand motion metaphors applied to music and temporal experience in general as more than mere linguistic devises. When Mark Johnson states that "our preferred concept of time is the product of a metaphorical conceptualisation of the abstract notion of change 'based on movement along a physical path'" (cited in Adlington, 2003, p. 304); or when Arnie Cox claims that "because musical events, like other events we experience, are anticipated, present and remembered, we are strongly motivated to understand them in terms of 'approach', 'arrival', and 'departure', and to understand them in terms of motion 'in' and 'through time'" (cited in Adlington, 2003, p. 306), one must assume that such analogies are in fact, as Cox himself puts it, "embodied cognitions" (Adlington, 2003, p. 303) —i.e., metaphorical approaches to perception and not artefacts of expression.

In sum, motion is so ingrained in the metaphorical perception of change that it becomes almost impossible to understand music's changing elements through any other analogy. When Adlington (2003) proposes alternative metaphors for the changing of musical sound, like 'pressure' or 'heat' (p. 309), he seems to be simply adjourning the inevitable, for changes in these apparently motionless elements tend too to be perceived and certainly described with path-like motion metaphors. To alter the metaphors that describe music would therefore mean to either profoundly alter one's way of perceiving it or deeply change its very essence. In the specific case of the motion metaphor, as has started to become clear, this means to radically change music's way of dealing with time.

xi. *no articulation and no motion*

The forth scene of the third act of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* is an example of how music can strongly avoid motion, producing a sonic body that questions several parameters usually considered as essential to the very concept of music—rhythm and melody being the most obvious. The whole ten-minute scene is one continuous breath of sound with only slight nuances of timbre and intensity, and a trajectory of three descending notes (see volume II for full score; and attached DVD for audio-visual example). A 'melodic line', that, if played within short-term memory's time span, would be felt as a descending motion from the first to the third and last note, is here extended over a period of ten minutes, destroying the notion of melody and pointing perception towards the infinite details of its sonic reality and away from its meaningful motion—the melody. Again, as with the vocal quartets (see chapter four), the scene is related to characters of the opera—in this case, *Um* and *Outro*—and, consequently, there is a verbal text for them to articulate. The piece

is for one clarinet, one violin, live electronics, and video projection—hence, no singers.

With only one perceived sound articulation, at the very beginning, that triggers the drone to be heard for ten uninterrupted minutes, the piece clearly rejects the previously described mechanisms that induce the perception of musical motion: it spans way beyond short-term memory. All changes are either imperceptible or introduced at such long intervals that their causal linkage becomes impossible to establish; and it refuses sonic activity by erasing articulations (Fig. 53).

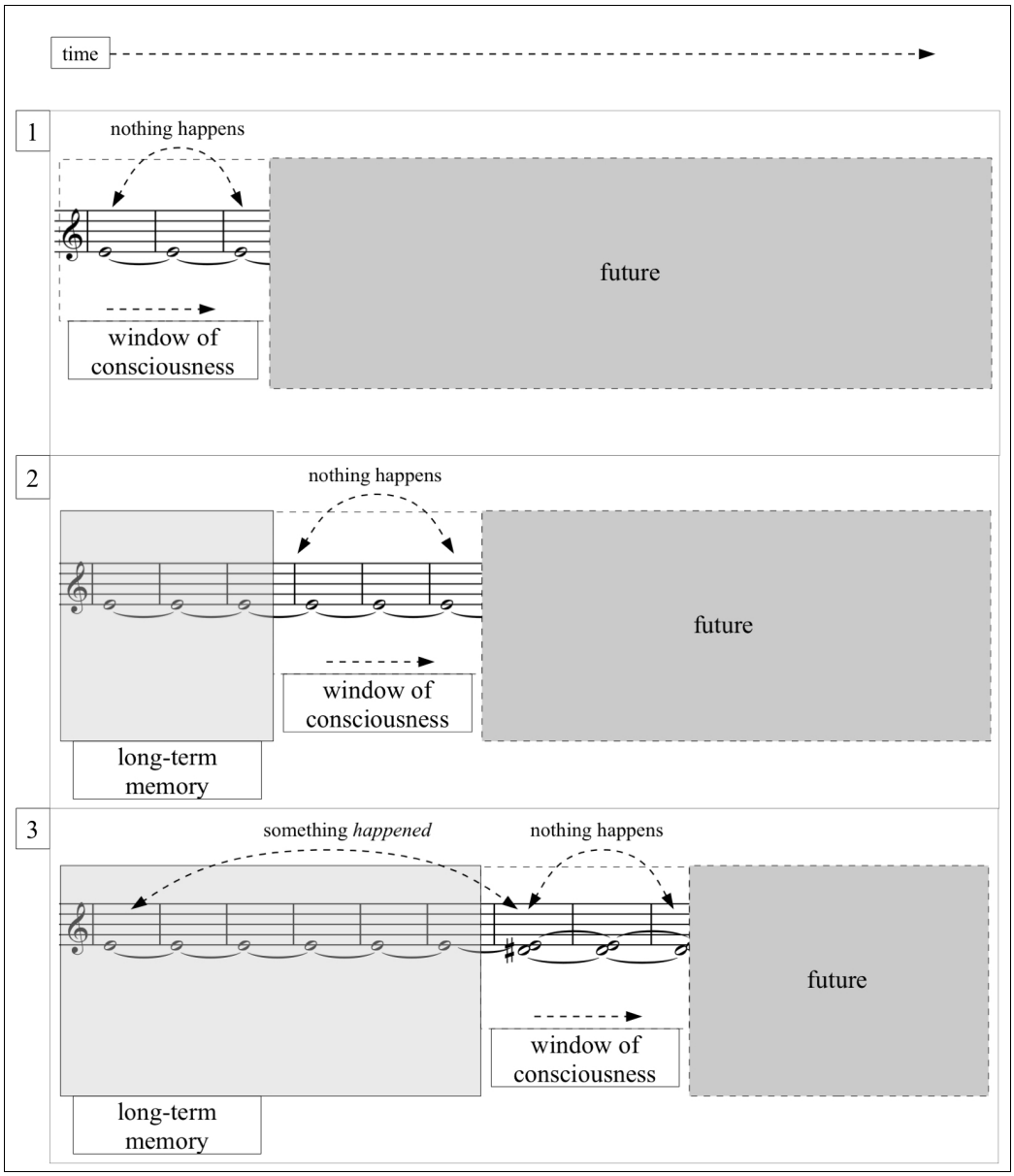


Fig. 53: By going beyond short-term memory capacity, the perception of motion is avoided. Things are not perceived as happening but as having happened.

This last point deserves further discussion. Articulation is usually considered as secondary element in music, a subaltern part of the more evident concepts of rhythm and durations. As already mentioned, Snyder (2001) remarks that "the metaphor of mobility is often applied to the idea of intensity in music. Points of higher intensity are said to be 'in motion,' and points of low intensity are said to be 'at rest'" (p. 62). Intensity is how Snyder alludes to musical activity or, as he puts it, to "any change in a stimulus that causes an increase in neural activity" (p. 62). Thus, music is perceived as being in motion when any of its elements is changing. However, it is rarely stressed how articulation has a fundamental role in this perception of change: (1) different durations may trigger similar perceptions of rhythm and consequent musical activity (Fig. 54);

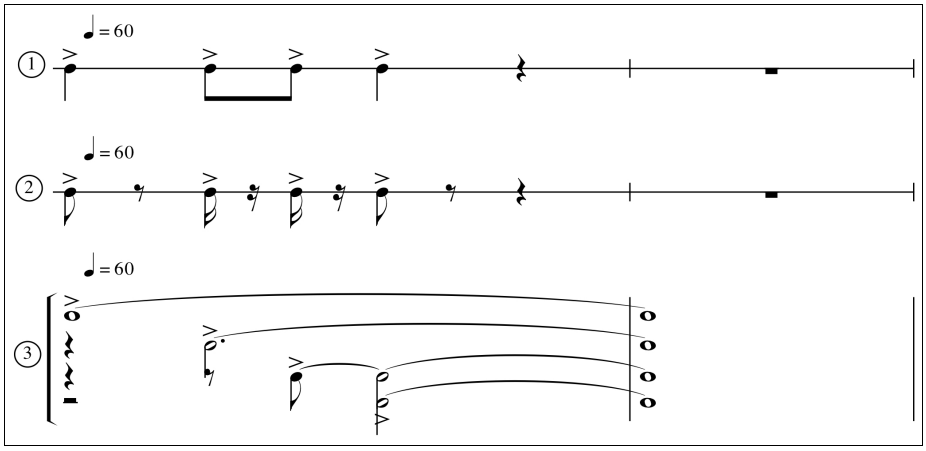


Fig. 54: Different rhythmic figures producing similar rhythmic perception.

however, (2) similar rhythmic figures may produce completely opposite notions of musical activity simply through different articulations (Fig. 55);

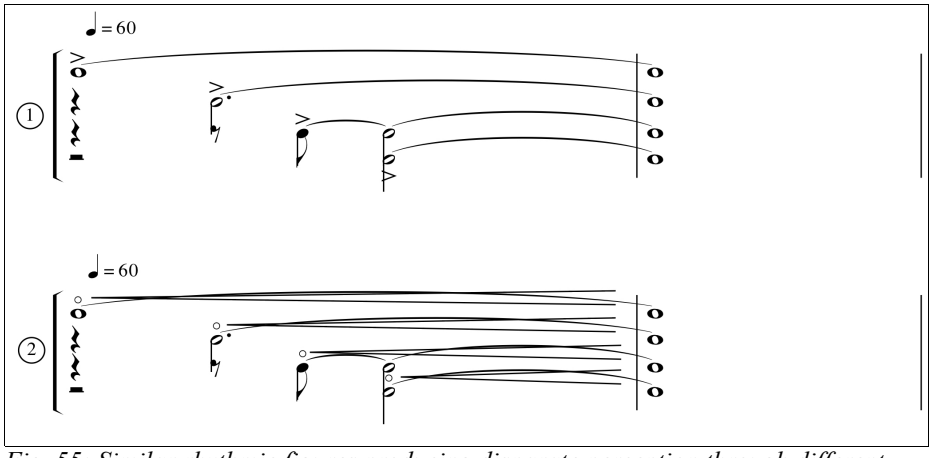


Fig. 55: Similar rhythmic figures producing disparate perception through different articulation.

and finally, (3) similar rhythmic patterns—i.e., similar proportions in durations—with similar articulations can also lead to an antagonistic perception of musical activity simply by extending their temporal frame and therefore making articulation sparser (Fig. 56).

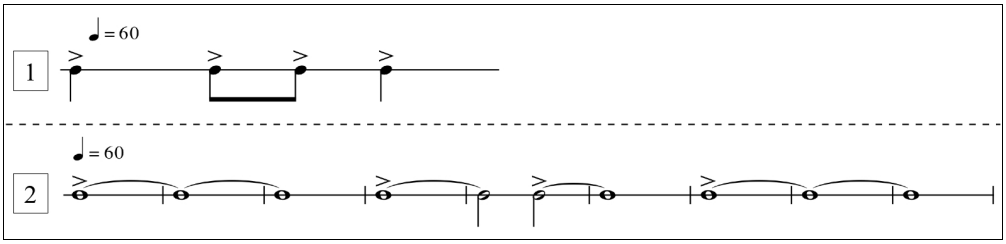


Fig. 56: Similar proportions producing different perceptions through time-scale dilatation.

In all these examples, it is articulation, its quality and its quantity, that is controlling the perception of musical activity and, consequently, of musical motion.

xii. *a motionless scene*

The concept of musical articulation and its avoidance was fundamental for the composition of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada.* The piece for the fourth scene of the third act is an extreme example. What was sought was precisely the absence of any articulation that could produce a feeling of motion. Although a path is followed from one note to another, it all happens so slowly that this path is not perceived. In fact, the complete pitch and rhythmic material could be written in a single 5/4 bar provided a radically extreme slow tempo would be followed (Fig. 57).

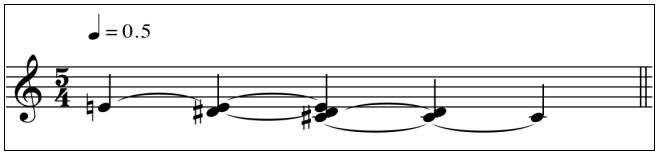


Fig. 57: Oversimplified score for scene 4 of act III.

Since each instrument represents one of the two main characters of the opera, the three notes are taken from the pitch palette conceived for the vocal soloists (see chapter eight). In fact, they are the only three notes that are common to both the male and the female soloists voices. These notes are distributed in descending order. Each new note appears every two minutes and lasts for three minutes. The musical process is based on very simple procedures:

(1) each instrument plays a three-second long note (Fig. 58);

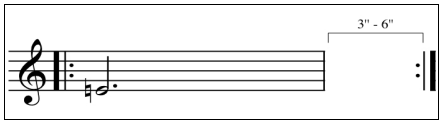


Fig. 58: First note to be played by both instruments.

(2) this note is recorded and looped by live electronics;

(3) each player then waits three to six seconds to repeat the process;

(4) since the electronic loop's duration largely exceeds the player's rest, the next note will overlap the electronics in a growing loop that can reach several dozens of layers (Fig. 59);[6]

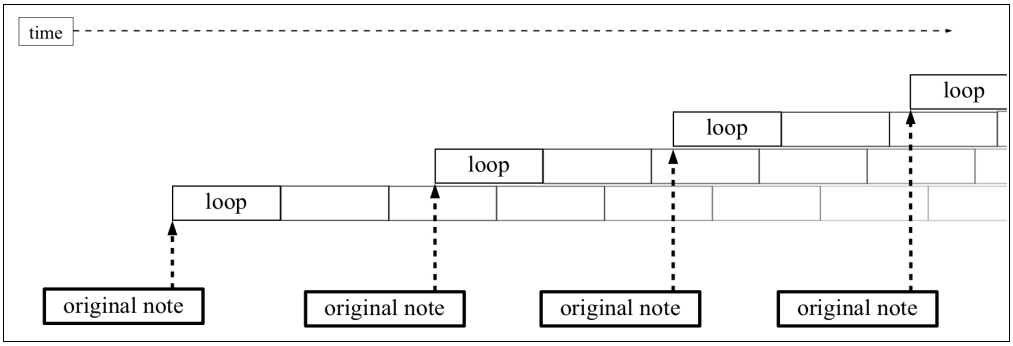


Fig. 59: Schematic simulation of the looping process.

(5) very quickly, the overall sound will become a thick texture of unsynchronised loops and live played sounds;

(6) after two minutes, the second note is introduced—the players now alternate between the first and the second note (Fig. 60);

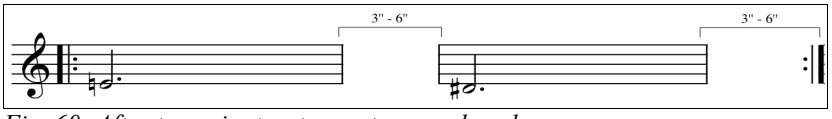


Fig. 60: After two minutes, two notes are played.

(7) after two more minutes, the third note is introduced—the players now alternate between the three notes (Fig. 61);

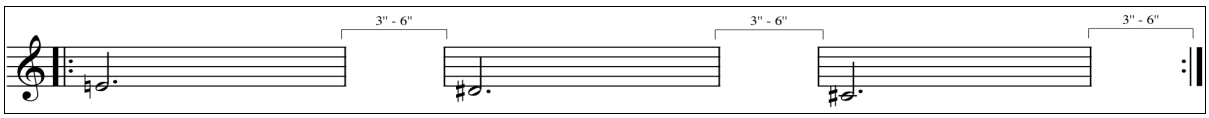


Fig. 61: After four minutes, the three notes are played.

(8) after two more minutes, the first note is no longer played—the players now alternate between

6 The loop looses 3% amplitude per three seconds, hence, it can be heard for more than two minutes.

the second and the third note (Fig. 62);

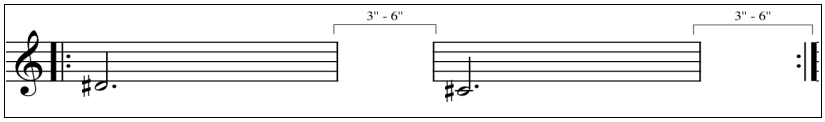


Fig. 62: After six minutes the last two notes are played.

(9) after two more minutes, the second note is no longer played—the players now simply play the third note (Fig. 63);

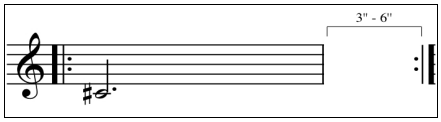


Fig. 63: After eight minutes, only the third note is played.

(10) after two more minutes, the piece ends.

It becomes obvious that, with such limited activity, attention will tend to focus on minor nuances that derive from the compositional process:

(1) the differences in mixture of the violin's and clarinet's disparate timbres;
(2) the slight differences in loudness produced when the live notes are played
(3) the slight differences in the tuning of each note, thickening or thinning each pitch;

Nevertheless, the overall sound will always be perceived as a sonic mass.

Again the problem of verbal articulation was solved by video projection. Actually, this point was assumed from the start, when deciding to use as characters instruments instead of singers. Although several staging decisions are left to stage direction, the presence of the two instrumentalists on stage is, in this case, essential. The projection of the text for each character will appear behind them, as happens with the vocal quartet pieces—the image is divided into two areas for each character's text to be projected. As with the opposite colours used in the two different scenes of the vocal quartets, representing the two different texts, here these opposing colours appear simultaneously on each side of the screen (Fig. 64). In this piece, however, the text is not moving in the screen as the singers sing. The process for articulating text image with sound is quite different:

(1) each note played by an instrument triggers a fragment of the text;
(2) this fragment is projected to the screen in realtime (Fig. 64);

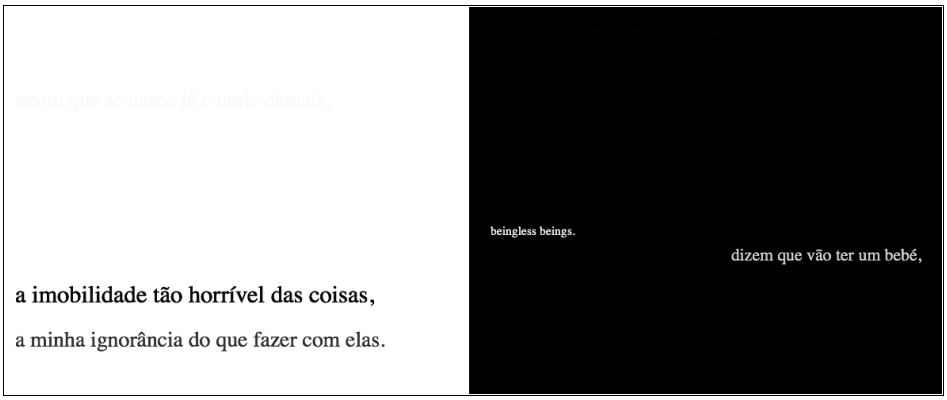


Fig. 64: Projected text after both clarinet and violin played two notes; left side is the text of Um*, and right side is the text of* Outro*.*

(3) this projection, like the note that is sustained by the electronic loop, will only very slowly disappear;

(4) the screen will slowly be filled by the whole projected text like the sonic building up of overlapping loops (Fig. 65).

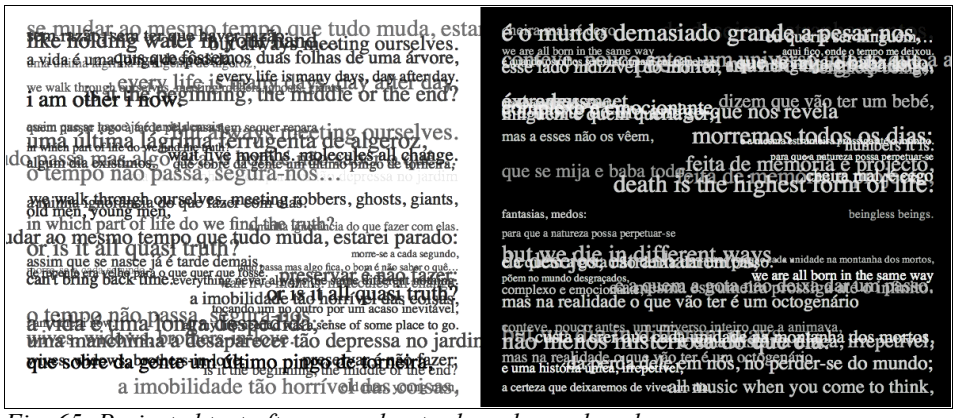


Fig. 65: Projected text after several notes have been played.

Conceived this way, the whole piece establishes strong links with the text—two final disillusioned statements of the two main characters regarding their ageing loneliness (see volume II)—even if never articulating it through the music. The absence of communication between the two characters and their dispassionate statements are, so to speak, replicated by the musical stasis of the long droning notes, by the absence of a true human voice, and by the progressive overlaying of text fragments covering each other to the point of unreadability.

As a closing statement, it should be emphasised that the musical piece may be understood as a simple three note motif—almost as if played on a piano without releasing the keys—extended way beyond the temporal limits necessary for it to be perceived as a motif.

However, if this process would to be done with spoken language, that is, if a three syllable word were to be articulated so slowly as to encompass a ten-minute duration, language would have ceased to be. As with the musical motif, attention would probably also drift towards sound and sound's infinite details, but the word that was to be expressed would cease to be a *word* and would become just *sound*. It is this condition of having understandable external referent that language has and music doesn't. To be language, verbal language needs to produce words. Music doesn't need to produce melodic or rhythmic motifs—although very often it does—to be music. It is this phenomenon that raises the problematic essence of this thesis. How can language and non-narrative music articulate each other in a verbal language dependent medium like opera?

chapter six: Musical Stasis

"tudo isto é tempo a passar... e aqui, que faço eu?"[1]

i. *intro*

In his essay on narrativity in music, *Music as Narrative*, Fred Maus (1991) remarks Donald Tovey's claim that Beethoven's 23rd sonata in three movements, Op. 57 in F minor (*Appassionata*), consisted of "two tragedies and a vision" of which the vision would be the second movement (p. 25). In fact, Tovey refers to the second movement as a needed "unutterable calm" composed of "simple and solemn variations" (p. 230). Such variations, according to Tovey, have the dramatic intent of an extraordinary "repose which is too unearthly to last", a "sublime vision" that vanishes "at the first sign of dramatic motion or change of key" (p. 242). In the particular case of the 23rd sonata's second movement, such extraordinary repose can last somewhere around six and a half minutes.[2]

Tovey's idea of frozen temporality, connecting the two dramatic movements of the first and last movements, is particularly relevant for an approach to the concept of musical stasis and its subsequent non-narrativity. Through his metaphorical idea of a *vision*, apparently as an interior enlightenment refrained from any dramatic agitation, one understands a piece of music that seems to avoid or minimise the usual perception of motion linked to the unfolding of musical discourse. Of course, this is not a radical approach, as when composers like Stockhausen, Ligeti, or Feldman attempt to create, as Roger Sessions states, "music that has nothing to do with time, but which instead is strictly static in character" (cited in Almén & Pearsall, 2006, p. 6).[3] Nevertheless, the *Appassionata*'s second movement is uncommonly depurated, in the movement's resources and model of variation, and may create, in fact, in the listener, an idea of minimal motion or even suspended time, through its constant repetitions, regular meter, limited melodic lines, and slow progression.

Presented as a sequence of theme, three variations, and a return to the theme, this movement never really releases its formal restrictions. Although the sequence of variations tends to implement rhythmic subdivision throughout and to evolve from low to high register, everything seems to happen so slowly, in an *Andante con moto* tempo, and constrained by its

1 [All this is time passing by... And here, what am I doing? (trans. by author)]

2 A quick survey through youtube reveals very different tempo choices for the second movement of Beethoven's *Appassionata*: from Mauricio Pollini's 5:45 interpretation to Lang Lang's 7:15 version.

3 Stockhausen's Stimmung, and Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna* are good examples of works from these composers that produce static perception. Almost all of Feldman's works tend to be perceived as static but *Three Voices for Joan La Barbara*, being a work for voice, positions itself in an interesting relation with these vocal pieces from Stockhausen and Ligeti.

every eighth bar repetitions that one's perception of progression is strongly attenuated. Not that Beethoven's music has anything to do with twentieth-century process music, but Steve Reich's (2002) description of "a process happening so slowly and gradually that listening to it resembles watching a minute hand on a watch—you can perceive it moving after you stay with it a little while" (p. 36) does come into mind.

Independently of the pertinency of such anachronistic parallels, it is important to understand that musical motion has always had as its counterpart the notion of musical stasis —points of rest towards which motion tends to direct itself (Snyder, 2001, p. 62; see chapter five). What distinguishes Beethoven's example is simply the giving of temporal length to such *resting points* and, within it, the creation of a very softened, almost imperceptible discourse. Seymour Chatman (1978) affirms that, in verbal narrative, the discourse states the story and that "these statements are of two kinds—process and stasis—according to whether someone did something or something happened; or whether something simply existed in the story" (pp. 31-32). It is this idea of stasis, of the *simple existence* without happenings, that seems to be transposed to such musical moments as the *Appassionata*'s second movement—an absence of narrative with a specific narrative role: a rest between two movements of dramatic activity. But, since in music the discourse—the flow of sonic events perceived as coherent—promotes the narrative impulse, meaning that it stimulates the listener's instinct to narrativise (see chapter four), it must be only through the avoidance of discourse, through the rejection of onward motion, that music may completely portray this *existence without happenings*.

This chapter discusses the concept of musical stasis as an essential element of non-narrative music. It shows (1) how music avoids motion; (2) how in doing so it limits music's force as an expressive tool, and questions the very concept of the author behind such expression; (3) how this reflects on the act of listening, forcing new aesthetic approaches and listening postures; and (4) how all of it can be understood as a manifestation of post-modernism—in Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation of the concept—and as its consequent negation of the narrative paradigm in all arts. Finally, it will be seen that, although non-narrativity has spread, in some way or the other, throughout all arts, literature included, musical stasis creates a problematic relation with verbal text; in that language's inevitable motion, even if with non-narrative content, becomes somewhat impossible to articulate within this music's static and non-discursive nature. Some non-musical solutions to this problem have been pointed out in previous chapters (see chapters four and five); this and the proceeding chapters deal with strictly musical solutions.

ii. *repetition as stasis*

As remarked, the *every-eighth-bar* repetition in Beethoven's Op. 57 second movement strongly constrains any perception of directed progression. In fact, one of the main arguments against a plain narrative reading of music's discourses is the figure of repetition. Repetition, a common trait in musical structure, has no exact parallel in literary narratives. As Nicholas Reyland (2013) emphasises, Michael Spitzer "has identified the conventional repetitions and recapitulations of certain musical forms as 'the perennial Achilles heel of musical narratology'" (p. 44). Carolyn Abbate (1989) also states that "a long tradition of musical analysis rooted in Hanslick's aesthetics of form would argue that repetition actually creates structure, architecture, hence stasis: time frozen" (p. 229). And, in a later work, Abbate (1991) refers directly to music that is "working against the story" (p. 6) when the ongoing narrative, sang in verbal text, is contradicted by repeating melodic material that seems immune to the passing and movement of the plot.

One should start by stressing that a musical 'architecture'—the design of happening things, or of things to happen—does not imply that the events are static or that these events are in themselves *time frozen*. Form in musicology has always been one of the several metaphors used to identify elements in musical analysis (Beard & Gloag, 2005, pp. 8-12). It actually underlines that musical pieces usually have a fixed order of events and, as a consequence, a fixed expressive dynamic through time. However, Abbate has a point: the typical structuralist analysis that builds, say, an *A-B-A* form, seems to evoke a lack of direction by finishing with the beginning. What structuralist analysis fails to emphasise in such visual schematics is music's temporality. As Eero Tarasti (1994) argues, "there is no symmetrical repetition in music at all, and even in simple *A-B-A* form, the second *A* differs from the first" (pp. 61-62). And this happens not necessarily because it has different notes in the score but because one listens to it for the second time, as a re-presentation. Its formal difference is in the listening, not in the music sheet. Byron Almén (2008) also stresses this point. For him, the difference is that "the listener has now experienced the intervening material" (p. 8). In the act of listening, to recognise that some musical material is a repetition *makes* it different. Therefore, although a structuralist analysis may indicate *A-B-A*, a narrative analysis must always refer to an *A-B-A′* form—narratively speaking the second *A* cannot be the same as the first (Fig. 66).

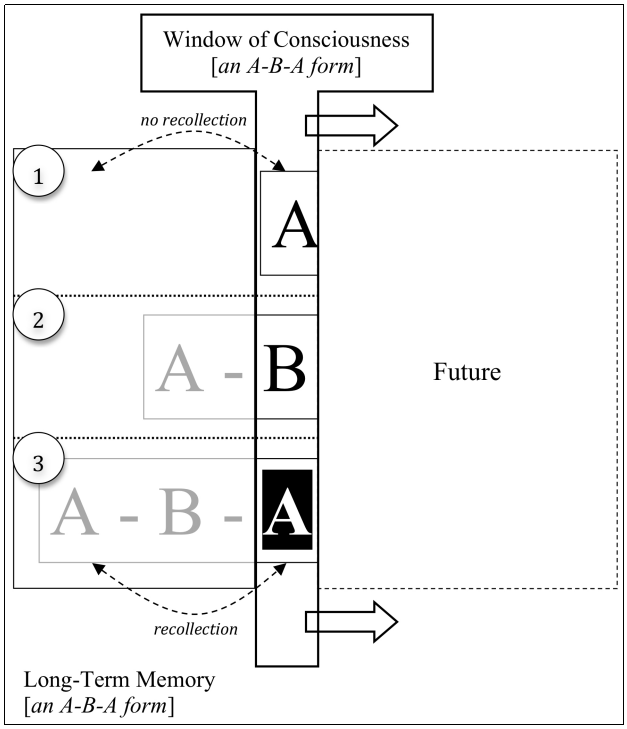


Fig. 66: Repetition as a distinct perception in a narrative perception.

While Tarasti and Almén deny the existence of true repetition in music, Gregory Karl (1997), somewhat following Edward Cone's (1982) statement that "formal repetitions are often best interpreted as representations of events rehearsed in memory" (p. 240), prefers to assume a different approach. For him, music repetition has a fundamental function in the dramatic unfolding of music. He argues that "these repetitions present no special difficulties for an interpretation of the work as an abstract fiction of mental life because, unlike dramatic scenes or situations in literary narratives, dreams are wont to recur" (p. 30). Repetition would thus be equivalent to dreamlike flashbacks in an interior mental drama. One can also propose that such recurrences in the ending of musical pieces could be interpreted as that kind of psychological recapitulation that happens in the ending of literary narratives, not specifically in the written text but in the mind of the reader, in her/his mental summary of the finished story.

Whatever the approach to the meaning and importance of repetition in music, it is evident that, in a non-referential temporal discourse like music, such technical feature is fundamental for bringing unity to the musical whole and specifically to its moments of closure. Nevertheless, the way the use of repetition has evolved throughout musical history—from the simplest straightforward duplicates of complete sections in the classical period, to its

elaborate disguise, through manipulation and variation, in the more dramatic music of the romanticism—seems to be the recognition that, although an essential feature for music's consistency, the recurrence of musical elements, specially when constantly used—as in Beethoven's example—tends, in fact, to block the ongoing motion and narrative purposes.

iii. *no motion*

Although Beethoven's example may serve as an indication of how music can manipulate its internal motion to the point of almost static temporality, it must be stressed that recent music that earns the epithet 'static' is usually guided by completely different intents than those of creating a moment of rest in the midst of dramatic occurrences. In such works, stasis becomes the very goal of the whole sonic entity. Traditional forms of temporal design and narrative structuring are usually abandoned or radically changed, avoiding the paradigm of musical discourse, and suggesting entirely new forms of musical conception and, consequently, of music listening. The notion of music as a memorable and meaningful sequence of causally linked events becomes a soundscape where pure perception seems to gain prominence over meaning. As Robert Adlington (2003) states, some avant-garde concert music of the second half of the twentieth century "can no longer be said to be passing, or unfolding, or flowing by; it is not leading towards anything, driving onwards, or following a path" (p. 316). Consequently, Adlington claims "the inadequacy of the motional framework for dealing with certain kinds of modern music, which tend to get lumbered with the epithet 'static'" (p. 300).

In fact, the concept of motion that seems adequate to account for the listener's perception of groups of sound events in western tradition music up to, more-or-less, the 1950s fails as a metaphor for describing the sonic elements that seem to reside motionlessly inside more recent music. But, contrary to what Adlington argues, this motion metaphor and the consequent interpretations of its perception are highly pertinent in order to define, through their absence, one of the main and immediately perceived characteristics of such new aesthetic approaches—that this music is *static* because onward motion and its dominance in the listener's perception is the main, thoroughly avoided feature.

As has been seen, the perception of motion in music derives from how specific elements are treated through the temporal scale of short-term memory—the memory process that deals also with the perception of physical motion (Snyder, 2001, p. 47; see chapter five). Because of the limits of this short-term memory, it is essential a segmented perception of temporal

continuum—from the listener's perspective—and, not less important, a segmented arrangement of the things one wishes to present through that continuum—from the composer's perspective. As Bob Snyder (2001) emphasises, "if it were not for the limits of short-term memory, there would be no need for any boundaries or any kind of 'units' at all" (p. 60). The main and simplified idea is that short-term memory perceives the elements that fit into it, which are then continuously stored in long-term memory, freeing short-term memory for new apprehensions (pp. 47-58). Thus, the totality of the perceived segmented portions, the whole of the movement, is only understood in long-term memory but it is short-term memory that actually perceives motion as such.

In musical stasis, what seems to be at stake is that the sound elements are presented in a way that eludes, through several specific techniques, the scope of short-term memory and, with it, the very memorability of the whole musical piece (Fig. 67)—what Snyder refers to as a "music on the fringes of, or even beyond, our ability to process information" (p. 234).

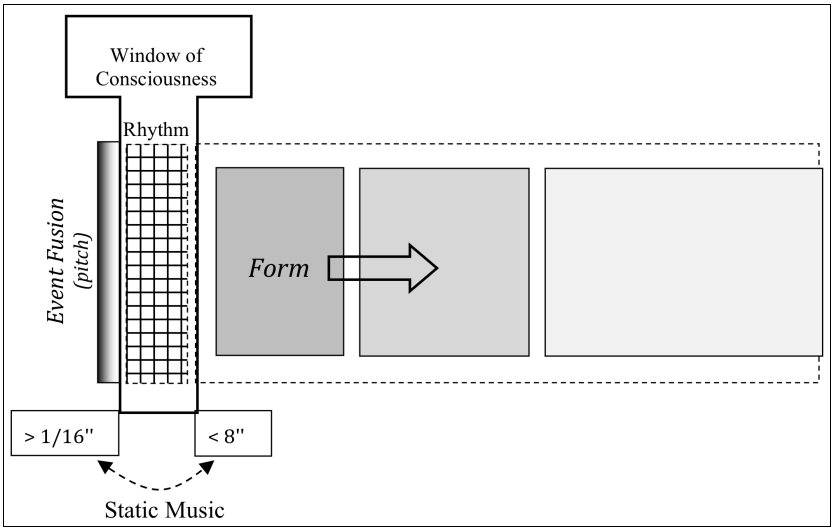


Fig. 67: Static music avoids short-term memory perception (time data in Snyder, 2001, p. 12).

This results in an interesting phenomenon: while hierarchical segmentation of sound groups helps to establish a continuity between elements, linking presently perceived events with previously heard memories or future expectancies, the lack of such segmentation or grouping into segments tends to break temporal discourse into a notion of eternal present. So, segmentation of time permits the continuity of ongoing musical motion, while persistent temporal continuity paradoxically freezes movement (Fig. 68).

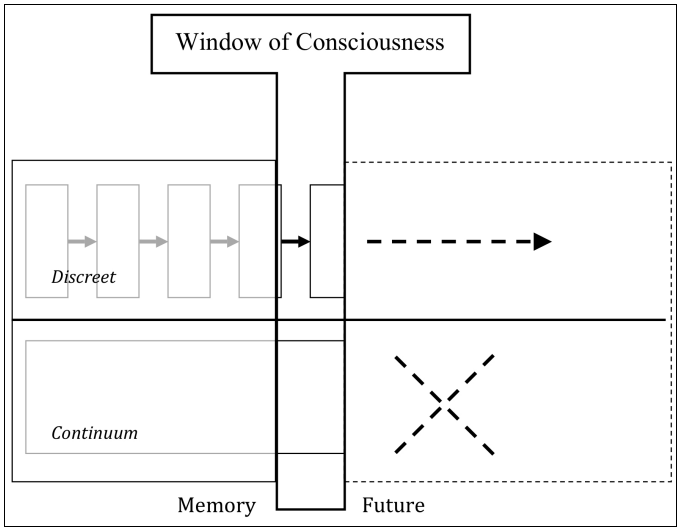


Fig. 68: Discreetness (above) creates prediction of movement; Continuum (below) limits the perception of movement.

Snyder explains: "Removing memory and anticipation from the situation leaves us with nothing but the present to focus on" (p. 235).

iv. *no causality*

In his text *History of Experimental Music in the United States*, John Cage (1973, pp. 67-75) discusses his aesthetic approaches to music together with composers Christian Wolf, Earle Brown and Morton Feldman. Their main goal was to create a music in which the relations between sounds would not be perceived, leaving the listener with only plain sound to focus on. Cage explaines: "Where people had felt the necessity to stick sounds together to make a continuity, we felt the necessity to get rid of the glue so that sounds would be themselves" (p. 71).

The 'glue' metaphor that Cage alludes to is the principle of causality—i.e., the idea of an invisible thread logically joining distinct sonic events. Causality links musical elements and makes it possible for them to transport more than their mere acoustic identity; by linearly joining sounds in the act of listening, it actually builds the perception of musical motion (Fig. 3). In sum, "earlier musical sounds," Vincent Meelberg (2006) explains, "influence the way the listener assesses future musical sounds, and new musical sounds can lead to a revision of the manner in which s/he views earlier musical sounds" (p. 17). So, without causality the metaphorical perception of motion is erased from music, since, to conceive motion, one needs to perceive a continuous identity in a changing process: an object traveling

in time. The *glue* that joins sonic elements in music of the western tradition guarantees that the whole sonic totality is perceived as one identity that moves and changes in directed motion from its beginning until its end. Hence, the absence of this *glue* blocks directed motion. As Snyder (2001) says, "in a sequence without any recognisable directed pattern of motion, any element can be the last one—we have no basis for predicting" (p. 61).

When sounds are not causally linked the listener cannot build a sonic moving body out of the presented occurrences. No specific design is inferred and sound becomes a *vehicle for nothing*. Meelberg emphasises:

> If a listener has no expectations with regard to the music s/he is hearing, then this means that the music does not represent musical events and musical phrases. No tension is created by this music, and thus no possibilities for representations of closure are available. This kind of music is in other words not a representation of a temporal development. (Meelberg, 2006, p. 78)

One concludes that: (1) non-teleological music cannot represent musical events because its sound elements fail to be joined into musical events; (2) a music with no expectations regarding its unfolding fails to create tension contrasts, nothing resolves because there is nothing to resolve; (3) the two previous points imply musical stasis; and, extrapolating, (4) if a music doesn't develop through time it misses the essence of narrative and any possible analogy with it. As Meelberg (2006) concludes, "not all music can be considered to represent a musical development, and therefore not all music is narrative" (p. 75).

v. *continuum as stasis*

In his treatise on the environmental sound of the living world, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Murray Schafer (1994) considers how the rhythm paradigms have changed from galloping horses to the sports car's drones (pp. 112-113). Schafer refers to how these radically different sonic environments may mould the creativity of the composers subjected to them. He quotes Karlheinz Stockhausen explaining his constant exposure, during a certain period of his life, to the long and harmonically rich drone of propeller plane engines and its influence in his immediately following works (p. 113).[4] The idea that rhythm can encompass such notions as long sounds

4 Stockhausen refers specifically to his composition *Carré* (1959/60), a serial piece for four orchestras that includes musical 'moments' purposely exceeding the limits of short-term memory (Schafer, 1994, p. 113).

or silences, going way beyond short-term memory span can thus be conceived, as previously stated, as directly related to the very change of the sonic nature of modern societies. As quoted by Allen Weiss (2008), John Cage too had perceived that "rhythm is not at all something periodic and repetitive" (p. 58). Weiss explains:

> rhythm need not be bound to metrics (i.e., to a sense of temporal regularity) […]. Rhythm, in its broadest definition, is the temporal relation between any two sound events whatsoever (no matter how many other sounds, or how much silence, or how much time or space, intervenes between the two). (Weiss, 2008, p. 58)

The main element in such discussion is the discreteness that traditional rhythm imposes over the continuum of time. Regular metrics with its simple subdivisions have ruled western music system basically since its first notational attempts. In fact, discreteness has also imposed itself on the traditional concept of pitch. As Ferruccio Busoni states, twelve equivalent degrees has "so thoroughly schooled our ears that we are no longer capable of hearing except through this impure medium. Yet nature created an infinite gradation—Infinite!" (cited in Weiss, 2008, pp. 10-11). In both cases—durations or pitches—it is discreteness that permits the separation of sonic elements in the act of perception. The lack of such separation transforms all articulation into continuum, sabotaging, to use Bob Snyder's (2001) term, the process by which memory could hold on to what is perceived (p. 235). So, just as total discreteness—no causality—which, as seen, avoids any linkage between sound elements, leaving the listener with the unrelated individuality of each sound and no temporal development to follow, total continuum too—the avoidance of clear articulation—impedes the segmentation of sonic groups, blocking any notion of movement, any framing of time, and any structure to memorise.

Thus, the music that uses long sonic continua—drones—freezes the perception of time. Or, shall one say, time is perceived but not in the sound. Time passes, but the sound seems to have nothing to do with it. Recalling Charlie D. Broad's example (see chapter five), just like the second hand of a clock seems to carry time with it while one sees it moving, and the hour hand seems to stay still letting time pass by, sonic articulation seems to transport temporal development while sonic continuum turns away from temporality. And Just like when one stops a moving image one becomes more aware of the characteristics of the object that was in motion, so too, when sound events become static, one tends to concentrate on the very qualities of that sound as opposed to the moving design it could have been doing. As Snyder

explains, "this lack of memorability also tends to emphasise the qualities of individual acoustical events, rather than their relationship to each other as parts of larger patterns" (p. 66). This sound quality in all its small irregularities might in fact be where some residue of motion can still be perceived, whether as specific characteristics of timbre or as part of micro-structural compositional details (Fig. 69).[5]

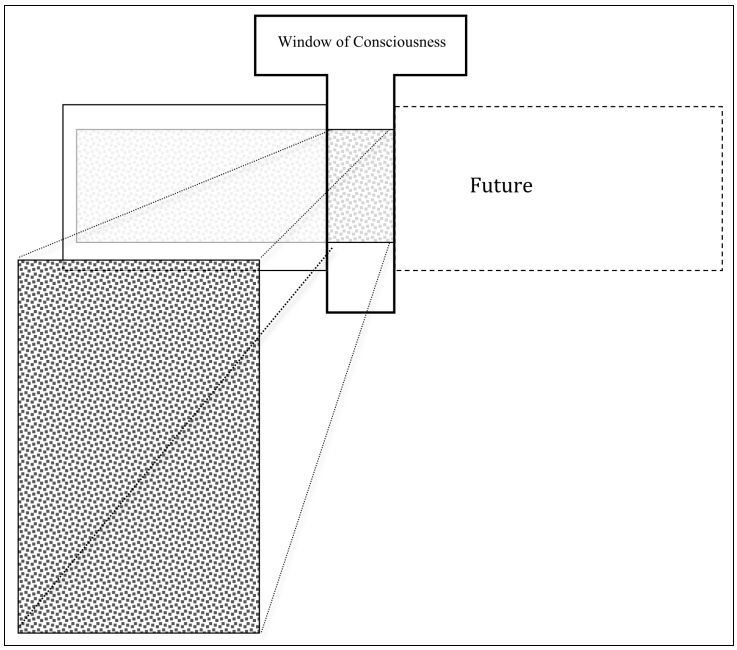


Fig. 69: Without prediction of movement, perceptual present is enhanced.

vi. ***no harmony, no melody, no rhythm***

Five More String Quartets is a piece by Phil Niblock that exemplifies the use of drone as a major element of composition. Composed in 1993, it is an electroacoustic work in the sense that, although composed for, and performed by a string quartet,[6] it consists of the over-layering, with multi-track technology, of five different scores recorded in studio and then performed through a multitrack reader or, in a two channel version, through a normal CD player (Straebel, 2008, pp. 239-241). Consisting exclusively of long notes, separated in pitch by not more than a major second (although at different octaves), played continuously on bowed instruments, which need no pause, the result is a 25 minutes long drone of what seems at first a constant sound. As in almost every other piece by Niblock, whose work seems to be

5 Such concentration in the micro structure of music is probably what György Ligeti refers to when affirming that "such music need be examined under an 'auditory microscope'" (cited in Weiss, 2008, p. 75).

6 *Five More String Quartets* was composed for Soldier String Quartet who also performed the piece.

as indivisible as each of his pieces, *Five More String Quartets* should be listened to extremely loud in order to enhance the harmonics caused by microtonal differences between the instruments.

In the specific case of this piece, there is a global scheme that, in Volker Straebel's (2008) words, "assures coherence in musical form" (p. 230). Through it, Niblock designs what could be understood as a sonic 'path'—a progression of specific frequencies from one designated point to another. However, everything happens so slowly that the listener tends to focus merely on oscillations and harmonics that appear as a result of each momentary combination of frequencies.

Niblock strongly seeks to realise *real* acoustical phenomena, avoiding any post-production cleaning by means of technology. Such concern can be understood in his description of the piece:

> Each session was recorded in real time. Each instrument was miked separately, and in the mix assigned to the left or right channel, to obtain maximum separation of the microtonal intervals. The 24 track tape was mixed to stereo, again with no processing (reverb, delay, etc.). The music is the purest, unadulterated sound of the instruments that we could achieve. The resultant harmonic changes come from the microtonal intervals of the score, not from the recording process. (cited in Straebel, 2008, p. 230)

All illusory effects of music are voluntarily stripped out. The listener has to deal with pure reality of sound through its intense presence and through total absence of compositional adornments—in Niblock's (2013) own words: "No harmony, no melody, no rhythm, no bullshit" (p. 202).

Niblock's music, as typically all drone music, invites the listener to dive into sound in a temporal acoustic experience. One has the impression that Niblock creates one sound for each piece. And that sound is simply shown to the listener through a magnifying lens of time and amplitude. It is in that magnifying lens that the listening happens, not as a representation of the thing but as the thing in itself.[7]

Niblock's pieces are usually not shorter than 25 minutes and presented in concerts lasting never less than 90 minutes. He stresses that "it takes quite a long time to get sort of inside the sound patterns, […] it really takes a while to get into the zen activity of the music"

7 Frederic Jameson remarks that Jean-François Lyotard's "narrative crisis" is in fact a "crisis of representation" (in Lyotard, 1984, p. viii). From such perspective, musical works that avoid artificial constructs of composition—Niblock's pieces being an example—may be seen as a sonic embodiment of Lyotard's *post-modern condition.*

(Blažević, Kozina & Lušić, 2010). In his concerts, the music is frequently accompanied by the projection of films showing people working, shot by Niblock himself in the 1970s. These films last longer than the presented music and have absolutely no synchronic relation. The absence of motion in an ongoing sound mass, and the everlasting films of human handwork, without any thread of relation besides an author and the fact that they are both (very) present, leaves the spectator disarmed in his own act of perception. If during such long durations boredom comes into mind, John Cage's elementary sentence—"boredom plus attention = becoming interested" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 223)—seems one pertinent response; Walter Benjamin's (1963) claim that "boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience" (p. 86), may be another.

vii. *no expression*

In his book *Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin (1988) refers to a mystical trail of song, linking all humanity throughout the world and throughout time, and having started with what he calls the "opening stanza of the World Song: 'I AM!'" (p. 282). This organic, linguistic, and self-centred expression can very well be the whole paradigm of western music until recent radically non-narrative aesthetics. Reflecting upon Chatwin's words, Iain Chambers states:

> The Nietzschean vision of a world, that is, a world of our making, dependent on our activity and language for its existence, is here laid out as the human adventure in which the movements of peoples, and the rigours and rhythms of bodies, limbs and voice, set patterns, the design, the nomination, of the land, the country, our home. (Chambers, 1994, p. 53)

In Chambers's words, one understands that an idea of organic rhythm, internal and gestural, inherently human and animalistic, is constant in musical expression; and that every human utterance belongs to this pulsation or is moulded by it. Through this concept one can perceive the exalting of an ideal where music would be an extension of the human organic instinct: an expression of her/his identity and feelings.

Heinrich Schenker's theories also extolled such paradigm, defending an ideal of a powerful human nature against the inexpressiveness of inorganic forms. He states that art "which is developed into an organic whole through the connection of background and foreground, is so filled with genuine life [that] it cannot tolerate the encroachment upon itself by non-living, mechanistic systems of immature musical intellectuals" (cited in Fink, 1999,

p. 106). One can perceive through Schenker's tone that his ideal of musical organicism was already threatened by new processes that tended to systematise composition in increasingly abstract, humanly distanced procedures.

In fact almost all twentieth-century musical vanguard movements, from serialism to futurism, from American experimentalism to minimalism, are based on processes that, intentionally or not, limit the possibilities of direct human expression, distancing music's own sonic expressivity from the human ego. These new currents propose, more than a new music, a new model of creating and listening to it. Ezra Pound's claim, in an apparent complete disagreement with Chatwin's ideal, that "music is the art most fit to express the fine quality of machines" (cited in Schafer, 1994, p. 110) seems to be one of such proposals; Eero Tarasti's (1994) metaphorical description of repetitive minimal music as "a machine that stops time" (p. 284) is, obviously, another.

Murray Schafer (1994) describes this shifting of paradigm (Fig. 70):

> As the tempo of human activities increases, the rhythms of foot and hand are mechanised, first into the rough 'grainy' concatenation of the Industrial Revolution's first tools, and finally into the smooth pitch contours of modern electronics. The resolving power of the senses makes it possible to turn some of the nervous agitation of the soundscape into drones which, being less turbulent to the ears, tend to have a pacifying quality. (Schafer, 1994, p. 228)

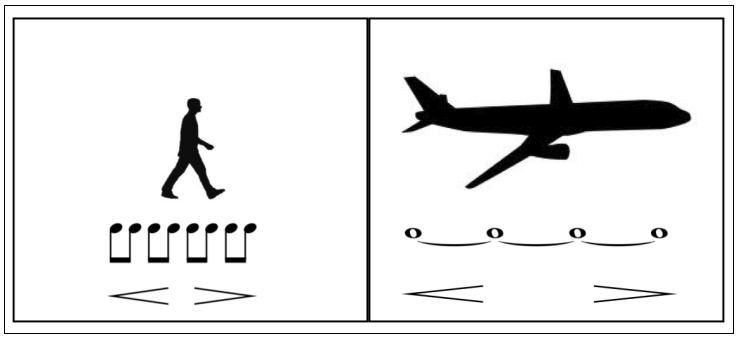


Fig. 70: From discrete pulse to motorised continuum, a shift in western society's sonic environment.

Schafer, thus, posits that the change in western contemporary soundscape, from organic human activity to the mechanical rumours of engines, may have influenced one's way of creating and listening to music. Such changes are demonstrated through Schafer's own sound recordings of non-urban environments. As he explains:

> The loudest of the continuous sounds was that of aircraft, and charts we made during the recording show that this sound was present over the rural setting for an average of 32 minutes per hour during the day and evening. (Schafer, 1994, p. 230)

From this perspective, one may postulate that the decline of narrativising structures in recent music can be attributed not only to the postmodernist decline of *history* and *ego*,[8] but also to the very transformation of the sonic paradigm, that in some 'Ballardian' way seems to have become progressively mechanised—a morphing of organic motion into motorised continuum.

viii. *no motion, no illusion*

When Robert Fink (1999) states that "all that is left in the postmodern era is the simulacrum, the image that represents only itself, the surface that floats free of any reality 'underneath'" (p. 121), he is in fact pointing out to a fundamental feature of non-narrativity. Narratives present things out of place, illusions carried through different media inviting the perceiver to see not the medium itself but the message—the thing that is not there. A narrative transforms the medium into an illusion—a representation. On the contrary, non-narrative music, avoiding any depth, shows itself in its entirety—the perception is the *thing*. It is motionless because motion was always an illusion, an artefact—their was never motion to begin with.

For Fink, an anti-illusory aesthetic can be found already in modernist art, and becoming a prevailing feature in postmodernism (p. 121). He refers to the art critic Clement Greenberg and his idea that "the truly modern feature of abstract expressionist painting was not its elimination of representation, but its stark, anti-illusionistic insistence on the two-dimensional picture plane" (p. 120). The idea is that the painting, when being no vehicle for anything else, simply shows itself. This means demonstrating its materiality—the canvas, the paint, the brush stroke—voided of any artificiality. This anti-illusory goal can also be perceived in John Cage's words referring to Robert Rauschenberg's paintings. In fact, Cage states something similar to Greenberg's conception: "This is not a composition. It is a place where things are" (p. 99). Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) points as well to painting as an example of the postmodernist artistic tendency towards bluntly non-representative works. Relating these aesthetic developments to new theatre, he claims that the post-dramatic concept of "juxtaposed 'language surfaces' in the place of dialogue"—where characters simply speak,

8 In his book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard (1984), announces as a condition of postmodernism the end of the grand narratives.

not entering in dialogue with each other and in fact seeming not to submerge into their theatrical function—"corresponds to the turning point of painting in modernity when instead of the illusion of three-dimensional space, what is being 'staged' is the picture's plane-ness, its two-dimensional reality, and the reality of colour as an autonomous quality" (p. 18).

In any case, all these artistic productions seem to be the aesthetic manifestation of what Frederic Jameson calls, in his introduction to Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, the "crisis of representation" (p. viii). Hence, music also mirrors this *crisis of representation*. As a temporal art that cannot represent beyond itself, it inflects not on *what* it represents but on *how* it represents: its motion, its temporal development, in a word, its narrative. Melody, directed motion, clearly defined rhythm, temporal manipulation, all such elements are, as has been seen, illusory. Musical sounds have no real discourse. They do not develop through time, they do not constitute narratives. They, at best, mimic all these elements and through this mimesis project an illusion—a representation—of another designed reality. A reality that, from the beginning of the twentieth-century, becomes slowly perceived as a wasted truth. "We can no longer believe in the grand meta-narratives of modernism," Lyotard claims (in Beard & Gloag, 2005, p. 106). Hence, non-narrative music delivers itself to the reality of sound per se—as all postmodernist art, it refuses to be artificial.

ix. *no illusion, no author*

In his book, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* Fredric Jameson (1991) considers that anti-illusionistic features of post-modern art purposely frustrate the perceiver's hermeneutical act, as an erasure of the s/he who expresses (pp. 14-16). Jameson compares the work of Vincent Van Gogh with that of Andy Warhol—one representing what he calls the high modernist moment and, the other, the postmodernist. He concludes that the work of Warhol "evidently no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's. Indeed," he states, "I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all" (p. 8). In art, to speak is to induce an illusion. It is to convey in the art object the idea that it is more than what is there, and that through it somebody is speaking to the perceiver. So the anti-illusionistic features of postmodernist art can be said to be also anti-expressive. John Cage, again referring to Rauschenberg, seems to confirm this point when stating that "he is not saying; he is painting" (p. 99).

Such expressive muteness, what Jameson calls "the end of the psychopathologies of […the] ego," or "the waning of affect," reflects another fundamental element in postmodern art:

the erasing of the individual. When art becomes voided of expression it becomes also voided of author—not that s/he is not there or that s/he did not create, s/he simply chose not to appear (Fig. 71).[9]

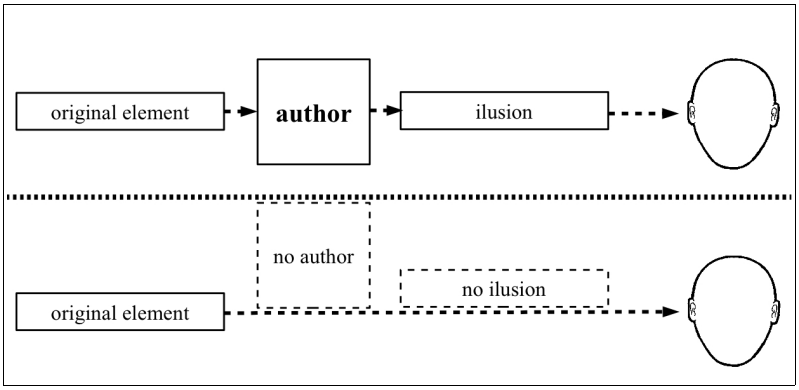


Fig. 71: Absence of illusion implies the absence of the concept of author.

Referring to minimal art and its inexpressive flatness, the critic and journalist Philip Sherburne stated: "One wonders if minimalism represents the ultimate human capacity—choice. The ability to leave the blank spaces blank represents the ultimate negative capacity: the will to withhold" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 326). And, as Roland Barthes (1977) explains in his text *The Death of the Author*, "once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile" (p. 147). In fact, authorship and expression seem intimately linked. And if one disappears when the other is absent, then the function of the perceiver becomes also, consequently, questioned: how to, or why should one, interpret that which is not expressed?

Expressiveness is what the perceiver—the listener, the reader, the spectator—expects from the author. Both concepts reinforce each other. Both concepts are thus mutually inclusive: to refrain from expression is to refrain authorship; to refrain from authorship is to refrain expression. Hence, whether in one order or the other, postmodernism derives from the obliteration of expression and the obliteration of authorship.

9 This can eventually be one of the main goals of static music: to silence the speech of s/he who composes. The composer Radu Malfati, for instance, defends such speechless music, complaining that "almost all the music which merciless surrounds us today has the same underlying structure: neverending gabbiness. What's the difference between MTV music and most of classical avant-garde? They use different material, but they're both intensively talkative" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 63).

x. *listening to stasis*

In his text on listening forms and how the listener positions her/himself in this act, *Seven Metaphors For (Music) Listening: Dramatic,* Joshua Mailman (2012b) explains how Robert Cogan "suggests the importance of choosing features carefully in music analysis based on modelling flux of intensity." Mailman quotes Cogan, "It is important […] to understand which sonic features bear that potential charge of change in each piece's specific context." This *charge of change* that models the *flux of intensity* reflects the idea that music is presented dramatically, where elements are combined in events and perceived as entities subjected to change. In other words, Cogan emphasises how one should always focus on the potential narrativity of a piece of music. Even if a musical piece eliminates all clear perception of change, becoming necessarily non-narrative, the process of listening will still probably be about following whatever is changing. But nothing is really changing in non-narrative music, at least in the motional sense of the term. Things are just not totally still. And it is almost or completely impossible to engender some sense of narrative besides pure time passing—one contemplates instead of understanding.

So when Vincent Meelberg (2006) argues, as has been exposed (see chapter four), that, "in assuming a narrative listening stance, the listener's possibilities to comprehend contemporary music might be enriched" (p. 2), it seems that he is in fact missing the point. Before a music that obliterates temporal development in the ways described throughout this chapter, a narrative listening stance can only be fruitless and discouraging. The same way that it might seem incorrect to listen to a temporally structured (narrative) piece, say a piano sonata, merely perceiving the nuances of timbre throughout the register of the instrument (it can be done, but then several elements of the music's structure would be purposeless); to understand directed and meaningful motion in static music, to narrativise the small nuances of what is being perceived, besides being extremely difficult, is also to misinterpret the concept of such music. Helmut Lachenmann's idea, quoted precisely by Meelberg, seems to be a better approach. Closer to an idea of acceptance of the sonic elements rather than trying to extract from them something they do not intend to convey, he states: "it is only by allowing oneself to experience this 'non-music' that listening becomes genuine perception" (p. 24).

Lachenmann's listening stance proposal resembles Gemma Fiumara's (1990) concept of *legein*. As explained by Mailman (2012b), Fiumara proposes an alternative way to the *logos* of listening. "*Logos* is *grasping, mastering, using*, whereas *legein* is *letting lie together* before using." While *logos* implies an extraction of information and, consequently, a system of

manipulative communication, *legein* proposes an ecological attitude towards listening, where what is perceived cohabits with the perceiver. As Fiumara says, *legein* "aims at coexistence with rather than knowledge of" (cited in Mailman, 2012b). This attitude towards sonic perception immediately presupposes that the object listened to has aesthetic value in itself, whether it has any meaning or not. Hence, such a listening stance will not be troubled by non-narrative music's avoidance of content, it will accommodate it as merely being there—which was its only intention from the beginning.

xi. *dramatising stasis*

In her contribution to the book, *Music and Narrative Since 1900*, Márta Grabócz (2013) states that "because of the recurrent use of the journey of initiation (whether conscious or unconscious) in modern opera, there has emerged a new form of musical and theatrical dramaturgy—an art built on stasis, enumeration, and variation" (p. 104). If stasis, enumeration, and variation is what non-narrative music is all about, then it could be understood by Grabócz's statement that non-narrative music appeared as a result of this new dramatic paradigm—that of "*the rite of initiation*" as opposed to the traditional "*significance and destiny of a hero (or heroine)*" (p. 102). In fact, for Grabócz, this new dramatic archetype, grounded on literature and drama, evolved from modernism to this postmodernist era, becoming "a challenge for twentieth-century music" (p. 108). In other words, a change in literature's dramatic paradigm would have forced itself upon theatrical dramaturgy and music, challenging these arts to conform with it. However, it seems as if Grabócz is approaching the issue from a wrong perspective. It appears more plausible that this new dramatic archetype is in fact culturally engrained in the postmodern society, and that it is the way western society focuses on the passage of time that is actually influencing all arts that deal with time.

Umberto Eco (1989) claims that "the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality" (p. 13); in other words, that the *Zeitgeist* carries with it the tools for interpreting its own creations. And these creations, in all its disparate manifestations, tend to be linked through the common traits of the time. Thus, if one links Grabócz's (2013) remark, that "lamentation and mourning are omnipresent" as affects of the new dramatic paradigm (p. 118), with Heiner Müller's description of his own work, as "a 'landscape beyond death'" (in Lehmann, 2006, p. 27), and with Walter Benjamin claim that "in all mourning there is the deepest inclination to speechlessness, which is infinitely more than the inability or disinclination to communicate" (p. 73), one understands

that static music, like all temporal arts that have tended towards non-narrativity, is not an adaptation towards the spirit of these times, but the very expression of it. Maybe it is the deep sadness that Benjamin refers to that compels all art to be non-communicative. Maybe this is why it is so pertinent to non-alienating artistic thought. And maybe it is language and literature, and consequently drama, now erased from their foundational and structural function in all temporal arts, and not music, that face the biggest *challenges*, to use Grabócz's term, in adapting itself to an increasingly speechless globalised world.

xii. *sung text in static music*

It has been suggested that verbal language carries in its very units a thread of motion (see chapter one). Words can only be understood through this movement—an articulated temporal design of sound—to which a meaning was conventionalised; and sentences, which group these sonic units into other larger units, also have their meaning dependent on the linear perception of a sonic movement—the thread of motion that links all these sounds as one breath of meaning. A verbal speech may refer to a completely static event or object but, even so, it will carry its own movement, its own articulated linear motion. This fact is the central problem of the present thesis: how to articulate an *operatic text* within *static music*—i.e., how to keep the text's understandability and music's non-narrativity within a coherent aesthetic unit, within an opera.

As a preliminary study for the composition of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*, a small piece for soprano, horn, and piano was composed—*Para Soprano, Trompa e Piano* (see volume II for full score). The text to be sung was a group of sentences taken from the opera's *libretto*. Although the major dramatic level of the original text was somewhat lost in such a fragmented excerpt, it remained useful as a case study and could, nevertheless, be understood as a scene within act II.[10] The intention was to test out two different compositional problems: (1) how such different sound sources could mingle into the uniformity of non-narrative music; and (2) how can the soprano voice be at the same time part of this mingled ensemble and a carrier of a sung text.

As with what would then happen in the compositional process of the opera, this small piece was composed in horizontal layers and in clearly delineated separate sections. However, none of the indeterminate processes used in the opera were applied here. Each section, of a

10 The piece remained an autonomous work and, contrary to the piece *Time Flies* (see chapter one), ended up not being integrated in the opera.

total of fourteen, is composed by desynchronising layers of different durations, and in different combinations. Much of the desynchronising processes used either result in symmetric sections or are manipulated to become symmetrical (Fig. 72).

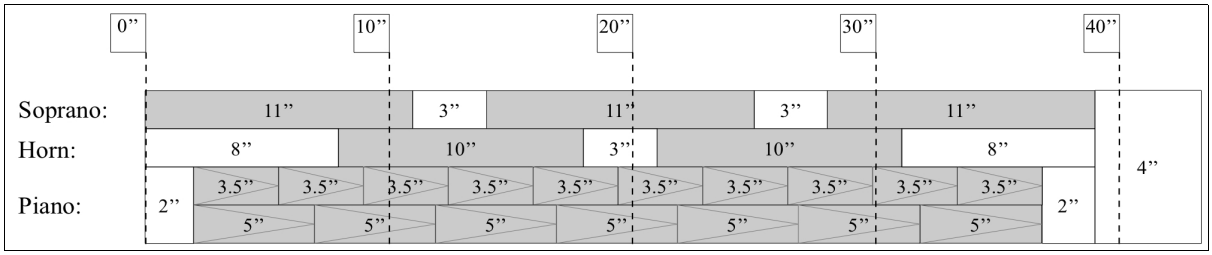


Fig. 72: Example of desynchronising symmetrical layers in section C of Para Soprano, Trompa e Piano (white areas are rests; values are in seconds).

Each sections finishes when its process is concluded. The disparity of durations used in the processes produce sections with very different lengths. All durations involved in these processes go beyond short term memory capacity (Fig. 73).

Sections:		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Total length:		1’20”	0’50”	0’43”	0’26”	0’54”	1’26”	1’32”	0’34”	0’46”	0’46”	0’16”	0’31”	1’10”	0’54”
Soprano	sound:	10”	8”	11”	4”	8”	12”	7”	2”		3.5”	4”		10”	10”
	rest:	1”	1”	3”	2”	1”	11”	7”	4”		1”	2”		1”	1”
Horn	sound:	9”	8”	10”		8”		5”	4”		6”		7”	9”	9”
	rest:	2”	1”	3”		24”		5”	2”		1”		3”	2”	2”
Piano	layer 1			5”		12.5”	12”	11”	6”	15”	3”		3”		4”
	layer 2			3.5”		10”	10”	7”	5”	13”	2”				3”
	layer 3						9”	4”		7”					
	layer 4						4”			6”					

Fig. 73: Table of different durations used for desynchronising processes in each section of the piece.

Throughout the piece, soprano and horn are treated equally—each duration is fulfilled as a complete breath. However, the piano part can be either a single layer of durations, articulating with the remaining instruments, or itself the result of different desynchronising layers. In any case, because of the piano’s sonic characteristics, specifically of its sound envelope, the durations must be understood as the temporal space between the articulation of each note or chord, and not as sound duration proper (Fig. 74).

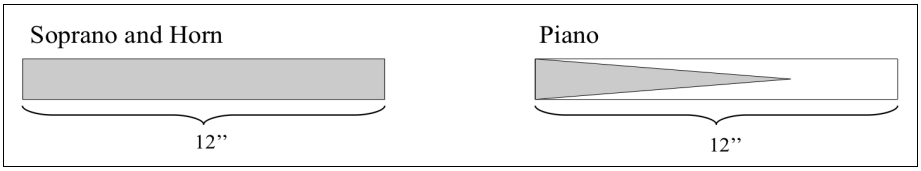


Fig. 74: Different concepts of duration used in the piece result from different sound envelopes produced by the instruments.

Pitches are fixed at specific octaves and each section deals with a limited group of these pitches. No melodic gesture is ever made, meaning that each breath holds only one pitch. In the piano, the combination of smaller durations in some sections may be understood as slightly melodic, because these durations fit within short-term memory. However, the reappearance of each pitch at the end of these durations creates a repetitive character that blocks any feeling of melodic intentionality. The pitches are chosen according to desired harmonic combinations. The overall piece may be perceived as a very slow progression, from section to section, from one desynchronising process to another, and from one harmonic region to another (Fig. 75).

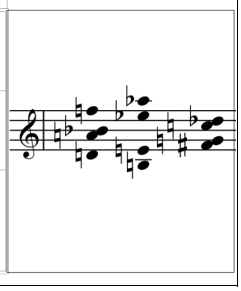
Sections:		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	
Soprano	notes:	*A Bb*	*A Bb*	*A*	*A*	*A Bb*	*A Bb*	*Eb F*	*Ab*		*F*	*Ab*		*A G*	*A Bb G*	
Horn	notes:	*A Bb*	*A Bb*	*Bb*		*A*		*E*	*B*		*B D*		*D*	*A G*	*A Bb G*	
Piano	notes:			*Ab E*		*Ab*	*A Ab B Bb*	*A Ab Bb*	*E Eb*	*Ab B E Eb*	*C Db F# G*		*C Db*		*A Bb*	

Fig. 75: Table of pitch material for each section (notes always keep defined octave).

Up until this point the voice is treated as any other sound sustaining instrument. So the piece could eventually be for, say, two horns and piano, where the sustaining sounds would be perceived as long strokes of sound over the sparse attacks of piano notes—a fully non-narrative soundscape. It is the articulation of the text that changes this stable sonic atmosphere.

With the exception of two instrumental interludes, each section deals with the articulation of one small sentence. In order to conform with the symmetry of some sections, the text is manipulated with the intention of producing other complementary mirror-like

sentences. These sentences are split in small units, which can be either single words or small unitary groups of words (Fig. 76).

Text arrangement for *Para Soprano, Trompa e Piano*:[11]

Section:	Sentence:
A	*pre**ci**so / de **ti** / **mi**nha / me**ta**de / [**mi**nha / de **ti** / pre**ci**so]*
B	*tão fe**liz** / nos teus **bra**ços / [nos teus **bra**ços / tão fe**liz**]*
C	***eu** / can**ta**va / para **ti***
D	***meu** / que**ri**do / am**or** / [**meu**]*
E	***lem**bra-te / de **mim** / [de **ti** / **lem**bro-me]*
F	*pe**ga**va-me / com as minha **mãos** / e **da**va-te-me*
G	*tro**car** / **tu**do / por **ti** / [por **mim** / **tu**do / tro**car**]*
H	***va**mos / vi**ver** / para **sem**pre / ou mor**rer** / a**go**ra / **jun**tos*
I	
J	***nie**mand / **muss** / a**lein** / **blei**ben / [**blei**ben / a**lein** / **muss** / **nie**mand]*
K	*não me **dei**xes / mor**rer** / [não me **dei**xes]*
L	
M	*inven**tá**mos / o a**mor** / para o**por** / ao hor**ror** / [o a**mor** / inven**tá**mos]*
N	*love loves to love [loves to love loves to...]*

Fig. 76: Sentences for each section: slash indicate split points; bold and underlined indicates accented syllable.

The text is then articulated in three very simple ways (Fig. 77):

(1) syllables are articulated by quarter-notes, with accented syllable extending the remaining duration;

(2) syllables are articulated by eighth-notes, with accented syllable extending the remaining duration;

Note: within a group of words the accented syllable is chosen according to the most relevant word.

(3) syllables are all articulated in quarter-notes throughout the whole section.

11 The sentences are: “I need you, my half” – mobile phone message; “So happy in your arms” – mobile phone message; “I would sing for you” – António Lobo Antunes; “My dear love” – personal writing; “remember me” – mobile phone message; “I would pick myself with my hands and give to you myself” – António Lobo Antunes; “Give all up for you” – Maria Teresa Horta; “Let’s live forever or die now together” – personal writing; “Nobody should stay alone” – Dietmar Dath; “Don’t let me die” – Luís Pacheco; “We invented love to oppose to horror” – personal writing; “Love loves to love” – James Joyce. (trans. by author).

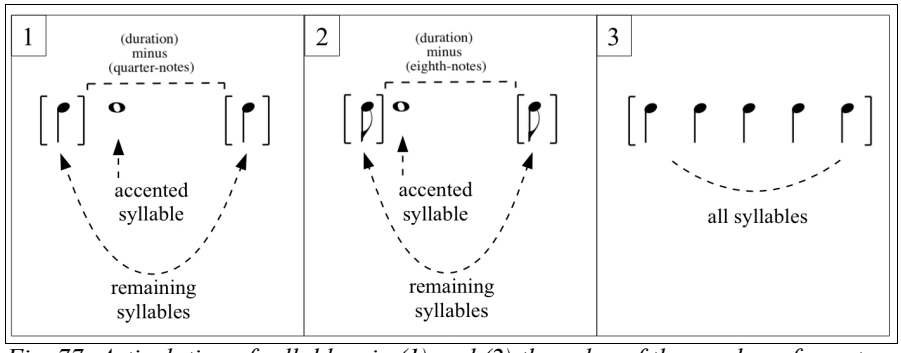


Fig. 77: Articulation of syllables: in (1) and (2) the value of the number of quarter- or eighth-notes is subtracted from the values of the accented syllable and its defined duration; in (3) the articulation is purely syllabic.

The articulation of a word or a group of words within a defined duration has no interference with its pitch. This means that each sung breath articulates text without producing melody. Except for the extended accented syllables, the articulation of the text happens within the short-term memory time span. This simultaneously causes the text to be understood and induces some motion to the sung part. Nevertheless the extended notes and specially the continued pitch maintain the music fairly static (Fig. 78).

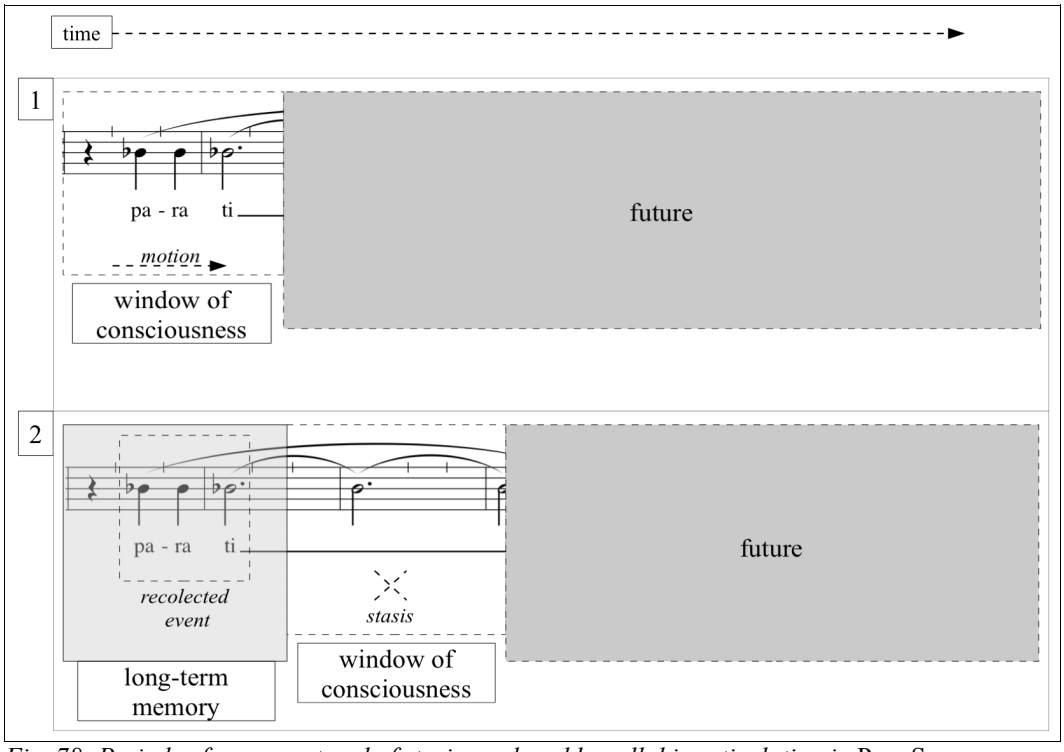


Fig. 78: Periods of movement and of stasis produced by syllabic articulation in Para Soprano, Trompa e Piano (excerpt from Section C).

The resulting *quasi stasis* of the sung part can be attributed to the use of the basic techniques for musical stasis described in this chapter:

(1) repetition—where rhythmic articulation is reduced to a redundant time unit;
(2) continuum—where both rhythm, in accented syllables, and pitch, as a fixed singled out note, extend beyond short-term memory.
(3) no expression—where the processes for the two previous points are realised within strict aesthetic goals that have nothing to do with expressing feelings or thoughts.

All these techniques give the piece a static presence where sound layers create specific ambiences but seem *not to go anywhere*. However, it must be stressed that the use of understandable text within non-narrative music will inevitably add to the otherwise non-hierarchical musical piece a second layer above the music's whole sonic field—the layer of meaning. The musical voice, or voices, that delivers this text will inevitably have a soloist function in the piece—i.e., even if its sound somewhat dissolves within the non-narrative whole, the singing voice gains a semantic role within its quasi static articulation.

It was with this in mind that the vocal parts of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* were conceived, assuming that over the non-narrative plainness of each scene, a layer of meaning and action would still be present. But, within the theatrical play, the characters have in fact soloist roles. This autonomy happens not because these characters are heroes within a drama conceived to show their tragic paths—the libretto was itself strictly conceived to avoid such dramatic sense (see chapter one)—but because verbal language creates, also in theatre, a layer of meaning above the play's timeline. Hence, the preponderance of sung musical parts ends up being consistent with their dramatic function. What in the end the piece for soprano, horn, and piano reveals is (1) that static music may have some thin threads of movement and still remain non-narrative; and (2) that within a non-narrative structure it is possible to have a layer of meaning, of some tenuous ongoing activity.

chapter seven: Non-Narrative Music

"um silêncio a somar-se ao silêncio"[1]

i. *intro*

Seymour Chatman (1981b) points out a dichotomy between descriptive and narrative discourse. He states that both exist in literary narrative with specific functions. Just like in the second movement of Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 57 (see chapter six), descriptive discourse would arrest time, inviting "aesthetic contemplation" before proceeding to the purely narrative discourse (pp. 124-126). Following this idea, Eero Tarasti (1994) and Edward Pearsall (2006) propose a terminology to designate the musical equivalent to these two literary facets of *descriptive* and *narrative* discourse. One has seen how musical discourse is inseparable from its content. In music, one cannot speak of different types of discourse, rather of music that is discursive or music that is non-discursive. Hence, Tarasti refers to the musical "modalities of 'doing' (discursive) and 'being' (non-dicursive)" (described in Pearsall, 2006, p. 58), while Pearsall prefers to consider non-discursive music as "silent" and discursive music as simply "discursive" (p. 42). Throughout this dissertation, for reasons that have slowly been unveiled (see chapter four), the terms *narrative* and *non-narrative* music have been preferred.

It has been pointed out that the *doing* or the *discursive* music of Tarasti and Pearsall—what has here been named as *narrative* music—is involved with action and motion. The main point seems to be that when acting upon time, when wishing to express her/himself through time, the composer needs to make that temporality perceivable. This means projecting sound in such a way that it is felt as changing and moving, hence, positioning occurrences within the brackets of the perceptual present. Through this illusion of movement, applied to all the commonly considered fundamental elements of music—time, pitch, intensity, density—designs of tension and rest become possible. The composer should then conceive a dramatic plot of sound events that will frame her/his work into a an expressive unit of temporal development, i.e., a *narrative*. Through this concept, any small musical phrase, melodically or harmonically speaking, has already such a design, since it is already *doing* or *discursive* or *narrative* in its essence.

1 [A silence adding itself to silence. (trans. by author)]

Tarasti's 'being' music[2]—the *non-narrative* music—is involved with stasis. Rejecting motion, or the musical means by which the illusion of motion is conceived, such music cannot create tension or rest in a clear contrasting way. To be sure, these states can in fact occur in non-narrative music, but the transition between them is either so long and only very slowly perceivable, or too abrupt for the listener to establish causal relations between them—i.e., to consider such transitions as a movement from one point to another, instead of two disparate occurrences that happened to succeed each other. In such dynamic flatness, the composer is no longer interested in conceiving a specific dramatic plot—an expressive unit to be interpreted by the listener. S/he is no longer an ego who transmits some personal belief or state of mind to the listener. To use Michael Pisaro's definition, the composer becomes merely "somebody who changes the sonic situation" (Artist House Music, 2012), simply suggesting *an aesthetic contemplation instead of inducing a narrative following*.

When Chatman speaks of descriptive and narrative discourses, it becomes evident that verbal language always flows in discursive form, even in static descriptions. Nevertheless, music, as is implied in Pearsall's above description, is either *discursive* or *non-discursive*. Pearsall (2006), enhancing the analogy with Chatman's active/*narrative* and static/*descriptive* dichotomy, stresses that "discursive events in music are those that manifest themselves primarily as functional or purposeful transactions, whereas non-discursive events are those whose aesthetic impression is their most prominent feature" (p. 44). Thus, one concludes that, since it doesn't represent beyond itself (Scruton, 1999, 118-139), a musical discourse, because of the inescapable motion of what is discursive, will inevitably represent some kind of sonic movement. Hence, for music to evoke total stillness, it will have to eliminate discourse and its implicit temporality. It is clear that such approach in referential systems like verbal language would destroy its foundations and existence. Because music is not referential, it seems to have survived this radical shift, although not without scars. After all, as Vincent Meelberg (2006) remarks, "by problematising time, one automatically problematises music itself" (p. 75).

This chapter scrolls through several disparate forms of non-narrative music, finding what in their specific compositional techniques blocks the narrative impulse of the listener. It also proposes what this aesthetic means in terms of contemporary art production, why the negative connotation implied in the term '*non*-narrative' is so pertinent to describe its most essential features, and how the listener should position her/himself towards this artistic *will to*

2 Pearsall's designation—silent music—is avoided here because, despite its interesting connotations with the idea of the composer's muteness and the more obvious relations with John Cage's (1973) use of the word *silence*, the concept in music simply seems too paradoxical for a broad academical use.

withhold (Philip Sherburne in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 326). Concluding this chapater, one will see how the traditionally melodic articulation of text can be blocked through non-narrative compositional techniques, hence, turning the vocal parts of the opera created for the present thesis into a quasi static sonic perception.

ii. *processual music*

When Steve Reich (2002) describes his compositional system as process music, and when he states that "once [such] a process is set up and loaded it runs by itself" (p. 34), a mechanical analogy becomes evident. Just like in physical machines, the process is understood as humanly conceived, but its motion is perceived as autonomous. As Joshua Mailman (2013) stresses, "where authorship cannot be assigned to events within the time frame of the piece of music, junctures of volition have to be located outside, before its process starts (or after it ends)" (p. 137). In fact, in process music all work must be finished before the appearance of the first note in the score—as if, instead of composing a musical work, the composer would design a machine that produces the work once conceived (Fig. 79).

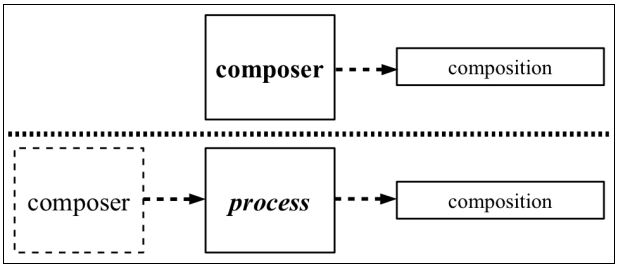


Fig. 79: How process music implies a distance between composer and composition.

It should be emphasised that, although process music is usually associated to american minimalism, serial music procedures, especially integral serialism from the 1950s, are in themselves, strictly speaking, also processual music—several parameters are previously defined and severely restricted by the characteristics of the series and their rules of use. And, again, once the primary work for preparing musical material is finished, serial music may also seem to write itself almost mechanically. In this sense, serial music can be said to be the precursor of musical minimalism. As Wim Mertens (1983) remarked at the beginning of the 1980s, "the real importance of repetitive music lies in the way in which it represents the most recent stage in the continuing evolution of music since Schoenberg" (p. 87).

Karlheinz Stockhausen's text from 1959, *Elektronische und Instrumentale*, emphasises this link between integral serialism and process music. In it, Stockhausen refers to the importance of

> the first experiments with computers […], in that they concentrate composition exclusively on the planning of a work and wish to leave the working out of the realisation, including the automatic production of a structural pattern, to the machines" (Stockhausen in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 377).

These *compositional automatons*, as Stockhausen calls them, would be strictly scored compositions predetermined by processual procedures, where the composer "would be much less concerned with determining the axioms that define the desired results than with determining the axioms of those structures that are *not* desirable" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 377)—a procedure that differs from minimal processual music only in what the composers consider as *not desirable*.

Mailman's search for *junctures of volition* in process music is driven by the will to find some kind of narrative residue that could permit such an analytical approach. However, his quest seems unfruitful because, even when the presence of the author can be sensed outside the music's structure, the mechanical unfolding of the process, whether through its cyclic perpetual motion, as in minimal music, whether through its disjunct linking of abstract atomistic units of music, as in integral serialism, will never stimulate any narrative impulse in the perceiver. One recalls Barbara Czarniawska's (1998) literary reference to *lists* and *tables* which, as she states, "differ from narrative in that they present items of information in a disjointed, abstracted way," concluding that, "to memorise a list or a table, one needs a mnemonic device to make up for the lack of connections" (p. 8). Inorganic elements are in fact averse to narrative construction. The musical shift from an organic expressiveness to a mechanical presentation seems therefore to eradicate the perception of directed causal motion and, with it, any notion of narrative transmission.

iii. *indeterminate music*

In a text from 1958—*Sound, Word, Synthesis*—the french composer Pierre Boulez (1986) refers to how, in integral serial music, the act of listening became an irreversible flux of attention because of the absence of formal 'markers' that otherwise would permit the

circumscribing of meaningful passed events into memory. He stated: "A composition is no longer a consciously directed construction moving from a 'beginning' to an 'end' and passing from one to another" (p. 178). For him, it was this elasticity in the process of listening, the fact that the retained musical work no longer seemed directed and concrete in memory, that somehow was incompatible with the fixed and rigid score of traditional western music. Boulez used *chance* procedures from this perspective: an act of coherence towards how the piece is perceived—the composer should leave formal sections of her/his work opened for different possible temporal outcomes. This way, the work itself becomes as elastic as the process of listening to it (Fig. 80). Through the score's indeterminate character, the piece leaves different possibilities for the performer to decide how to continue at specific moments —in Henri Pousseur's words, "a *field of possibilities*, an explicit invitation to exercise choice" (cited in Eco, 1989, p. 1).

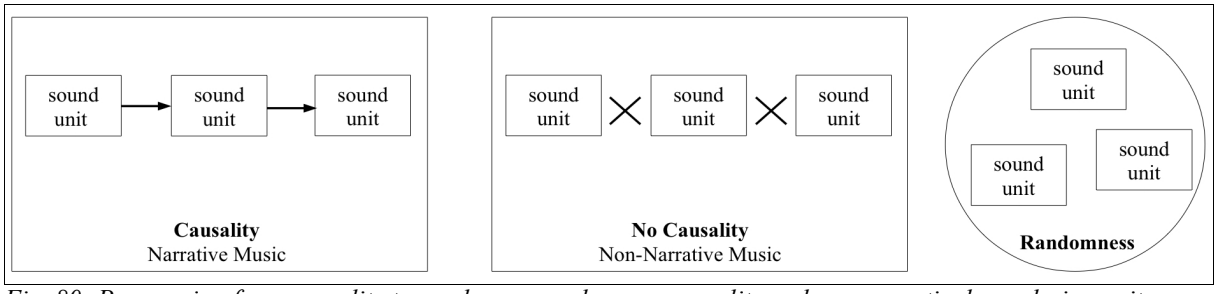


Fig. 80: Progression from causality to randomness; where no causality makes any particular ordering quite unnecessary.

It is important to understand that indeterminacy in music doesn't, by itself, mean that the piece becomes non-discursive. A musical piece is felt to be non-discursive either when the relations between elements fail to be established or when the discourse's temporal frame is overcome. Discourse, like motion, requires causality in perceptual present: (1) a twenty word discursive sentence, read slowly enough to last for twenty hours, will not be discursive due to lack of adequate temporality; (2) twenty unrelated words, read in normal discursive time, will not form a discourse because of the absence of adequate relations. So, in the European vanguard of the 1950s and 1960s, it is the lack of causality introduced by the atomising of musical elements, required by the more and more rigorous serial practices, that disrupts the musical discourse, and not exactly the multiplicity of choices proposed by indeterminate scores. As Umberto Eco states:

> If a musical pattern no longer necessarily determines the immediately following one, if there is no tonal basis which allows the listener to infer the next steps in the arrangement

> of the musical discourse from what has physically preceded them, this is just part of a general breakdown in the concept of causation. (Eco, 1989, p. 15)

However, as can be understood by Boulez's words, indeterminism is a reflex of the non-discursive character of serial music. It does not block discourse but brings coherence to a work in which discourse is blocked—if the listener cannot perceive a directed ongoing discourse, joining the piece's beginning to its end, why should it have any strict predefined order of events? Indeterminism in such moulds, more than creating non-discursiveness simply demonstrates it.

iv. *aleatoric music*

Boulez's aesthetic preoccupation in obtaining a coherent work out of serial procedures has strong parallels in John Cage's aleatoric music. In his 1958 lecture *Composition as Process: Indeterminancy*, Cage (1973) reflects upon two different uses of chance in musical composition: (1) chance in the compositional process; and (2) chance in the performance act. Using as example his own piece *Music of Changes*, a piece for piano from 1951 where all scored events were decided by the use of chance operations, Cage remarks how the procedures that gave rise to the work are not available in the performance of that work. Although the compositional process liberates the composer from the function of expressive agent, the performer remains restricted to her/his traditional function in western music (pp. 36-37). Cage's reluctance to such inconsistency in his own work is evident in his description of the resulting consequences. He stresses:

> The fact that these things that constitute it, though only sounds, have come together to control, a human being, the performer, gives the work the alarming aspect of a Frankenstein monster. This situation is of course characteristic of western music, the masterpieces of which are its most frightening examples, which when concerned with humane communication only move over from Frankenstein monster to Dictator. (Cage, 1973, p. 36)

Despite not being *indeterminate with respect to its performance*, to use Cage's words, the piece *Music of Changes* is non-discursive. This happens because the relations between sonic events that have appeared by aleatory procedures tend not to be perceived as causal but as *casual*, due precisely to this method. Some sequences of sound may conform with what is

needed for perception to join such instances into an organic group—as a kind of gesture.But these occasions are incidental and, in the midst of all other apparently chaotic activity, tend to be perceived simply as a slightly more complex sonic event, enhancing in fact even more the notion of unstructured chaos.

Cage's ideal of non-dualistic and consequently non-communicative music[3] can be understood as an opposite to his own description of what he considered the essential characteristics of conventional European music, i.e.:

> the presentation of a whole as an object in time having a beginning, a middle, and an ending, progressive rather than static in character, which is to say possessed of a climax or climaxes and in contrast a point or points of rest. (Cage, 1973, p. 36)

Opposing this paradigm, Cage sought a music that would be a disperse and static field of sonic elements, as temporally and sonically frameless as natural environmental sound (Fig. 81). He explains that

> in this new music nothing takes place but sounds: those that are notated and those that are not. Those that are not notated appear in written as silences, opening the doors of the music to the sounds that happen to be in the environment. (Cage, 1973, pp. 7-8)

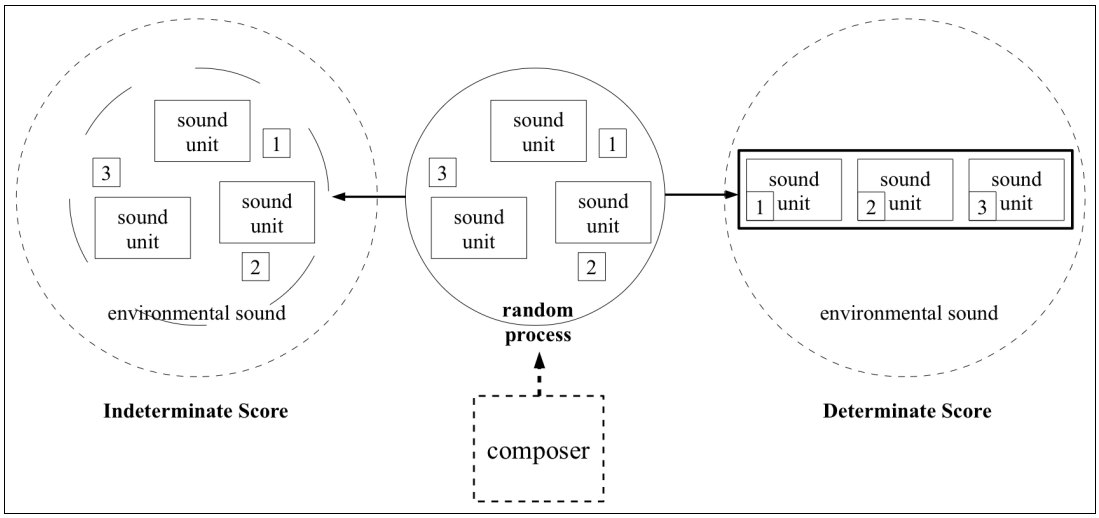


Fig. 81: Determinate and Indeterminate aleatoric composition; indeterminate composition blends with the natural sonic environment.

3 One can say that Cage, like Boulez, was looking for a complete coherence between the method of creation and the resulting object. Such an approach is in itself non-communicative. Communication presupposes a form, which is the carrier of information, and a content, i.e., what is to be communicated. When the productive act aims merely to be consistent with itself, this means that there is no intended content or, put in other words, that the form is its content. As Wim Mertens's (1983) states when referring to process music, "dialectical negativity ceases to exist" (p. 106). Therefore, such creative models are implicitly anti-linguistic and cannot intend to communicate. They tend to produce mere objects for contemplation.

It is this will to dilute that which is composed with that which happens to be already there that drives Cage to indeterminate scores. Such scores would then enable the same openness as the sounds with which they would mingle. Again it is not simply indeterminacy that makes Cage's music non-discursive; it is his approach to music as a chain of unrelated sounds detached from any human will of expression. Bernhard Günter, a composer strongly influenced by Cage's theories, describes his own musical concerns in what could be the summary of the American experimental and aleatory aesthetics:

> I wish to get away from the paradigm of music as language-like, the aesthetics that believe music, or art in general, is a form of communication. […] When you associate things with what you hear, visualising this or that, language gets back into the game and destroys the possibility of perceiving the existence of sound, its 'being like this.' (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 206)

v. *repetitive music*

In an art like music, where events, contrarily to the concrete references of literature or cinema, are not so easily memorised, repetition has a fundamental role. From the repeated playing of musicians while learning the score, to the every day rehearing of one's newly bought CD, music lends itself to a considerable amount of repeated listenings. Hence, restatements of musical ideas inside the musical piece itself may simply reflect how the listener is unable to grasp all musical details, turning its repetition not into a redundancy but into a refreshing of memory (Snyder, 2001, pp. 52-53).

However, when repetition is constant and goes beyond what is necessary to completely grasp the musical material, as in minimal repetitive music, a phenomenon of habituation appears that shifts the way the listener's attention was positioned. Bob Snyder (2001) affirms that

> when we completely "re-cognise" something, there is no longer any need to consciously process this information because it is already completely familiar to us, which usually causes this information to pass out of the focus of conscious awareness and become part of our perceptual and conceptual background. (Snyder, 2001, pp. 23-24)

In other words, thorough and constant repetition leads to an impression of absence of activity. The listener is therefore no longer focused on the design of the repeating musical figures and

in its temporal passing, and tends to direct her/his attention to other usually secondary details. As Edward Pearsal (2006) states, "the redundancy of the musical events in these [pervasive, non-discursive] compositions is the result of a purposeful effort to produce a static, spatial quality in which the texture itself becomes the focus of attention" (p. 54).

Naturally, if the piece of music listened to becomes all background, through constantly recurring elements, one can say that, likewise, it becomes all foreground. In fact, traditional musical hierarchies cease to be pertinent and, without them, all possibilities for creating conflicting material for dramatic dynamism or directed motion disappear. Hence, motion becomes meaningless. One can perceive movement but it doesn't seem to go anywhere. It becomes mere mechanical agitation. Snyder (2001) explains: "although music that consists of identical repeating events can certainly be heard as 'moving forward in time,' it has no directed parametric motion, and is in this sense static" (p. 113).

Without hierarchies music cannot give rise to expressive events. Discrete events cannot even be perceived as such. Each musical piece seems to be one single event and time seems to be frozen within it.[4] This absence of segmented structure interferes with the process of creating a meaningful design—i.e., a sequence of events, the order of which creates relations that can be perceived as units of meaning.[5] Hence, minimal repetitive music negates directed motion and, with it, the vehicle for meaning. As Arved Ashby (2005) declares, "minimalism is distinguished by repetition, and repetition is innately poetic in that it disrupts signification and literal meaning" (p. 246).

Finally, it is interesting to note that this process of emptying meaning by obsessive repetition occurs even with such referential medium as verbal language. Murray Schafer (1994) alludes to such phenomenon when referring to the reciting of mantras in some oriental religions. He describes "words repeated over and over until they hypnotise the mind, at which point they may give rise to new word-sounds" (p. 160). As with minimal music, through constant repetition and progressive habituation, meaning is voided into a mere sonic texture. Time becomes indivisible—an eternal perceptual present. In sum, "the phenomenon of

4 Phillip Glass, one of the major figures of America minimalism, refers to this sense of frozen time in his own music. He states: "One of the first things that people perceive in my music is extended time, or loss of time, or no sense of time whatever. All that narrative structure of the Beethoven concerto is gone from my music"(cited in Ashby, 2005, p. 245).

5 Actually, a sequence of events is in itself the contradiction of repetition. "The origin of a sequence," Roland Barthes (1975) stresses, "is not the observation of reality, but the necessity to vary and to outgrow the first form that man ever came by, namely repetition: a sequence is essentially a whole within which nothing is repeated" (p. 271).

habituation," using Snyder's (2001) words, "is truly one of the places where memory and perception become indistinguishable" (p. 24).

vi. *field recording*

An interesting form of sound art, which seems to derive from John Cage's interest in perceiving all sound as musical, is *field recording*. Greatly inspired by Murray Schafer's *The Tuning of the World* and his belief that the world's soundscape is a "vast musical composition which is unfolding around us ceaselessly" (in Cox & Warren, 2008, p. 29), *field recording* has slowly become a branch of art music.

Essentially, it presents itself as the reproduction of previously recorded tapes (or sound files) from specific sites that the 'composer' considers sonically relevant. Several nuances can occur, as to whether the recorded tapes are edited and/or processed, which can strongly alter the character of the sonic work. When too much processing is performed, the frontier between field recording and electroacoustic composition can be broken and the term *field recording* ceases to be suitable—it no longer classifies the music, merely the materials by which it was made. When in its purer forms, field recording is simply a work of carefully selecting sound environments and how to best capture them.

Despite recording real-life phenomena, field recording works, in themselves, are non-narrative. Just as with Cage's compositions, although the listener perceives sound elements—sonic events, even discursive sound events, even, say, a distant Beethoven sonata coming from the window of some busy city street, chaotic clouds of micro-sound structures, drones, a never-ending range of possibilities—still s/he cannot establish an idea of an organised dramatic presentation, of a flux of causally linked events. Sound is presented as raw and this is perceived in the listening—it may be a *composition* but it was not *composed*.

The ethnomusicologist and musician, Steven Feld, referring to his own recording, *Voices of the Rainforest*, a fairly documental montage of field recordings that replicate the sonic environment of the New Guinea rainforest, describes such soundscape as "a world of coordinated sound clocks, an intersection of millions of simultaneous cycles all refusing to ever start or stop at the same point" (p. 48). The chaotic nature of the unfolding of events naturally prevents the listener's narrative impulse. But the act of creating sonic art in such a way eliminates the very concept of narration. Through such medium, the composer seems to be a mere presenter of things: someone who calls attention to what exists instead of communicating. Field recording might remind one of Walter Benjamin's claim that "the

whole of nature, too, is imbued with a nameless, unspoken language" (p. 74). However, unspoken as this language is, it fails to deliver any narrative.

Even if it were a recording of a narrative, it would not in itself be a narrative but a mere presentation of it. Just like in literature, as when Roland Barthes (1975) considers that "the one *who speaks* (in the narrative) is not the one *who writes* (in real life) and the one *who writes* is not the one *who is"* (p. 261), in field recording s/he who records can solely be s/he who is. S/he is neither speaking nor writing. S/he is just the first listener, recording. The act of recording is an act of removing of the self in the most profound Cagean way. This erasure of expression, of sonic intervention, as well as the willingness to accept all sonic environment as musical joins field recording to the main currents of western music from the end of the twentieth- and the beginning of the twenty-first century. If one adds the words of minimalist composer Tom Johnson, stating that his will is "to find the music, not to compose it" (p. 285), one can see the common element of narrative refusal as a fundamental trace in some of the most important trends of contemporary music production. As Schafer (1994) states, the "blurring of the edges between music and environmental sounds may eventually prove to be the most striking feature of all twentieth-century music" (p. 111).

vii. *noise music*

One obvious form of non-communicative[6] music is *noise music*. Usually related to the underground musical scene in Japan in the 1990s, it has antecedents in the music of the western avant-garde—from the Italian futurists to the *Fluxus* movement—and in Rock from the 1960s—from Jimmy Hendrix to Robert Fripp. Its consequents, in a clear feedback relation —from west to east and back again—can be found in more recent European and American experimental and improvised music. As Paul Hegarty (2008) states, "it only makes sense to talk of noise music since the advent of the various types of noise produced in Japanese music and in terms of quantity this is really to do with the 1990s onward" (p. 133).

Technically speaking, as Jacques Attali (1985) remarks in his book, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, "noise is a term for a signal that interferes with the reception of a message by a receiver, even if the interfering signal has a meaning for that receiver" (p. 27). Attali's

6 The term *communicative* has been used through this dissertation referring to the idea that whatever is communicated uses a certain medium and in its articulation refers to something else. Music is not obviously referential but can create patterns whose design and perception go beyond the sonic medium in which it was created. It is when music refrains from presenting itself in such patterns that it ceases to be communicative, even if when presented in concert one realises an energetic interaction between performer and audience.

basic concept is that noise is sound that has no meaning for the listener, either because it indeed has no meaning, or because the listener doesn't want or is unable to infer it. Through such approach any concept of beauty in sound becomes irrelevant for classifying noise. A pleasant sound can be noise when it has no meaning: it doesn't fulfil communication and may potentially interfere with a communicative situation. Sound with no meaning is, in Attali's definition, *noise*.

Such concept immediately defines *noise music* as non-communicative or non-narrative; or, to be more precise, as anti-communicative and anti-narrative—i.e., once music is assumed as a communicative practice, not to produce narrative is to reject it. As Hegarty affirms: "Unlike music, […] [noise] resists narrative" (p. 138). In this sense, all non-narrative music that has been referred to throughout this text could be said to be noise music. Morton Feldman seems to accept such possibility when poetising: "noise: […] there is no sound, no tone, no sentiment, nothing left but the significance of our first breath" (p. 16).

What makes *noise music,* more than non-narrative, *anti*-narrative is its clear emphasis on the intention not to narrate. Hegarty (2008) remarks that "there is more noise in Japanese music, whether in terms of volume, distortion, non-musicality, non-musical elements, music against music and meaning" (p. 133). All Hegarty's classifying units are rejections. Hence, noise is almost a synonym for negation. Attali stresses:

> despite the death it contains, noise carries order within itself; it carries new information. This may seem strange. But noise does in fact create a meaning: first, because the interruption of a message signifies the interdiction of the transmitted meaning, signifies censorship and rarity; and second, because the very absence of meaning in pure noise or in the meaningless repetition of a message, by unchanneling auditory sensations, frees the listener's imagination. The absence of meaning is in this case the presence of all meanings, absolute ambiguity, a construction outside meaning. (Attali, 1985, p. 33)

So, noise is constantly threatened by meaning, the same way that meaning is constantly threatened by noise. In *noise music* the actual dichotomy of the term—noise/music—seems to evince such constant struggle. To obliterate meaning, as Attali suggests, *noise music* must obliterate itself constantly. This is implied in Hegarty's (2008) remark that "a crucial part of noise is that it keeps altering (white noise is not noise, in this sense)" (p. 138). Hence, *noise music* cannot be constant sonic chaos, it avoids any constancy. It is absolute misunderstanding.

Noise music is anti-narrative. It is not a form without a content or comprised in its content, as happens in process music. It is, as Hegarty states, "a form that undoes itself, that acts as form, while in fact offering something else where form is supposed to be" (p. 139). While in process music—from integral serialism and aleatoric music to minimalism and even some spectral music—narrativity is avoided through the construction of self-productive mechanisms where human interference is felt merely at point of inception,[7] *noise music*, like *field recording*, needs no process. It flattens everything by being everything. Hierarchies are not abolished, they are simply overlapped until exhaustion—as Merzbow, the alter ego of Masami Akita, probably the ground figure of all *noise music* as such, stated, "there is no difference between noise and music in my work" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 4). Where *field recording* presents all sound as it is, proposing the idea of a silent composer, *noise music* proposes no composer whatsoever, no time, no nothing, merely a tremendous shout. Using Simon Reynolds's words: "madness and violence are senseless and arbitrary (violence is the refusal to argue) and the only response is wordless—to scream" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 57).

viii. *contemplating non-narrative music*

In his essay on the postmodern tendency for rejection of deep structure, a text with the suggestive title of *Going Flat*, Robert Fink (1999) considers the postmodernist repudiation of what Fredric Jameson calls the hermeneutical *depth models*: the idea that art works have a deep concealed meaning available through interpretation and not through mere perception. The *flatness* that Fink refers to is thus the crunching of depth and surface in the perception of postmodern artistic and therefore also musical works. In fact, as Susan Sontag (1966) claimed, art works seem to have become *just what they are* (p. 7)—they became immune to hermeneutics because between what is perceived and what is meant no difference can be found. And this happens not because the 'truth' of the art work is immediately available to perception, but, simply, because the whole work is all there. Actually, it would be incongruent to look for truth when, as Jameson (1991) points out, "the very concept of 'truth' itself is part of the metaphysical baggage which poststructuralism seeks to abandon" (p. 12). The dialectical concept of depth and surface is but one of the models that collapses in contemporary art hermeneutics. Jameson enumerates other dichotomies that postmodern

7 David Toop refers to such generative music as "trying to create a seed, as opposed to classical composition which is like trying to engineer a tree" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 242).

thought repudiates which equally imply the notion of hidden truth needing to be unveiled—essence versus appearance, latent versus manifest, authenticity versus inauthenticity, and signifier versus signified (p. 12).

Such collapses of hermeneutic models point to a strong shifting of the principles of art perception. Language is the paradigm of such dialectical models presented by Jameson. It is the very essence of something that signifies beyond its materiality (see chapter eight). Art *going flat* is art that no longer follows the paradigm of language. It is no coincidence that, for instance, in contemporary drama, as Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) stresses, it is the text, the link between theatre and language, that is questioned if not altogether abolished. Karen Jürs-Munby goes as far as to consider that the twentieth-century theatre's progression into postmodernism represents "the historical shift out of a textual culture and into a 'mediatised' image and sound culture" (in Lehmann, 2006, p. 1).

In music, one could postulate that the intrinsic and hidden structures of serialism, camouflaged by their complexity, can still be perceived as analogous to a language-like model of medium and meaning (surface and depth). However, the inside structure—the depth—should not be understood as a meaning (as a signified). It is a compositional strategy, not aimed for perception. Serialism would thus be a language for construction, not for communication. Usually, the listener is not supposed to follow each row of musical elements and perceive how they are interconnected. Such features merely helped the composer construct its non expressive sonic structure. Still, the dichotomy between what is there and what one perceives maintains the hermeneutical paradigm of modernism—to understand serial music, one needs to interpret it; in this case, to analyse it.

It is only through the extreme simplifying of process music that the 'engine' which leads to the musical work—the deep structure—becomes evident to perception. In fact, it becomes so transparent that it can be said to *be* its surface. And it is when depth and surface combine in one that hermeneutics becomes useless. This results in a shifting from an idea of sound bringing meaning throughout its temporal unveiling, through its designed narrative—as happens with language—to a concept where sound is simply shown: where mere *presence* replaces *significance*. Listening to such music becomes, as John Cage (1973) states: "not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds" (p. 10).

Is non-narrative music meaningless? Indeed, its time flow doesn't produce an articulated meaning. It just doesn't express meaning, or permit its construction through temporal

development. And to insist on looking for such meaning in the temporal flow of non-narrative music inevitably will lead either to strong disappointment or to excessively imaginative interpretations. Roland Barthes (1975) stated that "art does not acknowledge the existence of noise (in the informational sense of the word)" (p. 245), meaning that however meaningless an artistic object is, its perception as art implies its perception as meaningful. The thing is that, in non-narrative music, to perceive and to understand become fused. Instead of interpreting, the listener must contemplate—all is already there. Alberto Caeiro's (Fernando Pessoa) words seem highly appropriate:

> The mirror reflects right; It errs not because it does not think.
> To think is essentially to err.
> To err is essentially to be blind and deaf.[8] (Caeiro, 1969, p. 239)

ix. *interpreting non-narrative music*

In his contribution for the book *Musical Narrative after 1900*, Joshua Mailman (2013) argues that even in obviously deterministic musical works—as in repetitive minimal music—it is possible to find traces of narrative or of narrativise-able material. This, according to Mailman's understanding, permits the interpretation of process music pieces in moulds not so distant from those of plane narrative music. Attempting to demonstrate his theory, Mailman uses visual 'narratives' that he considers analogous to, and therefore interpretive of specific deterministic pieces. The example he uses is Alvin Lucier's *Crossings*, from 1984.

As all Lucier's work, *Crossings* is based on a simple process and an acoustical phenomenon: a slow glissando of an electronic sine tone ascends from low infrasound to the high ultrasound lasting more than sixteen minutes. This sine tone is 'crossed' by discreet pitches of the chromatic scale played by the orchestra instruments at the moments where it is passing that specific frequency—this is the process. During the piece, acoustic beats are heard decelerating while the sine tone reaches the instrumental note and accelerating once it goes above its pitch—this is the acoustical phenomenon.

Mailman proposes an interesting analogy. He considers that such process can be compared with the "rising-sun-seen-through-venetian-blinds" (p. 139). The fact that a rising sun when crossing venetian blinds does in fact create an optical effect, and the fact that it is a

8 Translation by autor. In original: "O espelho reflecte certo; não erra porque não pensa. / Pensar é essencialmente errar. / Errar é essencialmente estar cego e surdo."

natural phenomenon, apart from any human agency, makes the analogy almost irrecusable. However two issues must be pointed out. The first is that, like most of the analogies used in narrative interpretations of music, one gets the impression that it is just one of a never-ending group of possibilities—a plausible substitution of a temporal event with another temporal event that shares a similar contour; i.e., a mimetic relation where one term embodies the other (see chapter three). Such replacement not only limits a more personal replacement that the listener could eventually decide to do, but can also, which is worse, distract her/him from listening to the music proper. The sonic phenomena proposed in Lucier's pieces (or Phil Niblock's for that matter; see chapter six) are aesthetically fulfilling in themselves; just like the motifs, rhythms, and melodies of narrative music are sufficiently gratifying to dispense external metaphorical interpretations, Lucier's pieces are full musical works and it is within them, and not in some imaginative external projection, that the listener is likely to find aesthetic pleasure. The second point is that Mailman's analogy isn't itself a narrative. It is a description of a natural phenomenon that can be aesthetically enjoyed—just like Lucier's *Crossing* is also such a phenomenon, dispensing any narrative or narrative interpretation. In fact, this seems to be Lucier's sole purpose: to present an acoustical phenomenon and to invite its contemplation. His statement that "careful listening is more important than making sounds happen" (in Cox & Warner, 2008, p. 63; see chapter six) somehow demonstrates it.

It becomes evident that Mailman's interpretation, although tempting, clashes with the kernel of the music he is approaching. Mailman (2013) himself seems to perceive such incompatibility when referring to "agential action denied by the extreme processive nature of Lucier's *Crossings*," and concluding that "its engine is pure machine, without will" (p. 138). In such strict non-narrative music, being perception and understanding so radically 'flattened' into a single plane, the fact is that the role of musical analysis or of musical theory may now be simply to point out this fact—the fact that there is nothing more than what is immediately heard.

However, in process music, as in conceptual art, there seems to be always an equilibrium between both the elegance of the process and the resulting beauty (in all the subjective meanings of the term) of the sonic material. Therefore, knowing how the process is functioning, or knowing the conceptual ground behind the conceived work enhances, and may be fundamental for, aesthetic listening. As Curtis Roads emphasises, "music will always be more than a game of logic" (p. 78)—even expressionless music can be impressive to the listener.

x. *non-narrative and non communicative*

Positioning himself against the use of the motion metaphors applied to non-linear or non-discursive music, which would imply that such music should be considered as *static*, Edward Pearsall (2006) remarks that "characterising events as having no motion […] reinforces the idea that nonlinear music is relatively powerless as a means of communication" (pp. 57-58). Pearsall considers that such description—to consider such music as a *powerless means of communication*—would denigrate its artistic force. However, as is becoming now obvious, to communicate is precisely what this music is trying to avoid. When, in 1964, Susan Sontag (1966) instigates the making of "works of art whose surface is so unified and clean […] that the work can be […] just what it is" (p. 7), she is precisely claiming that art should refrain from communicating. And this communication refusal can be perceived in music exactly through such non-linear or non-discursive approaches.

When the listener follows linear discursive music, as has been shown, s/he tends to narrativise its content, to conceive a meaningful perception of the work's dramatic totality as designed by its composer. If the discourse is blocked, so too is the composer's imprint as a temporal artefact for the listener to follow. Through this idea one can perceive that non-narrative music implies non-communicative music—at least in the sense of something that is expressed for the receiver to interpret and understand—because s/he who expresses is not even present.

Such avoidance of narrativity in music can be traced almost from the beginning of the twentieth century. Susan McClary (1997) states that "beginning with Debussy, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg and extending to the experiments of John Cage, the avant-garde music of the twentieth century has been self-consciously ANTI-narrative" (p. 21). All these composers can, in a formal sense of their work, be considered as part of the same anti-narrative idea. Even though, from the composers that McClary names, only Cage seems to take such aesthetic approach to the extreme.

McClary considers "the radical compositional devices associated with primitivism, expressionism, and chance [that] emerged as attempts at breaking the hegemony of narrativising musical processes" (p. 21) are a consequence of the decaying nineteenth-century society and a refusal of the narratives on which it was grounded. "Better NO meaning at all than THOSE meanings!" (p. 31), she states, seems to have been the main reactive attitude. McClary's idea opens up the notion that each musical period may have its own narratives to

tell and that the twentieth-century refusal to endorse narratives may some day be studied as a narrative of its own. Not in the sense of what these works tell in themselves, but what such silence narrates of the society in which they were created. And, as one moves on into the twenty-first century and as music seems to refuse even more any sense of communication, reducing its threads of narrative to the minimum, one can't help but speculate if this silence can be art's last expression of will.

xi. *the 'non-narrative' term*

Referring to the absence of drama in post-dramatic theatre, Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) asks "what is taking its place?" (p. 29). The same interrogation is pertinent for non-narrative music. What is taking the place of narrative in such static and non-discursive music? In some of its most radical cases one is, perhaps rightfully, tempted to answer: *nothing*. And, nevertheless, this 'hole' in the musical fabric may still be pregnant with meaning, like in Jacques Attali's above quoted interpretation of noise music. And what remains to be grasped may still deliver powerful aesthetic pleasure.

Lehmann laments the absence of positive terminology for vanguardist theatre, and for art in general—i.e., the lack of a term to refer to these manifestations remarking its existing features instead of stating what is missing. In fact, artistic vanguards are usually described through what is not there, what is missing, maybe reflecting some lack of analytical attention on its specificity (p. 19). Lehmann's claim is thus true and pertinent. However, in some particular cases, these negative terms actually help to understand a feature that appears precisely as a *will to avoid*. Through what has been exposed throughout this chapter, it is clear that non-narrative music is such a case.

The usefulness of the concept of non-narrativity is that it allows to classify a specific group of works sufficiently different from the majority of the western art-music repertoire. This difference involves not only the works in themselves, with its technicalities and structural issues, as is common in every new emergent musical style, but also, and most importantly, the listening and analytical stance that one should adopt. In other words, this repertoire is so radically different, despite its evident western heritage, that it practically demands a rethinking of what is a musical experience. To speak about such repertoire involves discovering what exactly distinguishes it. And this element of distinction is, as has been systematically proposed in this dissertation, narrativity. From this perspective, Jean-Jacques Nattiez's (1990a) claim, that the narrative analogy in music would be "nothing but

superfluous metaphor" (p. 257) becomes once more questioned: the narrative metaphor may actually become fundamental to distinguish between two practically opposite ways of composing, listening and analysing music.

It is by understanding non-narrativity in music as a reaction against narrative music that one finds the concepts of *discursive* and *non-discursive* music somewhat incomplete. Although being a fairly objective way to classify music's main characteristics, such designations fail to refer to the very ground of their existence. On the contrary, the term *non-narrative*, besides describing the lack of temporal dynamic of its music, already evident in the *non-discursive* term, demonstrates the very motivation behind its use in music: the main goal is not to *stop* music's discursive flux; it is to prevent it from speaking, from *narrating*. But, one thing can't be done without the other, as John Cage (1973) exemplifies in his famous paradoxical statement from *Lecture on Nothing*: "I have nothing to say and I am saying it" (p. 109). To stop narrative, music needs to stop its discourse.

Walter Benjamin (1963), in 1936, states that "the art of story-telling is coming to an end" (p. 80), seemingly predicting the noisy but paradoxically mute society of today. Apolitically, he remarks how by the end of the first world war, "men returned from the battlefield grown silent" (p. 81). The reason, he claims, was because "the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out" (p. 83). One can't help thinking that this decay is a decay of language, or, more in conformity with Benjamin's thought, a decay of the use of language, eventually leading to its extinction. As Benjamin puts it, "it is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us, the ability to exchange experiences (p. 80). In fact, art generally speaking surely seems to have renounced all claims for a status of language; a revolution that is still going on, and one is still to know where it will lead. This seems to be the point where things are: a middle ground where language seems to function merely to explain that which renounced to be language; to narrate its own end.

However, static music—non-communicative, non-discursive, non-linguistic, non-narrative—still uses verbal language: be it in suggestive titles, in songs, or in opera. To resolve this incongruence between two (only now) opposite media—one discursive, one non-discursive—is the challenge of the composer who still wishes to join, in a non-narrative era, verbal language and its dramatic outcome with music. This incongruence is to be resolved not because language still speaks, not because it still has something important to say—it evidently has less and less—but because its words still narrate inside themselves, within their unit of meaning, something which even non-narrativity cannot erase.

xii. *non-narrative 'melody' in sung text*

One can say that melody symbolises the essence of narrativity in music: a sequence of pitches is understood as moving and simultaneously drawing a form. Melodies are music's closest resemblance with language, a morphological semblance where elements seem glued to each other and are articulated in breath-sized portions. A melody, in its traditional sense, is inevitably narrative; it cannot be non-narrative. Byron Almén and Edward Pearsall (2006) emphasise this feature when stating that "among the primary musical parameters, melody has the longest history as a locus of meaning. The ubiquity of its association with the human voice has indelibly marked it as the premiere embodiment of expressive communication, even when, in instrumental music, the voice is mute" (p. 4). To perceive a melody is to perceive its narrativity, its ongoing temporal flux, its notes leading one to another in a metaphorical perception of linear motion.

In the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*, any sign of melody is thoroughly avoided. This happens naturally in the lengthy sonic strokes of all instrumental parts (see chapter three), or in the long breaths of the vocal quartet and the never ending continuum of the clarinet and violin duet, where text is simply video projected. However, in the soloists' vocal parts the absence of melodies seems almost as if imposed. This is because, traditionally, the syllabic articulation of verbal text implies a changing of pitch. Hence, to avoid such change implies re-articulating the same pitch through the duration of each breath. This way, a long sustaining note preserves its essence while simultaneously articulating the syllables of a text. All pitch inflection, whether associated with the tradition of sung music or linked to the very quasi melodic contour of oral language, is reduced to an artificial and unexpressive monotone syllabic sequence. Language is reduced to un-patterned sound and its pure conceptual meaning. Language becomes non-narrative even if carrying *a narrative*.

Somewhat paradoxically, the pitches for the voice parts are extracted from a simple melodic model (Fig. 82):

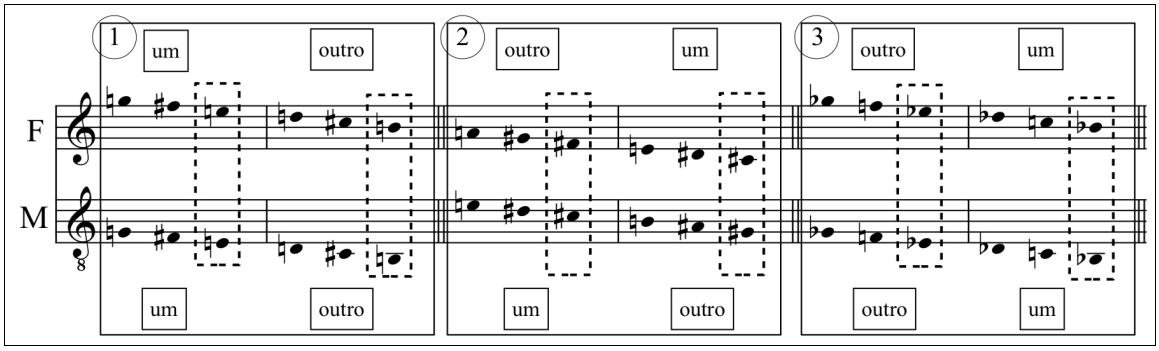


Fig. 82: Pitch material for vocal parts in the opera—Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente *Nada*—*divided into three sections and attributed to the main characters.*

This melodic model is based on the same pitch material as the instrumental pieces (Fig. 83; see also chapter three).

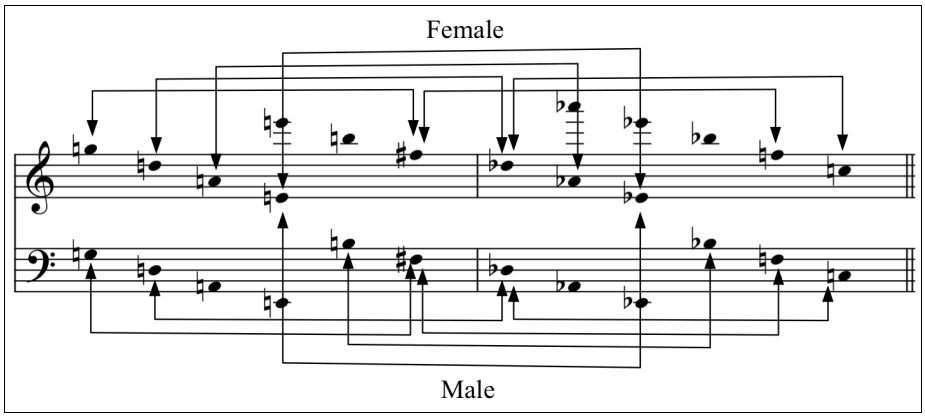


Fig. 83: Pitch material for the instrumental pieces and its relation with the melodic model for the vocal parts.

One can see that the first two pitches of each group of three notes in the vocal parts is confined to the octaves of the instrumental parts. The notes within the dashed rectangles are added to build the 'melodic' element—1 half-tone / 2 half-tones (descending)—that is the base for the vocal parts. One can also find the group of three pitches—[*E-D#-C#*]—that built the piece for clarinet, violin and electronics (see chapter five). These three pitches are the only ones common both to the *Male* and *Female* scores.[9] This way, being also the origin for the vocal quartets in scenes II.1 and III.1 (see chapter four), one can say that the pitch material that builds the instrumental pieces structures the whole opera. Or, viewing it the other way round, the whole pitch material for the opera is built from the central piece for clarinet, violin, and electronics—a ten-minute melodic drone in scene III.4 (see chapter five).

9 The main characters can be either male or female and in any possible combination. These details are discussed in chapter eight.

Nevertheless, the melodic modules for the vocal parts are never treated melodically. The three-note melodic element is grouped in male and female ranges; then it is divided in three sections; and then attributed to the characters. Finally, all this is temporally distributed through the twelve scenes of the opera—each scene having therefore a specific pitch material (Fig. 84).

Act:	I		II				III				IV	
Scene:	1	2	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2
Um:	**3**	**2**		**1**	**1**			**2**		**2** Um	**3**	
Outro:	**3**	**2**		**1**	**1**				**2**	(clarinet & violin)	**3**	
Narrativa		**2**	vocal quartet	**1**		**1** Outro	vocal quartet	**2** Outro			**3** Outro	**2**

Fig. 84: Pitch material for each scene and character of the opera (numbers correspond to the sections in figure 82).

The sonic atmosphere of each scene has, therefore, some relation with the pitch material used. And the whole distribution of these sonic regions contributes to a slight perception of the evolving structure of the whole of the opera, despite the strong static nature within each scene

Once the pitch groups have been distributed, the singers may choose at given moments which of these pitches to sing.[10] These moments of choice are rare and have to do with specific sections within the text. Again, a monotonic atmosphere makes disappear any dynamism the verbal text could have. And, generally, the three pitches of the melodic motif extend over the total duration of the scenes—a three note melody transformed into plain stasis. But, within these sung pitches, a text is articulated by a specific rhythm that is given in the score. The singer must thus combine her/his chosen pitch with the given rhythm and corresponding text.[11] How this rhythm works with the *libretto* in order to preserve the non-narrative character of the music and, simultaneously, the text's comprehensibility will be seen in chapter eight.

10 It should be remembered that the instrumental pieces are also randomly chosen for each scene. Hence, the exact pitches and consequent harmonic combinations to be heard are never completely predictable.

11 See full score in volume II. The attached DVD contains several musical examples of sung scenes I.1, II.3, II.4, III.3, and IV.2.

chapter eight: Language in Music

"a sua sombra seguia-o, macaqueando o seu modo de andar e os seus pensamentos e o seu próprio ser"[1]

i. *intro*

Maybe the strongest reason for sensing music's narrativity is its resemblance to language. Byron Almén (2008) affirms that "common to virtually all approaches to musical narrative is the recognition of a degree of similarity between musical and literary discourse" (p. 11). The literary discourse, as is known, not being exactly an oral discourse derives from it its structures and consistency. Music seems to resemble oral discourse in its fluidity, and literary discourse in its unified structured whole. Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) explains that "music and language have in common the fact that they are constituted of sound objects. In language as in music, there are rhythms and accents, durations of notes and syllables" (p. 251). These sound objects, whether in music or in language, once objectified, cease to be sounds. They become patterned elements that one understands as such and not as sound proper. What Roger Scruton (1999) refers specifically to music, when stating that "we do not hear sound only; we hear something in the sound, something which moves with a force of its own" (pp. 19-20), is thus extensible to verbal language. Scruton stresses the relation that exists between the grouping of notes in music and the grouping of words in sentences, showing how such process involves "an activity of mental organisation" that "collects sounds together" into meaningful units (p. 211). Hence, a kind of syntax that persists in both systems turns their hearing into a cognitive process (pp. 185-186). In both cases sound becomes meaning or meaningful.

This frequent analogy between music and language can be said to involve semantic, syntactical, and expressive features. But it is morphologically that one may find the strongest resemblances: the notion that small sound groups—rhythmic/melodic/harmonic—joined by an intuited logic, throughout several time scales, produce sonic structures remarkably similar to those of words, sentences, and paragraphs, or, in some other way, to interjections or other human utterances. The composer Boris Vladimirovič Asaf'ev's theory somehow explains this morphological semblance. He considered that "musical ideas originated as expressions of human actions and experiences, but that over historical time they came to express music, to refer to one another and not things outside the musical universe" (cited in Abbate, 1989,

1 [His shadow followed him monkeying his walking way, his thoughts, and his own being. (trans. by author)]

p. 224). This concept is similar to archaeologist Steven Mithen's (2006) idea that language and music may both have originated from some kind of common primordial system of expression. He states that "there was a single precursor for both music and language: a communication system that had the characteristics that are now shared by music and language, but that split into two systems at some date in our evolutionary history" (p. 26).

Despite the fragility of such claims, from a field of study where it is extremely difficult to support theories with solid observations, it is nonetheless appealing to consider these similarities between music and language and understand how western music's values have followed some basic verbal language principles from almost its origins until the present day, moulding not only music's structures but one's way of listening to it. Narrativity in music may thus be considered as a instinctive reflex derived from music's proximity to language, a cultural paradigm that only recently some composers and sound artists have began to question.

In this chapter, it will be shown that narrative music and language work in parallel systems, basing their structure in similar perceptual mechanisms and dealing with time in similar forms. Strong differences arise when one focuses on language's referentiality, which has no parallel in music, nevertheless, it will be seen that narrative music's temporal development fits almost perfectly within language's morphology, and vice-versa. This is actually demonstrated by centuries of sung music history where verbal language and melody have been mingled almost effortlessly, whether in conception or in perception. This strong relation between language and music can also be demonstrated, as will be seen, through recent anthropological theories that consider the two systems as having emerged from a common paradigm of pre-linguistic expression.

In fact, it was only the breaking of this common paradigm between language and music, in recent non-narrative music, that began to problematise the relation between the two systems. By questioning temporal development, non-narrative music questions its intimate relation with verbal language, creating a gap difficult to transpose—either music renounces its static nature, or language renounces its temporal flux. Oral language seems to be inevitably narrative in its sonic discourse. This link between language and narrative music may explain why both system fuse so well—how the musical and the linguistic discourses have combined easily with each other throughout musical history. This same link also explains why non-narrative music, by questioning its linguistic paradigm, simultaneously questions the very possibility of combining both systems into one whole unit—into non-narrative sung music. It

has been shown how in a small study piece—*Para Soprano, Trompa e Piano*—under certain conditions, verbal language can be articulated in a non-narrative music context, neither damaging the text's intelligibility nor music's non-narrative nature (see chapter six). The last sections of this chapter will summarise the musical solutions found to articulate the sung text of a much larger work: the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*—the main compositional work for the present thesis.

ii. *music as language*

Julia Kristeva (1969) considers Pierre Boulez's *Relevés d'Apprenti* (1966) as one of the first texts to approach music as a language, referring to music's morphology, semantics and syntax (p. 428). Boulez (1986) finds that music "has its own semantics firmly rooted in its own basic structures and obeying specific laws so that the sense communicated is parallel to, rather than identical with, the sense communicated by words" (p. 189). He considers music's evolution as somewhat similar to that of language since both standardise certain expressive material throughout specific periods of their history: "The 'symbolism' of music evolves just as the language does […]. This evolution in 'significance' of music shows to what an extent sounds and words are governed by similar linguistic laws" (p. 190). Kristeva (1969), for her part, compares the two systems remarking that: both share the same media—time and sound; both are perceived by the same receiving organ—the ear; both have writing systems that decompose their elements—tones and durations for music, alphabet for language; and both have signifying systems based on difference (pp. 428-429). However, despite all similarities, Kristeva stresses music's inability to truly signify, to confer a precise meaning. She concludes: "music is effectively a differential system without semantic substance, a formalism that doesn't signify" (p. 429).[2] Thus, for her, any musical interpretation will always be highly subjective and dependent on mastering specific musical codes of genre and style (p. 429-430).

Concerning this last point, Kofi Agawu's (1999) explains that "whereas language interprets itself, music cannot interpret itself. Language is the interpreting system of music" (p. 145). In fact, language seems to be the interpreting system of all human experience (Fig. 85).

2 In the portuguese edition: "A música é efectivamente um sistema diferencial sem semântica, um formalismo que não significa." (trans. by author)

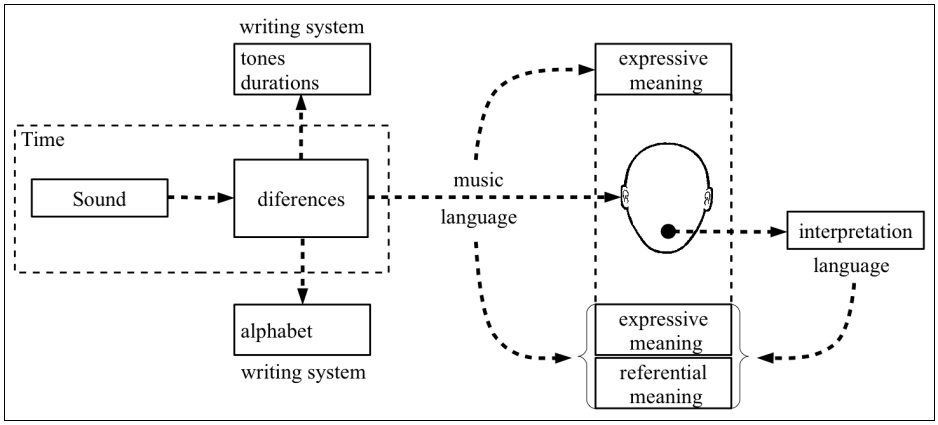


Fig. 85: Schema of Kristeva's and Agawu's theories on language and music systems.

But verbal language's ability to interpret music is itself, as has been remarked, quite limited. Agawu (1999) refers to Emile Benveniste's theory of "nonconvertibility of systems with different bases" as the reason for these limitations. Regarding its implications in how one medium could explain the other, for Agawu, Benveniste's theory "undermines all arguments for translation, without denying the existence of morphological or expressive resemblances between systems" (p. 144). What seems to be the point, is that music itself possesses characteristics of language. Kristeva (1969) stresses that there is no thought without language. For her, language not only transmits ideas, it is itself the idea (p. 20). She states that "the classic question: 'What is language's primary function: to *produce* thought or to *communicate* it?' has no objective ground." For her, "language is all that simultaneously" (p. 20).[3] When considering Kristeva's theory together with Benveniste's concept, it becomes impossible to imagine that a musical idea would originate in verbal language thought and then be translated to music. Hence music must be itself a form of thought and, thus, itself a form of language. This idea had already been suggested by Walter Benjamin (2004; written in 1916) when stating that "every expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language" (p. 62). And music is one such case.

iii. *temporality in music and language*

Both J. Peter Burkholder (2006) and Ray Jackendoff (2009) name more or less the same common features between music and language mentioned by Kristeva. However, another element is emphasised. Besides syntax similarities, Burkholder and Jackendoff consider how

3 In portuguese edition: "A pergunta clássica: 'Qual é a função primeira da linguagem: a de *produzir* um pensamento ou a de *comunicar*?' não tem nenhum fundamento objectivo. A linguagem é tudo isso simultaneamente." (trans. by author)

"the processing of both language and music involves creating expectations of what is to come" (Jackendoff, 2009, p. 196), and how the avoidance of syntactic functions can, in both systems, produce "feelings of frustration, delay, or desire" (Burkholder, 2006, p. 77). In other words, apart from being composed of elements that have in some way similar functions, both verbal language and music produce temporal expectancies through the manipulation of these functions. This concept is somewhat implicit in Roman Jakobson's notion that, as explained by Jerome Bruner (1991a), "language is a system not only for communicating, but also for organising attention" (p. 73). Thus, language and music have a tacit temporal unfolding that joins elements together by making their sequence appear unavoidable. This happens through an unconscious grouping of elements, extending from the smallest units—what could be called a syntactical system—to the large whole—the semantic structure. As Scruton observes,

> [musical elements] seem to incline towards each other, fall away from each other, as though they were incomplete entities which are magnetised by their neighbours and eager to cling to them. To certain extent they resemble words in a language, which are restless and ambiguous until surrounded by a completing sentence. (Scruton, 1999, p. 52)

Hence, this *magnetism* and this *restlessness* that Scruton mentions create both, retrospectively, the notion of units from a sequence of perceived sound events, and, prospectively, expectancies of their resolution (Fig. 86).

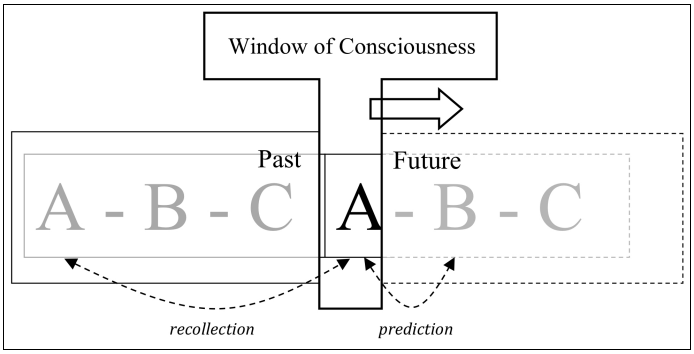


Fig. 86: Prediction of future events based on past events.

Bob Snyder (2001), in his study on the relations between music and memory, considers these groupings[4] and one's anticipation towards them as perceptual constructs of memory (pp. 32-33). Snyder states:

4 Snyder (2001) uses the term "sequential grouping," referring to melodic and rhythmic elements, and distinguishing them from "simultaneous grouping," that build impressions of amplitude and frequency (p. 32).

> Memory influences how we decide when groups of events end and other groups of events begin, and how these events are related. It also allows us to comprehend time sequences of events in their totality, and to have expectations about what will happen next. (Snyder, 2001, p. 1)

This grouping of sound events that seems to be a "natural tendency of the human nervous system" (p. 31), as Snyder explains, occurs both in short term memory—in the case of small scale structures—and in long term memory—in the case of large scale formal units (pp. 32-33). While the former is grounded mainly on the structure of the human nervous system, the latter, because it receives the patterns built in short term memory and tries to organise them according to stored data, is dependent on individual learning and culture (p. 33). So in whichever case, grouping of sound events is an essential cognitive process for language and music. As Snyder stresses, through this process "rather than hearing completely isolated sounds or an undifferentiated continuum, we hear phonemes, words, sentences, melodies, rhythms, and phrases, all consisting of parts that seem related despite their taking place at different frequencies and at different times" (p. 31). Burkholder's, Jackendoff's, and Scruton's perception of an ongoing motion of understanding and expectation in language and in music is therefore firmly rooted in the human biological perceptual system.

iv. *breathing in music and language*

In her search for new metaphorical images in musical analysis, Marion Guck (1981) refers to a study made among her students, where she asked them to find consensual metaphors that described in someway a specific piece of music. In the reported case it was Chopin's *B minor Prelude*. The analogy that seemed to prevail in this exercise was that "the whole piece, [… was] like a person breathing" (p. 31), a suggestion given by one of the students and that was quite consensually accepted in the class. Although the left hand's ascending and descending gestures of Chopin's piece make the breathing analogy quite obvious (and therefore consensual),[5] it is, nevertheless, a recurring idea that all musical phrases, similarly to verbal sentences, fall somewhat within the boundaries of human breath and are thus designed accordingly. Melodies and indeed what is usually called musical gestures have not only a tendency to follow this ascending and descending design but also to fit within the temporal limit of a human breath. This is not to say that in Guck's case the

5 Chopin's prelude is marked by an rising and descending arpeggio gesture, played by the pianist's left hand, that delineates the piece's harmonic path.

metaphor would be too vague for analytical purposes. On the contrary, what is being stressed is that western music, rooted in the same vocal paradigm as language, will have inevitable relations with the breathing cadence of humans, and to mime or to allude to this pulse is one of music's aesthetic possibilities.

Steven Mithen (2006), as has been mentioned, justifies this relation in the common origin of both music and language. Musical and verbal *holistic* phrases, to use Mithen's term, would have, at some point, been the same and thus submitted to the constrains of our breathing body. He states that "each phrase would have been an indivisible unit that had to be learned, *uttered* and understood as a single acoustic sequence" (p. 172, my emphasis). Hence, the articulation of primitive utterances was limited by human breath and this condition may have profoundly moulded the rhythmic morphology of both music and verbal language. Murray Schafer (1994) points to the same idea when stating that "the rhythms of all poetry and recited literature bear a relationship to breathing patterns" (p. 227).[6] For him, rhythmic notions appear generally from human limitations: sung and spoken rhythms evolving from breathing limitations and percussive rhythms deriving from human walking, jumping, and hitting limitations (pp. 226-228). In western art music the vocal language patterns seem to have predominated over more percussive rhythms, influencing music's melodic contours and, therefore, its tendency to be organised around breath-based utterances.

It is interesting to observe that the human breathing cadence has chronological similarities with short term memory time span, where words and musical units are assembled. Such a coincidence can be explained through Snyder's statement that "the organisation of our experience often correlates with the order of the physical world because the human nervous system has evolved to comprehend and survive in that world" (p. 31). Evidently, this physical world includes one's own body (Fig. 87).

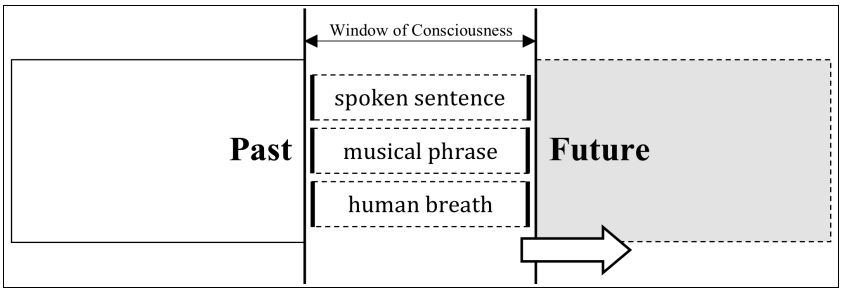


Fig. 87: Temporal correspondence between human consciousness, human breath, spoken language, and music.

6 Schafer (1994) goes as far to affirm that distinct ways of breathing may influence phrasing structure in different literary authors (p. 228).

Guck's above described breathing metaphor is thus so much striking when considering the musical piece in question was conceived for a mechanical instrument that needs no breathing, the piano. It seems that the contingencies that moulded music's first expressions and that still exist in its breath-dependent instruments created a paradigm that persists even when those limitations are overcome. Thrasyboulos Georgiades, as explained by Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990), "demonstrated that instrumental musics, in becoming increasingly emancipated from the vocal music dominant until the Baroque, conserved the mark of the languages with which they had been in contact for at least ten centuries" (p. 253). The morphology of language and of song has thus prevailed in music and with it its primordial cadence: that of breath. As Allen Weiss (2008) states, tying language and music together: "Poetics must be founded on the ontology of breath, and articulation of breath gives rise to rhythm. Speech is thus fundamentally lyrical, thus musical" (p. 31).

v. *a paradigm common to language and music*

As mentioned, Mithen (2006) considers that language and music may have once been indistinct human manifestations, a kind of proto-language that served both purposes in an era where specific meaning had not yet been attached to corresponding utterances. According to him, these emotional expressions were probably holistic, meaning that they were groups of vocal gestures with indivisible expressive content (p. 149). Mithen sustains that throughout evolution, progressively, these holistic phrases became fragmented into isolated units of meaning finally separating rational communication into what he calls compositional language, and emotional expression into music (p. 266). This process of 'segmentation', as Alison Wray calls it (Mithen, 2006, p. 253), was facilitated by the very musicality of primitive holistic phrases, since "pitch and rhythm would have emphasised particular phonetic segments" and this "ensured that holistic utterances were of sufficient length, so that the process of segmentation would have some raw material to work with" (p. 255). Through Mithen's suggestions one can postulate that music and language share a morphological origin that explains its continuing formal similarity.

Ray Jackendoff (2009) suggests this issue when considering "the extent to which phonology and music are structured rhythmically by very similar metrical systems" (p. 199). Jackendoff, who mistrusts strong connections between language and music (p. 203), considers that this morphological semblance may in fact be the most important link between the two systems, something "perhaps shared by only music and language" (p. 199). The assumption of

a common link, although clearly focused in biological instead of anthropological evidences, is also somewhat implicit in Jackendoff's assertion that the typical descending design at the end of verbal language (prosody) and musical lines (melody) "probably inherit […] [their similarity] from the form of human and mammalian calls (and possibly from the physiology that gives rise to calls, e.g., the drop in air pressure as the lungs are emptied)" (p. 199). One can then assume that, for instance, when the ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl states that "the typical pattern of linguistic tone sequences in some west African languages seem to affect how their melodies are composed" (Mithen, 2006, p. 288); or when the musicologist Edward T. Cone (1974) states that "the gestures of music can be interpreted as symbolic of physical as well as verbal gestures" (p. 164), what is in stake is a primordial link between the to systems and not some kind of mimetic reverence of music towards language. In other words, music's formal resemblance to verbal language may not be an intentional musical construction—another imitation in which music is prolific—it seems rather a vestige of their common origin. Hence, in classical western music, the human voice and its speech remain constantly evoked, due to their primordial proximity, even when through highly mechanical and/or artificial instruments.

vi. *language as music*

The relation between language and music can also be approached through the opposite perspective. This way, instead of searching for reminiscences of language in music, one looks for musical elements persisting in language. In fact, one can intuit in oral language, through the expressive prosody of its syllabic sequencing, some kind of intrinsic musicality. Mithen (2006) refers to "variations in intonation—dynamics, speed, timbre and so forth—that infuse speech with emotional content and often influence its meaning" (p. 55). For him, these expressive elements of verbal language are fundamental in emotional communication and inclusive in "creating and manipulating social relationships through their impact upon emotional states" (p. 172). Because this tendentiously melodic element is more evident in music, Mithen affirms that "prosody, as this is called, can sound very music-like" (p. 55).

Throughout his career, the American composer Steve Reich has worked frequently this idea of speech prosody. Although one can find traces of this research in some of his early tape works like *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) or *Come Out* (1966), it is with *Different Trains* (1988), for string quartet and tape, that Reich starts clearly using the melodic inflections of speech as a

starting point for designing instrumental melodic lines (Reich, 2002, p. 181).[7] *Different Trains* is built around recordings of interviews about train traveling in specific periods throughout the twentieth-century. The *speech melodies*, as Reich calls them, of these interviewed voices are transcribed as exactly as possible to the instrumental score (p. 198). They are the piece's main melodic material, whether being heard through the recorded voices alone, emphasised by the doubling instruments, or completely abstracted from their original content, as when the instruments play the prosodic contours without their carrying words. Throughout the piece, however, the melodies are never completely divorced from the significance of the originating phrases as spoken by the person interviewed (Fig. 88).

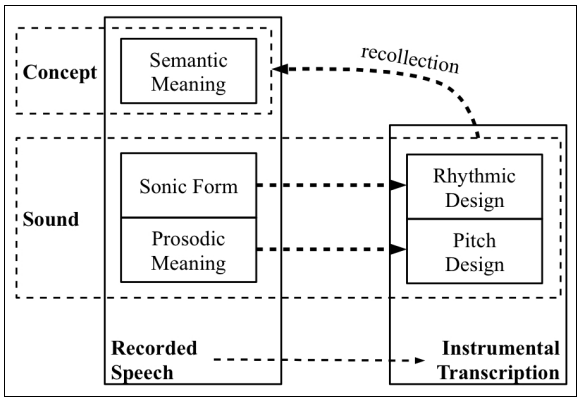


Fig. 88: Meaningful relations between oral speech and instrumental transcription of its speech melodies.

As Reich (2002) puts it, "their speech melody is the unpremeditated organic expression of the events they lived through" (p. 198). For Reich the prosody is indissociable from the meaning it assists (p. 199) and is intimately related to its specific language (p. 194). Following Béla Bartók's and Leoš Janáček's research on the links between language and folksong, and believing that "art music is in turn tied to the folk music" (p. 196), Reich claims that "the music of each culture is rooted in the language of that very culture" (p. 193). Thus, using exclusively recordings in english language and generating his melodic material through these recordings, Reich deeply roots his music in his own North-American cultural fabric.

Through his compositional technique, Reich decomposes language into its prosodic and semantic components confronting the listener with a melodic contour that was somewhat hidden by the meaning of the words that supported it.[8] Reich's work with recorded voices

7 Besides in *Different Trains*, Steve Reich uses this same compositional technique in *The Cave* (1990-1993), *City Life* (1995), *Three Tales* (2002), and *WTC 9/11* (2010). (Information retrieved from Steve Reich's official website: http://www.stevereich.com/)

8 Steven Mithen (2006) stresses: "Emotional expression is more central to music than to language. If I listen to the song-like cry of a mother who has lost her child, I can more easily appreciate her grief than if she simply

suggests that the *telling* itself contains that *emotional expression*, and that this may be the common paradigm between verbal language and music. What Reich seems to capture, through the emphasising of oral language's musicality, is precisely the emotional expression that, as in song, serves much more than to merely transport its signifying sentence.

vii. *meaning in language and in music*

If the morphology of language and music, their abstract contour design, seems to be the closest element linking the two systems, the semantical aspect appears to be that which clearly separates them. Kofi Agawu (1999) emphasises that "units of language have more or less fixed lexical meaning, while units of music do not" (p. 144). This links to other distinctions that Agawu points out: (1) "unlike language, which functions both as a medium for communication ('ordinary language') and as a vehicle of expression ('poetic language'), musical language exists primarily in the 'poetic' sense" (p. 142); and (2) "musical and linguistic meaning (or reference) may be extrinsic or intrinsic. But in music intrinsic meaning predominates over extrinsic meaning, whereas in language it is the other way round" (p. 144). In any case, what comes to the fore is that explicit and objective meaning can only happen in language and is absent in music. Actually, as Scruton (1999) argues, if music would manage to convey such explicit and objective meaning "it would cease to be music" (p. 138, see chapter two). Thus, one concludes that it is part of music's essence not to have this kind of significance. This inevitably implies that music cannot accurately represent outside itself without help of extramusical media—through lyrics or through drama (pp. 130-132). Contrariwise, in verbal language manifestations it is almost impossible not to be referential. Scruton stresses, "there is no work of literature that does not refer beyond itself, to a world that is other than the text itself" (p. 122). Although, when focusing on some radical vanguard literature like *visual poetry* or *sound poetry*,[9] this claim might seem not completely true, it is nonetheless evident that such cases seem as detours from language proper. In fact, they drift closer to visual arts or to music, where again the external referential is either fairly secondary, as in the former, or absent, as in the latter.

Karol Berger (1994) emphasises this unexpected liaison between music and painting at the expense of language. For her, language's semantic dependence is such that a credible analogy with music becomes purposeless. She states that "music's lack of 'referentiality' will

tells me that her child has died and that she feels distraught" (p. 24).

9 Both sound and visual poetry, as the names suggest, discard their literary semantic content in favour of, respectively, its phonetic and graphic aspects.

stop troubling us when, instead of expecting it to behave like language, we notice that in this respect it is more akin to painting" (p. 417). Berger defends a new analogy that avoids the troublesome semantic feature of language and its ambiguous relation with music's inability to refer to beyond itself. She claims, "in these two arts [music and painting], unlike in visual or aural traffic signs or in language when it is reduced to its referential function, what presents itself cannot be bypassed without a loss of something essential" (p. 417). This is what it means to signify only within itself: in bypassing the medium one bypasses the meaning. Through this perspective, music's semantic features seem in fact closer to painting than to language. However, if one would face language as an artistic medium instead of reducing it, as Berger suggests, to its *referential function*, then the analogy would regain consistency. The artistic expression, whatever the medium, seems always to be ambiguous and irreducible to some possible referential function. The problem is then that language has more than a single use. Returning to Agawu's (1999) distinction between 'ordinary' and 'poetic' language, one remembers that it is the 'ordinary sense,' the function of clear communication that seems to lack in music or at least to raise problematic questions (p. 142).

viii. *sound in language and in music*

Roger Scruton (1999) remarks that "every sound intentionally made is instinctively taken to be an attempt at communication" (p. 18). This statement stresses the importance and exclusivity of sound in human social relations. One may surely say that physical gestures, for instance, can also be used for communication, in fact anthropologists like Gordon Hewes or Michael Corballis have defended that spoken language has derived from gesture (Mithen, 2006, p. 15). Gestures are still today a fundamental element of human communication,[10] and, even in music, physical gestures are present both in the players and in the listeners, and implicit in some descriptions of melodic and rhythmic phrasing.[11] However, physical gestures are not exclusively communicative. To put it in Scruton's terms, an intentional physical gesture shouldn't necessarily be taken as an attempt at communication. Human movement is

10 According to Mithen (2006) the majority of human communication "occurs through body rather than spoken language" (p. 155). Julia Kristeva also stresses that "language is a chain of articulated sounds, but also a net of written marks (a writing) and a game of gestures (a body language);" [in the portuguese edition: "a linguagem é uma cadeia de sons articulados, mas também uma rede de marcas escritas (uma escrita) ou um jogo de gestos (uma gestualidade)" (p. 19, trans. by author)].

11 Robert Hatten's *Intrepreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (2004), and Anthony Gritten and Alaine King's *Music and Gesture* (2006) are two fundamental books on the subject. Vincent Meelberg's article *Sonic Strokes and Musical Gestures: The Difference between Musical Affect and Musical Emotion* (2009) also points to new forms of perceiving gesture in music.

fundamental in an enormous amount of practices besides communication. It is only the sonic manifestation that, when produced voluntarily, seems to have no other reason besides expression and, therefore, communication.

However, sound alone doesn't make language, and sound alone doesn't make music. The first fundamental element, both to language and to music, besides sound is evinced in Scruton's above sentence: intentionality. It implies that language and music need an intentional act of expression or, at least, as has been seen, an intentional act of perception (see chapter two). Withal, a second feature seems also essential to language and to almost all music: it is a kind of recognised order (or organisation) that ables the listener to perceive sound as language, or sound as music. Scruton (1999) refers to these processes as "the transformation of a sound into a word," in verbal language, and "the transformation from sound to tone," in music (p. 17).[12] These *fields of forces*, as Scruton calls language's and music's organising structures, somehow separate our understanding from the perception of sound (see chapter two). Scruton says: "Language causes us to hear the voice as in a certain sense outside nature: it is not a sound, but a message broadcast into the soundscape" (p. 17). Similarly, in music "when we hear [… musical elements], we hear their musical implications in something like the way that we hear the grammatical implications of words in language" (p. 18). Thus, Scruton concludes, "to hear a sound as music is not merely to hear it, but to *order* it" (p. 18). So sound alone is not really the medium for either language or the majority of western music. One can say that there are two levels in both oral speech's and music's carrying media: firstly there is sound and secondly there are the significant utterances. It is through these utterances (words, sentences) that one perceives language; it is through these utterances (motifs, rhythms, phrases) that one perceives almost all music. Sound *per se*, although constantly referred to, only very recently and in very specific types of music came to be used as the only musical medium. And in these cases the language analogy finally seems to fade completely, not only taking music away from its linguistic similarities but questioning the very possibility of an organic interrelation between both systems as in sung music.

ix. *sung language*

Since the closest relation between music and language seems to be morphologic, when music prefers to renounce such relation, so too the morphologic resemblances disappear.

12 *Tone* is a specific term that Scruton uses to describe when one is hearing sound as musical elements and not as sound proper (pp. 19-79).)

Actually these resemblances were what made the analogy between music and language credible in the first place. And these morphologic similarities are what facilitated the integration of language in music, as has been done throughout centuries of sung music. So, a music that questions its linguistic similarities, also questions its relation with text in a more practical sense—it destroys the common structure that permitted a natural integration of language within music and of music within language.

It has been seen that verbal language and narrative music are delivered through specifically articulated sonic patterns—not through sound, but through the patterns built with sound (Scruton, 1999, pp. 17-18). Hence, in sung narrative music, language and music share their building patterns and are delivered through the same source. This guarantees immediately a certain organic unity of the whole outcome. However, non-narrative music prescinds the ordered patterns of pitch and rhythm that build music's motion and narrativity. Non-narrative music is just sound. Therefore, to use sung text in non-narrative music implies delivering two disparate sonic layers: one of patterned motion and order, and another of static flatness. One can say that, in these conditions, the relation between text and music becomes somewhat forced. After all, it is only natural that a musical paradigm based on the nature of breath and bodily rhythm would articulate words more easily than an aesthetic approach based on mechanical drones and other random-like sounds from the environment.

Since, non-narrative music brought music back into the level of plain sound, it would appear logical to do the same with verbal language. In fact, this is more-or-less what is proposed in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*. Whether by video projecting the text in a stylised way, or by articulating the syllables of each sentence in a strict uniform rhythm, as will be described below, verbal language is being somewhat constrained to the medium that transports it, it is being aestheticised within its matter and before its meaning is built. However, as with traditional opera, the semantic level is not lost. The articulation is made in such a simple manner the it is still possible to infer meaning from the sonic or visual presentation of the text. In this opera, language's function is structural, it guides the overall order of events and must therefore be understandable. It is essential to keep the very reason for language's structuring role: if the text is not comprehensible, why should it have such an important formal role? The problem of disparity between language and non-narrative music is thus more evident in operatic contexts than in other sung music genres.

x. *articulating a* libretto *in a non-narrative opera*

The working of verbal language in non-narrative music, with the intention of preserving both language's intelligibility and meaning, and music's non-narrative character is exemplified in the articulation of the sung parts of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*. One has seen how the inevitable movement of a sung text can be largely attenuated by the use of very simple rhythmic formulas, constant pitch, and strict following of processual mechanisms (see chapters six and seven). These processes were here adapted to the specificity of a segmented operatic work, where the layers of text are longer and, besides carrying its normal semantic meaning, are reinforced by the meaningful active presence on stage. The intention, once more, was to articulate the *libretto* within a strongly non-narrative music context, producing, nevertheless, a music-theatre work that although questioning some of opera's traditional paradigms would still keep a link with this tradition.

The play has a total of three characters. These characters appear in different combinations throughout the twelve scenes (Fig. 89):

Act:	I		II				III				IV	
Scene:	1	2	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2
Characters:	[Um & Outro]	Um Outro Narrativa	Narrativa	Um Outro Narrativa	Um Outro	[Um & Outro] Narrativa	Narrativa	Um Narrativa	Outro	Um Outro	[Um & Outro] Narrativa	Narrativa

Fig. 89: Distribution of characters throughout Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*'s twelve scenes.*

This overall plan guided the specific compositional decisions that were taken. It has been seen how scenes 1 from acts II and III were composed for four voices with the text being articulated through video projection (see chapter four). In scene 4 from act III, as also previously seen, clarinet and violin represent characters *Um* and *Outro* while the text, again, is video projected (see chapter five). The remaining nine scenes have indeterminate accompaniments that are chance-chosen to accompany the vocal parts (see chapter three). These vocal parts, with the exception of the pre-recorded spoken part of *Um* and *Outro* in scene 4 from act II (see chapter one), have not yet been discussed.

Firstly, however, some pre-composition decisions must be addressed:

(1) Each one of the main characters—*Um* and *Outro*—are performed by one singer;

(2) The *libretto* is ambiguous towards gender—each one of the characters may be man or woman (they can, inclusively, be two women or two men);[13]

13 In the examples in attached DVD, character *Um* was sung by a male voice while character *Outro* was sung by

(3) In scenes 1 from acts I and IV, and scene 4 from act II characters *Um* and *Outro* share the same text—meaning that they speak together as if having the same thought;

(4) The secondary character—*Narrativa*—may be performed by one singer, two singers, or four singers—i.e., it represents an inconsistent character, or group of characters, commenting on the action as if being the narrator or the reader/listener (Fig. 90);

Act:	I		II				III				IV	
Scene:	1	2	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2
Narrativa: number of singers:		**2**	**4**	**1**		**1**	**4**	**1**			**1**	**2**

Fig. 90: Number of singers used in each scene for the character Narrativa.

(5) This character is also of ambiguous gender—it may be male or female and in any combination;

(6) Although in the libretto there is an order by which the characters speak in each scene, no real dialogues happen, and so this order isn't strictly observed;

Note: This point implies that not only the order might be changed, but that the singing parts may in fact overlap.

All these elements were preliminary decisions that considered the *libretto* and the overall form, and how elements should appear throughout the opera. It can be said that this structure is built by the text or, in other words, these decisions were conditioned by musical intentions that in turn were themselves conditioned by what the text pointed to.

xi. *articulating sung text within non-narrative music*

Once the preliminary decisions were made, it was necessary to define how the text would be articulated. Due to the extension of the text, something natural in operatic plays, durations had to be somewhat restricted. Hence, simple and strict rhythms were used, as in *Para Soprano, Trompa, e Piano* (see chapter six), but in combinations that permitted more text to be sung in less time. The main characters' text parts were articulated in three very simple rhythmic formulas (Fig. 91):

(1) syllables articulated by eighth-notes and accented syllable lasting a whole-note;

(2) syllables are articulated in eighth-notes throughout the whole section, accenting up to two syllables per breath;

a female voice.

Note: within a group of words the accented syllable is chosen according to the most relevant word.

(3) syllables are articulated in half-notes throughout the whole section.

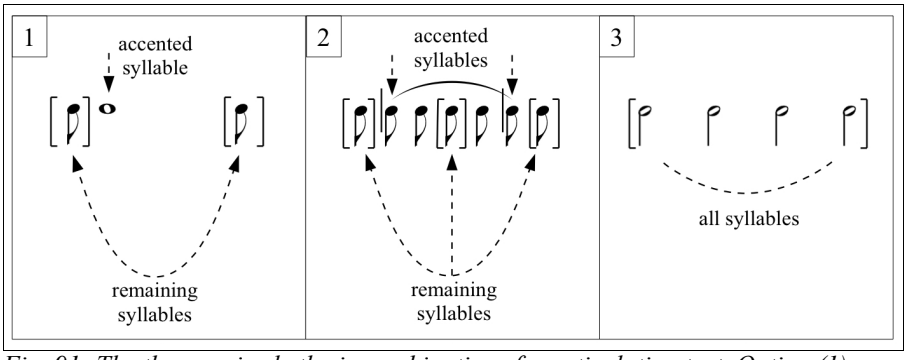


Fig. 91: The three main rhythmic combinations for articulating text. Option (1) extends the duration of one accented syllable; option (2) permits two accented syllables per breath; option (3) ignores syllabic accents.

Any of these three options create an austere, strict, and uniform syllabic articulation that simultaneously avoids expression but maintains understandability. These rhythmic possibilities involve treating the text in three slightly different ways: the sentences are split in meaningful portions to be sung within each breath, but this splitting takes into account which rhythmic option would be applied. Figure 92 demonstrates the text arrangement in three excerpts of *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*:[14]

14 The sentences: (1) "I need you, my half of me" – mobile phone message; "Give all up for you" – Maria Teresa Horta; "Shout into you all words that I never said" – Patrícia Reis; (2) "We seem so small and the world so big" – mobile phone message; "The throat that, only when I silenced, belonged to me again " – António Lobo Antunes; "I would pick myself with my hands and give to you myself" – António Lobo Antunes; "The shop's window showing me, pitiless, a curved silhouette, me" – António Lobo Antunes; "Reality embraces the outer side of my skin" – personal writing; "My flesh's insignificant and atomistic casing" – Jack Kerouac; (3) "She kissed me, my youth, never again, only once it comes" – James Joyce; "We promised ourselves the right to live" – Jack Kerouac; "But life takes us away from life" – personal writing; "All changed, forgotten, the young are old" – James Joyce. (trans. by author).

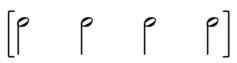
Scene/Part:	**Sentence:**	Rhythmic model:
Act: II **Scene: 2** ***Part: Outro*** ***Section: III***	*pre**ci**so / de **ti** / minha me**ta**de / de **mim***	
	*tro**car** / **tu**do / por **ti** / se for pre**ci**so*	
	*gri**tar** / para **den**tro / de **ti** / todas as pa**la**vras / que **nun**ca / te **dis**se*	
Act: III **Scene: 3** ***Part: Outro*** ***Section: I***	*pare**ce**mos tão pe**que**nos / e o **mun**do tão **gran**de*	
	*a gar**gan**ta / que a**pe**nas ao ca**lar**-me / me pertenceu de **no**vo*	
	*a vi**tri**na de uma **lo**ja / a mos**trar** sem pie**da**de / uma silhueta cur**va**da / eu*	
	*a reali**da**de abraça / o **la**do de **for**a / da minha **pe**le*	
	*o insignifi**can**te / e ato**mís**tico / in**vó**lucro / da minha **car**ne*	
Act: II **Scene: 3** **Part: *Um*** ***Section: I***	*she kissed me / my youth / never again / only once it comes*	
	prometemos / a nós mesmos / o direito / de viver	
	mas a vida / leva-nos / para fora / da vida	
	all changed / forgotten / the young are old	

Fig. 92: Three excerpts prepared for the three different forms of syllabic articulation: slash indicate split points; bold and underlined indicates accented syllable.

In order to maintain the non-dialogical sense of each main character's part, each scene uses only one rhythmic solution. This means that both characters' parts will somewhat mingle with each other and with the overall continuum of non-narrative sound. One can say that the two characters represent only one layer of sung voice within two different layers of meaning. Musically, the characters' parts are static because seemingly similar through the whole scene, and undifferentiated because they share the same rhythmic material.

While the two main characters are close to identical, the secondary character has a disparate role. To conform with this specificity *Narrativa*'s text uses a group of different rhythmic solutions. This reinforces the character's separate role as commenter of the action. Hence, two other solutions for text articulation are used. Being a secondary character, the text is considerably smaller, permitting longer durations (Fig. 93):

(1) syllables articulated by eighth-notes and accented syllable lasting a double-note;
(2) syllables are articulated in whole-notes throughout the whole section, the breaths are shared by two singers, permitting the text to extend beyond breath capacity.

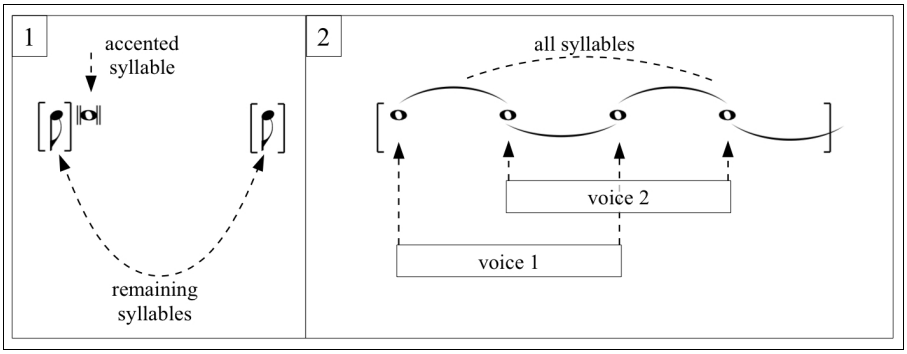


Fig. 93: Two rhythmic alternatives for the character Narrativa.

These rhythmic solutions are closer to the static quality of the instrumental parts. Musically, this makes the secondary character a kind of middle layer between instruments and main characters. While the two principal characters fuse with each other, *Narrativa* merges with the accompanying instrumental layer.

The rhythmic models for text articulation were then positioned through the whole of the opera, scene by scene, considering a balanced distribution of their differences (Fig. 94).[15] This arrangement can be said to be a narrative based compositional decision—in the sense that the overall scheme of events is defined to obtain a certain order of differences. Time is in fact structured with the idea of obtaining a specific sequence of the text's musical articulations. Nevertheless, it must be noticed that these decisions—as several others also regarding elementary music material as pitch and durations—define the conditions for the ten-minute time frame of each scene. During these ten minutes, however, a static atmosphere persists, and the singing characters seem be part of that atmosphere—as a speaking speechlessness. If a narrative progression can be felt from one scene to another, this doesn't change the fact that within each scene the sonic experience stays strongly non-narrative.

15 The attached DVD exemplifies all these rhythmic articulations: I.1—rhythm 1; II.3—rhythm 3; and III.3—rhythms 1 and 2.

Act:	I		II			
Scene:	1	2	1	2	3	4
Um: / **Outro:**	**Rhythm** **(1)** [simultaneous]	**Rhythm** **(2)**		**Rhythm** **(1)**	**Rhythm** **(3)**	pre-recorded spoken voice
Narrativa:		**Rhythm** **(2')** [two voices]	pre-composed piece for four voices	**Rhythm** **(1')**		**Rhythm** **(1')**

Act:	III				IV	
Scene:	1	2	3	4	1	2
Um:		**Rhythm (3)** + **Rhythm (2)** (spoken)		pre-composed piece for clarinet, violin, and electronics	**Rhythm** **(2)** [simultaneous]	
Outro:			**Rhythm (1)** (electronic loop) + **Rhythm (2)**			
Narrativa:	pre-composed piece for four voices	**Rhythm (3)** + **Rhythm (1)**			**Rhythm** **(1')**	**Rhythm** **(2')** [two voices]

Fig. 94: Rhythmic distribution for each character.

xii. *articulating narrative functions within non-narrative music*

In rhythmic distribution table (Fig. 94) it is possible to detect some exceptions to the compositional processes that highlight certain scenes. These are:

(1) in scene II.4 the text for characters *Um* and *Outro* is a spoken recording manipulated electronically (see chapter one);
(2) in scenes II.1, III.1, and III.4 the text is video projected (see chapters four and five);
(3) in scenes I.1 and IV.1 the text is common to both main characters, hence, they sing the same rhythm together and synchronised;
(4) in scenes I.2 and IV.2 the character *Narrativa* is sung by two voices;
(5) in scene III.2 the text is sung in different rhythmic articulations both by characters *Um* and *Narrativa*;
(6) in scene III.3 the text is recorded in real-time and repeated through the scene electronically.

Points (1) and (2) have been already been discussed. Points (3) to (6) require some explanation. Point (3) creates a rare element in this opera, that of obligatory synchronisation —the two main characters sing the same text homo-rhythmically.[16] In fact, it is one of the only parts in the whole opera, besides beginnings and endings, where the singers must stay in sync throughout the scene, keeping the same tempo and following each other. Again, the reason for this compositional decision is in the *libretto* and the fact that the two characters share the same sentences. Since in the remaining scenes the two characters follow individual tempos, this simple musical technique emphasises the only moments where they apparently become one. The only other instance where this happens is in the already mentioned scene II.4 where the characters are represented by a recorded voice speaking for both of them as if in thought.[17]

The other moment where synchronising must happen is referred to in point (4). Here, as previously explained, two voices representing the character *Narrativa* keep a long sustaining note while articulating the text. One singer articulates one syllable in a whole-note, releasing it at the beginning of the next syllable; the second singer then articulates this new syllable in another whole-note, releasing on the next one, and so on (Fig. 95).

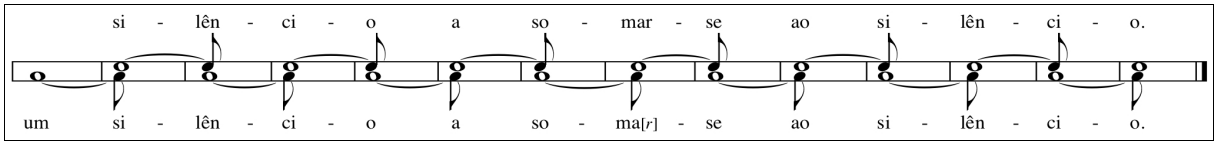


Fig. 95: Excerpt from Narrativa's *part where a whole phrase is articulated in whole-notes (act IV, scene 2).*

Hence, again both singers must stay synchronised with each other. Through this technique the sentences are extended almost beyond comprehensibility. To a certain point, the perception of this element can be compared to the video projection of text that slowly crosses from one side of the screen to the other, in scenes II.1 and III.1. The perceiver must hold on to the information s/he is receiving in order to slowly build the meaningful whole.[18]

Points (5) and (6) are exceptions as to how the sung parts develop throughout a scene. In point (5), both characters *Um* and *Narrativa* use two different text articulating rhythms. Each having their parts divided in tree sections, they mainly use half-note rhythm. However, one of the sections has a different articulation—eighth-note rhythm for *Um*, and whole-note rhythm for *Narrativa*. Two important details should be stressed: (1) *Narrativa* uses the rhythms of the main characters, thus becoming itself a kind of main character; and (2) *Um*'s

16 The attached DVD contains audio examples of scene I.1.
17 The compositional process for scene II.4 is discussed in chapter one.
18 The attached DVD contains audio examples of scene IV.2.

eighth-note section is not pitch sung but rhythmically spoken. The fact that these different elements appear during one scene creates some kind of temporal segmentation—the division of the scene by different rhythmic moments. To avoid narrative decisions within the composition of the scene, the order of its sections is randomly chosen at each presentation. This way, any order of the three sections is possible and in any combination between the singers (Fig. 96).

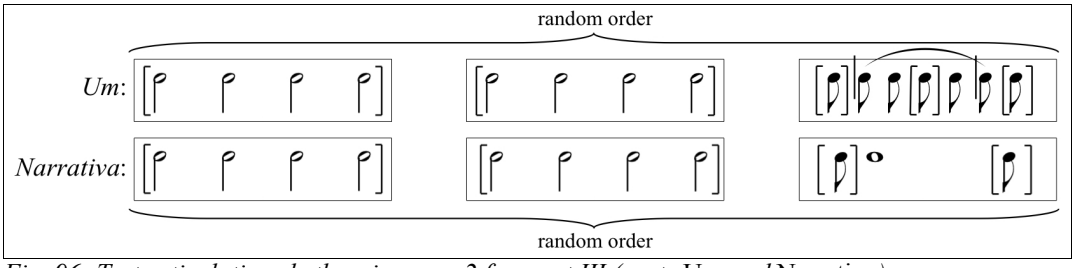


Fig. 96: Text articulating rhythms in scene 2 from act III (parts Um *and* Narrativa*).*

Finally, point (6) refers to scene III.3 where live electronics are used. The only character to appear—*Outro*—has, again, two different text articulating rhythms—whole-notes and eighth-notes. However, in this case, the rhythms are superimposed, producing two layers of sung text, instead of two different temporal sections (Fig. 97).[19]

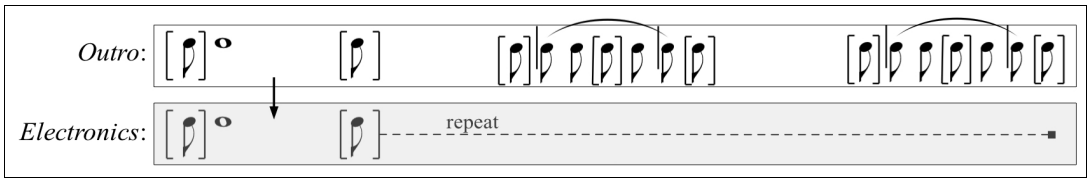


Fig. 97: Text articulating rhythms in scene 3 from act III (part Outro*).*

It should be mentioned that the whole note rhythm is sung only once at the begging of the scene. From then on, it is reproduced by electronics while the singer proceeds through the remaining text in eighth-note rhythm. It all happens in a simple four step procedure:

(1) the singer sings the three text segments of the first section;
(2) these are recorded;
(3) the electronics play the recorded segments in random order;
(4) while this happens, the singer proceeds singing the following sections over his own voice,.

It is important to note that III.2 and III.3 are the only scenes where the musical material is not similar throughout the scenes' duration. This could result in a perception of some kind

19 The attached DVD contains two audio examples of scene III.3.

of progressive activity, or ongoing development. However, whether by randomising the temporal sequence of events, or by superimposing the disparate sonic material in different layers, the presented solutions carefully preserve each of these scenes' static essence.

These exceptional cases have particular narrative functions. They are not narrative within the music but within the dramatic formal plot. The scenes emerge as special elements within the overall work, just as the vocal quartet scenes or the clarinet and violin duet scene, or the randomly chosen scenes where each different instrumental accompaniment appears. Hence, the different formulas for linking language and non-narrative music end up being the tools that design the whole operatic plot. Each of these ten-minute moments structure the whole opera creating an ever changing narrative thread that music had withheld. In fact, it is possible to find specific characteristics that give a specific identity to each scene of the opera. But, as with plain non-narrative music, these details are much more subtle than in overtly expressive music.[20]

20 A detailed formal overview regarding the individuality of each scene within the whole opera will be made in chapter ten.

chapter nine: Mimesis and Diegesis

"sou eu ali, sou tu aqui, sou nós duas. lui c'est moi"[1]

i. *intro*

Regarding how music unfolds through time, what is perceived of its design and what stays as a formal memory of the sonic whole, Fred Maus wrote two fundamental essays which summarise two possible perspectives on this issue: *Music as Drama* (1988), and *Music as Narrative* (1991). It seems implicit, because of their titles and these titles' resemblance, that such perspectives are somehow mutually exclusive, or at least contrasting. The two titles seem to suggest an either/or choice between understanding music as *mimetic*, as a sonic showing, or as *diegetic*, as a sonic telling. What is problematic in Maus's theories is that he considers the term *narrative* as an exclusive feature of the diegetic model. For Maus, a musical narrative must imply a teller, the equivalent to the narrator in literary theory. However, as has been seen (see chapter three), narrative and diegesis are not inevitably linked in contemporary theory. And the term narrative can even appear dissociated from literature and from the concept of the narrator.

Gérard Genette (1980) considers the "opposition between *showing* ('representation' in Todorov's vocabulary) and *telling* ('narration')" as "a resurgence of the Platonic categories of *mimesis* (perfect imitation) and *diegesis* (pure narrative)" (p. 30). These categories would represent "the various ways of representing the speech of characters, and the modes of explicit or implicit presence in the narrative of narrator and reader" (p. 30). From Genette's words, one understands that both concepts of mimesis and diegesis have to do with narrative; they simply imply different modes of approaching this narrative according to its content—the implicit or explicit teller, and the implicit or explicit perceiver. Thus, whether music as drama or music as narrative, both perspectives must imply understanding music as narrative. The former presupposes it *re*-presented, and the latter considers it narrated.[2]

Since, as has also been seen, music lacks a specific signifying system (see chapter two), the ways in which narrative music can either *represent* or *narrate* are necessarily polemic and unclear. Likewise, it might seem obvious that non-narrative music cannot or must not narrate, but it is not so clear whether it cannot be mimetic, or whether the lack of will to communicate

1 [I am me there, I am you here, I am the two of us. He is me. (trans. by author)]

2 It is worth pointing out that Carolyn Abbate's (1989, 1991) reservations towards the use of the term narrative in music, derive essentially from the interpretation of the concept through this latter model, specifically because of music's inability to project the 'voice' of a narrator, thus understanding narrative exclusively as diegesis (see chapter three).

implies necessarily also an absence of mimetic presentation. To clarify this point, it becomes essential to understand the difference between mimesis and diegesis and what is meant when relating these concepts to music. And finally, if such concepts are in fact useful for understanding music, two questions must be raised: (1) if music is diegetic, what does it tell?; and/or (2) if music is mimetic then what does it mime?

In this chapter, it will be seen: (1) how diegesis and mimesis are essentially different regarding its use of language; (2) that music, lacking the fundamental elements of language's referentiality, has to be mimetic in its nature; and (3) how this sonic mimetic act of music has different models, regarding what in fact is being mimed. Finally, it will be seen, (4) that these very concepts of mimesis and diegesis can cross genres—from literature to cinema, to theatre, and to opera—and (5) how music, within these delineated genres, can it too have ambiguous functions as to being mimetic or diegetic.

ii. *language in mimesis and in diegesis*

One of the main differences between mimesis and diegesis seems to be that the two narrative genres have distinct dependencies on language. In fact, when considering the implicit idea of narrator in the diegetic model it becomes difficult to conceive how a mediator between the story and the receiver can operate her/his tellings without the use of some kind of linguistic tool. Language is also present in mimetic genres as is easily perceived in theatrical dialogues, but the dramatic narrative is not exclusively made of dialogues. On stage all elements can be said to deliver the drama. Hence, Gérard enette (1980) distinguishes between what he calls a *narrative of words*—referring to the speech of the characters—and a *narrative of events*—referring to the things that happen in the act and can dispense language (p. 164; Fig 98).

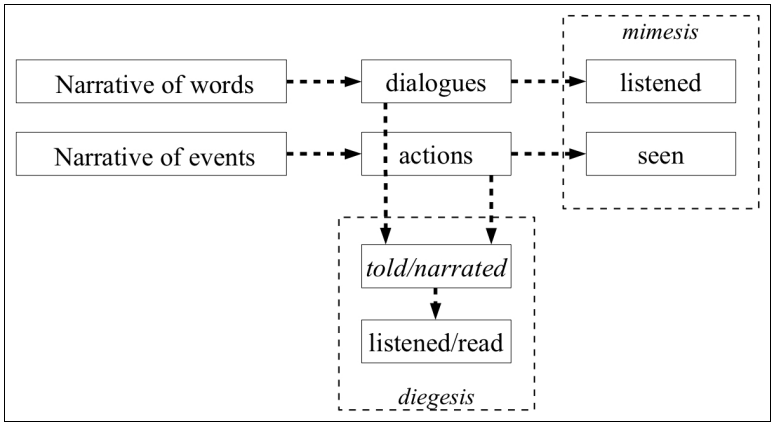


Fig. 98: Narrative of words and narrative of events based on Genette's theory.

However, as is obvious, in a literary text even this *narrative of events* cannot prescind words. A description of an event like: "Stuck on the pain two flies buzzed, stuck" (Joyce, 1937, p. 164), whether filtered by whatever perspective or directly evinced by the invisible and omnipresent narrator, cannot be made without language. In such cases, as Genette (1980) puts it, "'showing' can be only a *way of telling*" (p. 166). Only when a dramatic text is staged, or enacted in any way, can the *narrative of events* renounce language and present itself as pure mimesis. In other words, the mimetic genre, whether written or spoken, when not enacted, tends to fuse with the diegetic mode (pp. 164-169). And the diegetic mode, being 'filtered' by a *teller* and concerned with the *telling*, is essentially linguistic. As Genette puts it, "narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating (p. 164). In sum, despite the mimetic mode not being language dependent, it remains dependent while confined to a literary text. In fact, the mimetic mode becomes diegetic when circumscribed in text, signifying without imitating.

So, true mimesis happens beyond language while diegesis happens within language. The mimetic genre presents elements and events to a perceiver. The diegetic genre relates these elements and events, giving the perspective of s/he who is relating. Mimesis may use language, as when mimed characters speak to each other in a theatrical play, but in these cases it is language itself that is being mimed—language is not telling but being shown. Diegesis uses language to reach another world—the world of the story—while mimesis presents language from within that world—from within the story (Fig. 99).

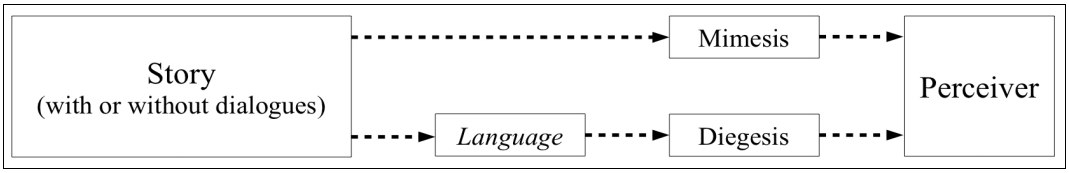


Fig. 99: Language as a necessary condition for diegesis.

iii. *mimesis*

Since music cannot have language's specificity, it seems more plausible to speak of music as a mimetic act. If nothing specific is being said, then music cannot be telling anything specific. This means that music cannot be a diegetic genre. Even when a character in a play is playing an instrument, its music has a diegetic function—because it belongs to the story—but it is not in itself diegetic—because it is not telling anything specific. Music's lack of specific referentiality makes it incompatible with the linguistic dependency of the diegetic mode.

Gérard Genette's (1980) idea that language is specific to diegesis—a narrative of words—and contrary to mimesis—a narrative of events—finds support in Merlin Donald's theories. This psychologist and cognitive neuroscientist considers mimesis to be "the ability to produce conscious, self-initiated, representational acts that are intentional but not linguistic" (cited in Mithen, 2006, p. 167). For Donald, mimesis is a pre-linguistic form of human communication. Steven Mithen (2006) emphasis that it is the fact that such system is not symbolic that makes it non-linguistic (p. 169). This means that the relation between the representation and that which is represented is not codified but direct. To build a story, mimesis has to present it as happening before the perceiver.

However, what is being presented in mimesis is not the real thing, and the perceiver knows it. Mimesis is mimesis because it presents itself as such—i.e., it is understood as a representation and not as real life. A man walking by in the street is not a mimetic act, but a man crossing the stage as if walking by in the street is. Hence, if applied to sound, mimesis involves the sonic *re-presentation* of elements and, necessarily, this imitation must be done through other elements besides the ones which are mimed—to ring a doorbell is not a mimetic act, but the expression of the sound '*ring*' is (Fig. 100).[3]

3 Such case is actually an onomatopoeia, since the mimed sound became a word, thus subjected to tendentiously arbitrary grammatical rules of the language.

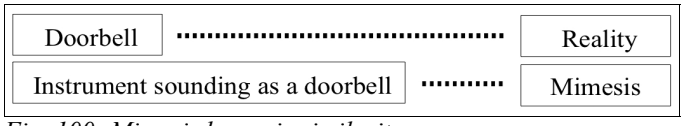


Fig. 100: Mimesis by sonic similarity.

But the very sound of a door bell can be understood as a mimetic act. If again the door is on stage as a theatrical prop, it will be understood as mimetic, even though it is a real door. And its sound will also be considered mimetic, even if it is a real doorbell ringing. This points to all displaced elements that act as if being what they are—a man walking by is really a man walking by, although he is not in the street; and a door on stage is really a door, although not in a truly functional way (Fig. 101).

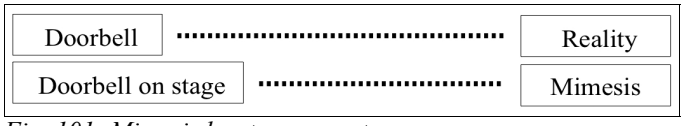


Fig. 101: Mimesis by stage expectancy.

This notion can be paralleled with Muray Schafer's (1994) concept of *schizophonia*—"the split between an original sound and its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction" conveying "the same sense of aberration and drama" as the word schizophrenia (pp. 90-91). The acceptance of this displacement makes it perceivable as a mimetic act. By framing acts within a stage, a kind of contract with the audience is assumed: that which is observed or heard is theatrical and therefore mimetic. Taking this point to an extreme, one can construct an idea of sonic displacement as a dramatic mimesis, where, for example, both the reproduction of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in an apartment in Lisbon, or the playing of field recordings from Lisbon's streets in the Berlin Philharmonic's concert hall could be considered as instances of that mimetic act.

It is also important to mention that with the help of verbal language, or gestural clearness, even that which is not easily assumed as mimetic may become so: any odd and decontextualised sound can serve as mimetic of a doorbell ring if previous to its sound one sees a clear gesture ringing the doorbell or if the character simply states that he is pressing the doorbell. The assumption of the mimetic act takes the audience to find coherence between sound and stage action. Hence all heard sounds framed within the mimetic act are also perceived as mimetic, even if they don't conform that easily to what is happening on stage (Fig. 102).[4]

4 This point was essential for the composition of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* and

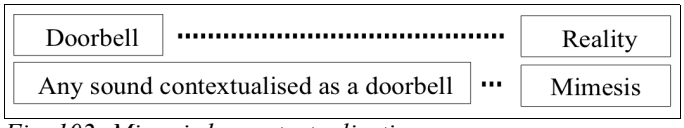


Fig. 102: Mimesis by contextualisation.

iv. *sound mimesis*

In his book on the origins of language and music, Steven Mithen (2006) refers to another fundamental aspect of sonic mimesis: that of "sound synaesthesia" (p. 170). He considers this feature as the mapping of specific characteristics of objects into sound. It implies the concept of sonic representation of non sonic objects, or of its features, or of its events. An example is when, for instance, "sounds are the product of physical gestures made by tongue and lips, which mimic the size of the object being named" (p. 170). This way, high pitched sounds tend to be associated with smaller sizes than low pitched sounds because the the mouth, tongue and lips are positioned to become 'smaller' and inevitably produce higher pitches. One can easily think of other possibilities: like fast tongue movements to represent speed; or again high and low pitches to represent tension and release, relating to the actual physical tension necessary to vocally produce those pitches. Independently of the possibilities, what remains fundamental in such concept is that the non sonic world can be somewhat represented sonically and, therefore, sound mimesis isn't limited to the imitation of sounds.

Hence, the sonic representation of extra-musical elements can be either a direct mimesis of an object—*isosonorous*[5]—or a mimetic analogy to the significance of an object which is itself soundless—*isomorphic*. To explain such difference, Abbate (1991) establishes, as example, a parallel between the imitation of sounds of footsteps as a straightforward mimesis of that sonic action—the walking—and the much more complex sonic evocation of its related notions—the departure, the travel, or the arrival (p. 33). However, it is clear that these two possibilities of sonic mimesis have different degrees of precision. While the first can be quite clear and exact, as when a piccolo imitates a singing bird, the second is necessarily more ambiguous, and may relate to several different interpretations, as when, not knowing the title of Debussy's *La Mer*, diverging interpretations of its wave-like mimetic movement may

will be discussed in chapter ten.

5 The semiotic principle is that, using Carolyn Abbate's (1991) words, "the musical moment is isosonorous with the object that it signifies" (p. 33).

occur. One can say that the first case establishes a objective similarity, while the second establishes a metaphorical similarity (Fig. 103).

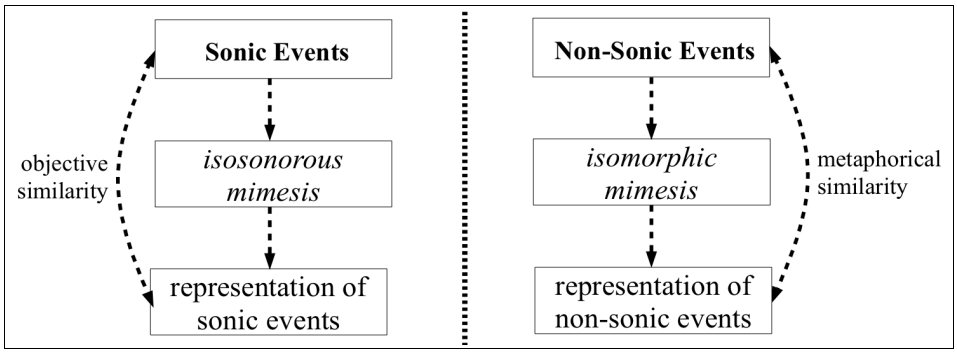


Fig. 103: Objective and metaphorical similarity in sonic mimesis.

It is clear that the isosonorous model has to do with sonic identity. Specific objects have specific sounds and to mime them means calling upon their identity. It, so to say, designates an entity by referring to its sonic identity. The isomorphic model can also characterise objects by relating a specific sound to some notorious feature of the object—a high pitch for a small object, as in Mithen's above described examples—but, on the other hand, isomorphism can deal with temporally dynamic events that, although not specifically sonorous or not sonorous at all, have a formal outline that can be represented sonically. In this case there is no specific identity being mimed. What is mimed is a temporal evolution, an event or a succession of events—i.e., a narrative. And this seems to be the main mimetic model that characterises western music tradition.

v. *musical mimesis*

The concept of mimesis in music is quite polemic. If on one side Theodor Adorno claimed that music is aesthetically autonomous and its materials are self-centred, resembling the real world through this medium and "not through any process of 'imitating the world'" (cited in Beard & Gloag, 2005, p. 16); on the other, Ferrucio Busoni stated that "all arts resources and forms ever aim at one end [… is] the imitation of nature and the interpretation of human feelings" (cited in Weiss, 2008, p. 10). However, whether in favour or against an idea of music as mimetic, both opposing views leave open the debate as to what it means exactly to imitate the world sonically and how this would be, or is accomplished.

This dissertation, having suggested the notions of narrative music as a *wordless speech*, and of non-narrative music as a *speechless sound*, partly proposes how the concepts of

mimesis and diegesis can be approached in music. It could thus be considered that narrative music would mime speech while non-narrative music would merely mime sound. But, actually, when Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990a), remarks that "music is capable of various forms of imitation, and that, among them, it is possible for it to imitate the outward appearance of a literary narrative" (p. 251), one is tempted to suggest that, in such a case, narrative music becomes *a mimesis of a diegesis*—the showing of a telling, so to say. From the same perspective, non-narrative music would then be a pure showing, where what is presented is all that there is to hear, becoming the very concept of mimesis fused with the concept of pure reality.

Not belonging to real life, so to say, music, whether narrative or non-narrative, is a constructed reality within life. Hence, it happens by human invention and from this perspective must be seen as the creation of a sonic entity. Its presentation—its exposure—must function either as a diegetic moment, as telling something, necessarily referring to outside itself, or as a mimetic moment, as showing something that is made to happen as one perceives. When Carolyn Abbate (1989) remarks that "[Paul] Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* is not a retelling of events; it is a depiction of events, happening as we listen" (p. 230), she is not only referring again to the absence of a narrator in music's narrative, but also to music's direct immediacy, to the fact that music only happens as one listens.[6] Therefore, contrary to Adorno's claim, to consider music as mimetic may not necessarily be to consider it as representing outside itself, as *imitating the world*, or as miming a specific reality that must be decoded from its mimetic state. What is being exposed by the mimetic analogy is that music is 'shown'. It is there and, contrary to language, does not refer to another reality besides itself—i.e., it is not diegetic.

vi. *narrative music mimesis*

Since narratives are not specifically sonorous, in the sense that a specific sound cannot be attributed or considered to represent any specific narrative, one must conclude that narrative music functions in an *isomorphic* model (see chapter three). In fact, mimesis in narrative music seems clearly more an abstract representation of dynamism, of opposing

6 For Abbate, here lies the main difference between diegetic and mimetic genres—the fact that the latter cannot distance itself from the reality of the perceiver. However, it should be remembered that the dramatic world, that which is represented by mimesis, is also not itself the reality where the perceiver is. As Karen Jürs-Munsby states, drama is a "closed-off fictional cosmos, the mimetic staging of a fable" (in Lehmann, 2006, p. 3). Hence, Abbate's claim of an absence of distance between mimetic works and its perceivers is not clearly grounded.

contrasts, of transitions between tension and release, and of a sense of continuation throughout theses stages than a question of recognising specific contents. As Anthony Newcomb stresses, "inasmuch as music may be (and is by many listeners) heard as a mimetic and referential metaphor, the mimesis involved is of modes of continuation, of change and potential" (p. 167). From this perspective, narrative mimesis becomes not so much the representation of an external dramatic world, but, more importantly, the mimetic representation of an internal perception of dramatic time and of its unfolding force—what Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990a) refers to as the imitation of "the intonation contour of a narrative" (p. 251; Fig. 104).

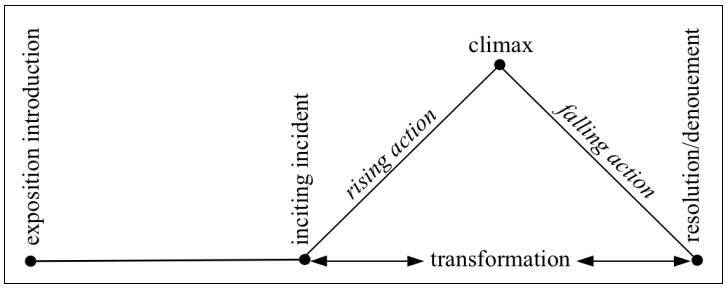


Fig. 104: Graphic of Freytag's (1900) dramatic arch. Narrative music tends to follow this contour both in the overall form, and in each of its rhythmic or melodic units.

[based on image retrieved from http://narrativestructures.wisc.edu/aristotle]

As already stated, Byron Almén (2008) refers to musical narrative as isomorphic to the dramatic dynamics of narrative proper (pp. 44-45; see chapter three). Narrative music can thus be understood as the result of an act of mimesis—the miming of a particular narrative's dynamic. From this perspective, one understands that narrative in music is an abstract element whose specificity needs not to be clarified. In fact, this specificity cannot be clarified, it was never specific to begin with. Rarely a composer ponders a concrete story with the intention of expressing it musically. And when this happens, the verbal text that indeed expresses the story needs somehow to reach the audience—whether as sung lyrics, piece titles, or program notes. Otherwise, the very concrete story that was intended to be expressed will not be perceived. In other words, it will never be the music expressing the concrete story; it will always be the verbal text. Music can merely delineate the story's external form and eventually induce a corresponding emotional state.

What is in fact being mimed is this abstract outline—the *contour*, to use Jean-Jacques Nattiez's word—of a possible narrative. What is not clear, both in Nattiez's and in Almén's concepts is whether this *intonation contour* of the narrative derives from the emotional flux

that is transversal to the narrative events or, as is somehow suggested by the characteristic gestures and phrases of music, from the very oral act of telling that narrative. What has been proposed through this dissertation is that narrative music functions as a mimetic act that mixes both previous possibilities—a *mimetic diegesis*. Narrative music doesn't tell a story. It is not in music's faculties to tell anything by itself. Narrative music exposes a temporal design of a perceived narrative, hence, as told *and* as happening.

vii. *non-narrative music mimesis*

Non-narrative music renounces any temporal development and, hence, cannot and should not be perceived as miming any narrative outline. The very concept of musical *isomorphism*, considering as it does the idea of temporal form is contrary to the notion of non-narrative music. If the unfolding of time within a musical piece avoids any perceptible design, it becomes impossible to conceive a form from that temporal unit. Hence, non-narrative music cannot be understood as isomorphic to any other temporal form, because it has itself no form in the temporal sense of the term. To be sure, a piece may have different sections dividing time in clear units, but, within these blocks, time is not conceived as deriving from one point to another, it gains no form. And even from one block to the other, one cannot perceive a relation that might draw the two elements together as a formal unit.

Non-narrative music must thus be considered either as following the *isosonorous* mimetic model or as avoiding mimesis *tout court*. Fulfilling the first possibility would be all non-narrative music that grounds its aesthetic in replicating or alluding to more or less recognisable real-life sonic atmospheres—from John Cage's indeterminate music that follows life's own unpredictability, to noise music's fascination with all sorts of loud, urban, and industrial sounds. It must be remarked that isosonorous mimesis is a miming of a sonic identity. As referred to above, it replicates or alludes to sound as a recognisable and constant unit and not as a temporally developing event. Hence it is non-narrative by nature.

For the second possibility, for a music that simply avoids any mimeses, it becomes quite difficult to suggest an example. To avoid mimesis means embracing the pure sonic reality. However, as has been seen, even field-recording, where the sound is transported from the natural soundscape to the CD player, can to some extreme be considered as a mimetic act.[7] Even if, for instance, a string quartet simply presents long sustained notes, forcing the

7 In his book, *Varieties of Audio Mimesis: Musical Evocations of Landscape*, Allen Weiss (2008) considers all music as mimetic and proposes a classification model that categorises music through its different mimetic models.

audience to hear nothing but the plane sound of each instrument of the string quartet, just like the above described example of the doorbell, by presenting itself on stage, this string quartet must also be understood as a mimetic act. The simple act o presenting itself is here considered as an act o mimesis, as the creation of an *out-of-place* reality. The only musical work that would not be mimetic would then be 'real' sound in its 'real' place—a sound that is not created for being listened but that is already their; a sound that happens naturally and is not displaced from its origin. Hence, considering exclusively as it does the specific sound of the place and moment in which it occurs, John Cage's *4'33"* might be in fact the only example of purely non-mimetic music (Fig. 105).

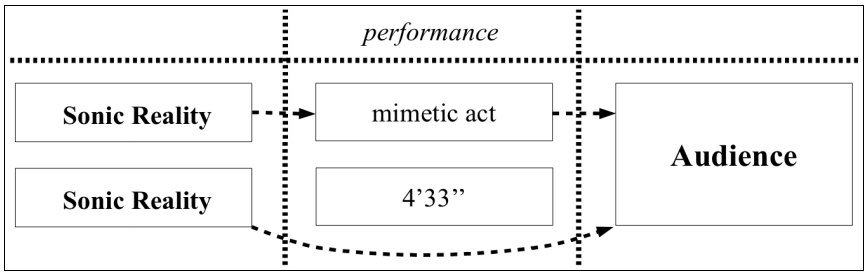


Fig. 105: Performance as a mimetic act.

viii. *showing or telling*

Directly associated with the notion of mimesis is the notion of drama in the theatrical sense.[8] Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) considers drama simply as the combination of mimesis and plot (p. 38). From this point of view, drama happens whenever there is a plot—a string of logicically sequenced events—that is being mimetically enacted—presented as a representation of what is really not there. Such definition does not exclude, by itself, the notion of narrative, nor even the notion of telling. Georg Hegel's concept of drama, however, as explained by Lehmann, is one where "'actual human beings' (the actors) 'design' the 'personae', the masks of the heroes, and portray them 'not in the form of a narrative, but in the actual speech of the actors themselves'" (pp. 44-45). Hence, Hegel considers narrative as belonging fundamentally to the diegetic mode. From his perspective, the concept of narrative as a telling falls apart from drama as a showing. Drama is a showing of events—the mimesis—and narrative is the telling of those events—the diegesis.

8 The term 'drama' although not even close to having the same ambiguity and polemics in theoretical literature as the term 'narrative', has, nevertheless, two different meanings. As Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) remarks, "apparently, the words 'drama' and 'dramatic' in everyday language are associated more with an atmosphere, a sense of heightened excitation, anxiety and uncertainty than with a certain structure of events" (p. 35). In this dissertation one is referring *drama* as staged theatre.

Susan McClary (1997) and Carolyn Abbate (1989) also understand the concepts of drama and narrative in a Hegelian way. Regarding the concept of narrative, McClary remarks:

> if we were to restrict the word to its narrower definitions, then much of what I and others want to call 'narrative' in music would not qualify. Our phenomenon seems closer to the direct presentation of plots in plays or films, in which we rarely have a mediating narrator but in which we experience the dramatic sequence of events as they occur. (McClary, 1997, p. 21)

It is evident in McClary's words—in the way she considers a strict interpretation of the term 'narrative' that distances itself from the concept of drama—the opposing notions of showing and telling. Likewise, Carolyn Abbate's (1989) notion of narrative isn't too distanced from McClary's. She states that "in terms of the Aristotelian distinctions, what we call narrative—novels, stories, myths, and the like—is diegetic, epic poetry and not theatre" (p. 228). In both ideas one finds a clear distinction between the concepts of *showing* and *telling*, where the mimesis and diegesis are clearly framed concepts.

These two concepts can, nevertheless, be perceived from a wider perspective, so to say. It can be understood that the acting of a story can never really be the story itself, and that, no matter how deeply convincing is the staging of that story, the perceiver will always know s/he is being *presented* to it and not *living through* it. The story is thus not there, it is being shown —represented—which can simply mean *being told* by mimesis. So, instead of opposing *telling* to *mimesis*, one can understand the latter as a specific type of the former—a telling by showing (Fig. 106).

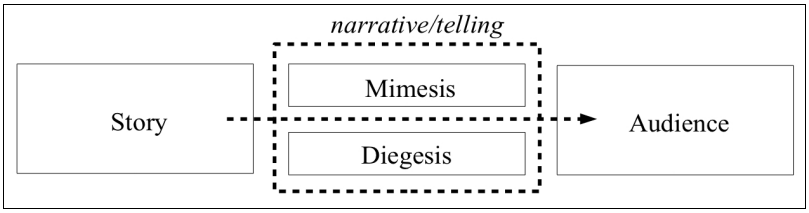


Fig. 106: Story reaches audience through mimesis or diegesis in a process of telling.

When considering music closer to theatrical or filmic presentation, and eventually distanced from narrative, McClary and Abbate seem not to acknowledged that narrative is constantly referred to both in cinema and in theatre studies (Chatman, 1981b). Cinema and theatre are also told stories, using nevertheless other media besides language. Hence, to consider music's temporal unfolding closer to such temporal arts as theatre or film is more

than understandable but does not turn music's narrativity further away. Film and theatre are themselves usually narrative. As Susan Sontag (1966) states, "drama *is* a narrative (i.e., temporal) form that extends itself visually and pictorially upon a stage" (p. 8; my emphasis).

ix. *mimetic and dramatic music*

The exposed conception—i.e., the idea that a narrative music piece replicates sonically the dramatic sequences of tensions and releases, of suspenses and outcomes of a narrative and of its telling, condensing, so to say, the whole plot to the overall duration of the piece, but in an unspecified manner, as an abstract plot of energetic forces—might imply that the more dynamic is the sound sequence through time, the more narrative is the musical work. Abbate alludes to such possibility when she refers to how "the eighteenth-century vogue for mimetic works that depicted plastic images, natural scenes (such as the *Pastoral Symphony*) ceded in the course of the nineteenth century to more dynamic models, to drama and plot" (p. 20). Abbate's idea explains why narrative approaches to music tend to focus on the nineteenth-century repertoire, where in fact a greater diversity in all music elements lends itself to more dramatic interpretations. Byron Almén, however, refers to a different group of repertoire that coincides with the appearance of the dramatic musical genres that were to precede oratorio and opera. He claims that because of the desire to achieve dramatic effect, "narrative organisation begins to appear in music from the sixteenth century onward" (p. 17).

Such chronological dispute is quite unfruitful before determining what is exactly meant by dramatic narrative or simply by musical narrative. Actually, from what has been exposed throughout this dissertation, one can propose that elements of dramatic effect—where the musical motion tends to take the listener through a dynamic curve of rising and then descending tension—can be traced if not in any pre-medieval minimally circumscribed melodic unit or rhythmic phrase, at least in the inflections of medieval plainchant melodies. In fact, to some extent these monodies enact sonically the significance of their texts, highlighting what is considered its moments of tension and release, and, not less important, the moments of tension and release of the speech act itself. Although one can attribute a certain 'static' state of mind throughout these pieces, the truth is that they have a dramaturgical approach in their building towards central points in the text and in their unraveling towards the end. Hence, to a certain point it is possible to postulate that musical narrativity can be found in all western music production that either uses verbal text or is based on its morphological principles—i.e., in practically all western music history up until the twentieth century.

A tragedy of highly contrasting opposites is not needed in order to fulfil a narrative impulse. Although some music pieces may be considered as more dramatic than others, a simple construction of linear melodic motion is enough to trigger the listener's narrative impulse. Hence, almost all western music can be said to be a mimesis of a narrative—i.e., the outcome of a musical motion, whether composed as such or perceived as such—that may have originated simultaneously with the basic human impulse to construct narratives. As Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) stresses, evincing both sides of the mimetic act, "Human sentiment imitates art, as much as, the other way round, art imitates life (p. 37). It is only when music renounces its dualistic character, voluntarily avoiding the tension/release paradigm, that its dramatic and narrative structure seems to disappear completely. But then it becomes questionable whether music can be of any use within any dramatic genre.

x. *diegetic and non-diegetic in mimesis*

Despite the distinctions that have been pointed out, the separation between the concepts of mimesis and diegesis is not completely straightforward. The classifying term *diegetic* is frequently used to refer to the world of the story, as opposed to the world of the teller. This implies that the concept can appear in mimetic genres, as when in theatre the use of music may be considered diegetic—when music actually happens in the story and is heard by the characters—or non-diegetic—when music happens outside the story and, hence, was put there as a manipulative staging option. In such cases, the very concepts of diegesis and mimesis become diffuse, because the staging decisions can be considered as the giving of some kind of perspective and the stage director may then be seen as a *meta-narrator*. So, in mimesis one can classify certain material as diegetic, and other as non-diegetic while never leaving a mimetic genre.

Composed as a preparative work for the present thesis, the soundtrack for *Avus*, a film by the german director Ralph Meiling (in attached DVD), was composed keeping in mind the idea of fusing diegetic and non-diegetic sound in a non-narrative music context. The idea was to work the very context of diegesis and mimesis in order to posteriorly discover parallels with the operatic context. With the exception of spoken dialogue, all sound—from plain music to outdoor sonic ambience, sounds of footsteps, of engines, of handled props, etc...—was artificially created from scratch, through digital synthesis. This permitted the conception of both diegetic and non-diegetic sound as one whole 'musical' score. Through such method, not only the concepts of *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* sounds fuse into a single unity, but the very

concepts of what is *music* and what is *natural sound* become undistinguishable—each element being understood as contributing to the other.

Thus, for instance, when at 00:27:53 teardrops fall into a looking-glass, and their sound is extended into clearly pitched drones, it is not clear what of this is perceived by the characters and what is, so to say, introduced by an invisible narrator. Likewise, in the suspenseful scene at 00:34:50, after dancing to a music that the audience does not hear—what is heard appears to be the sound of the character's own crackling floor—a deep menacing sound builds up only to suddenly disappear when the character covers her ears. These menacing and suspenseful sounds are traditional artefacts in cinema. They both warn the spectator that something may be about to happen, and reveal some interior tension within the character the camera is following. But in this case, the disappearing of the sound synchronised with the character's covering of ears gives the impression that she too was hearing that sound. This element, proceeding a dance scene where the music is absent, makes it appear as if the personage sometimes shares what she listens and sometimes not. Consequently, one questions what is really part of the action, what is happening in the characters inner self, and what is merely an exclusive musical background for the audience (Fig. 107).

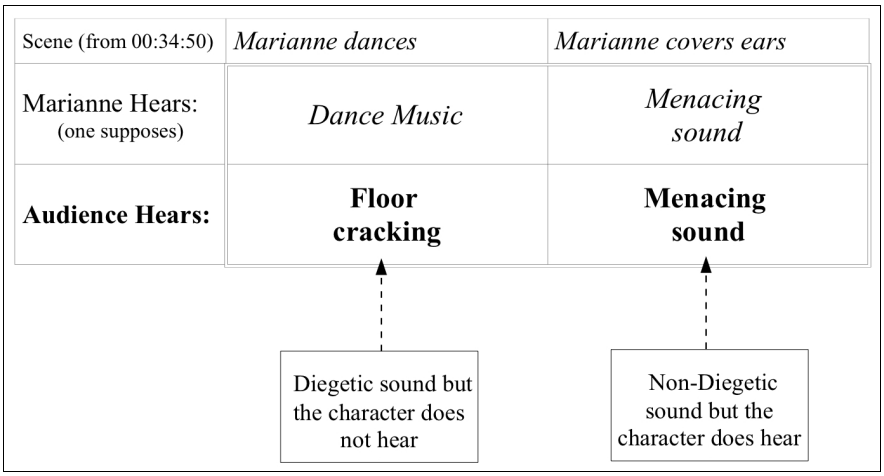


Fig. 107: Progression from diegetic to non-diegetic sound in scene 00:34:50.

Diegetic and non-diegetic sounds cross their frontiers constantly throughout the film. The sonic ambience of one scene may be mistaken for non-diegetic music, and vice-versa. The audience ends up hearing what in all these sonic possibilities was considered most important for the overall composition.

It is important to remark that all this happens within a non-narrative music context. Non-narrative music, by avoiding a temporal design of motion, works within the essence of

sound and not in the patterns that sound may build. The difference between sound as music and sound as environment is, therefore, strongly questioned. Consequently, within soundtracks of film, theatre plays, or in opera, when non-narrative music is used the difference between 'music' and 'sound effect' can it too become diluted. And the composer may use this feature, this dilution as a working tool, composing a sonic work that is simultaneously functional—because diegetic—and musical—because non-diegetic, but leaving the impression that this difference is not really essential.

xi. *diegetic and non-diegetic music in* Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada

The working of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, at least in a clearly delineated form, is not so common in opera as is in cinema, an art that, by controlling precisely what the audience sees, is more able to separate the 'real' world of drama from its manipulative sonic involvement.[9] Alicyn Warren (1989) remarks how what he calls 'realistic' music—"*music occurring in the world of drama*"—and 'non-realistic' music—the music whose sound is only heard by the audience—tend to be clearly separate entities in cinematic use while opera is more inclined to leave such distinction somewhat diffuse (p. 74). This absence of a clear frontier between the sound that comes from outside the drama and that which comes from within it opens up interpretive possibilities. Warren actually defends that cinema could gain with a more operatic treatment of diegetic and non-diegetic sound (p. 74).

With the intention to work the diegetic/non-diegetic dilution in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*, six pieces for 'tape' were made. In some way, these six pieces have a similar function to the instrumental quartets discussed in chapter three—i.e., they accompany the sung parts of the opera in randomly chosen scenes. However two obvious characteristics distinguish these 'tape' pieces from the quartets:

(1) while the quartets use clear pitches, the 'tape' pieces have no clear pitch material;
(2) while each quartet is one single piece with several possible outcomes, the 'tape' pieces are six fixed pieces and each will sound the same every time it is played.

The six pieces are essentially field recordings with specific uniting material:[10]

(1) each recording has a more or less homogeneous and constant sonic atmosphere through its

9 Regarding opera's inevitably unrealistic stagings, Alycin Warren (1989) recalls John Ford's remark "that he did not like to see a man alone, dying of thirst in the desert, with the Philadelphia Orchestra behind him" (p. 74).

10 The attached DVD contains all six field recordings made for the opera.

whole duration;

(2) all recordings last ten minutes and start with a five-second quick fade-in ending with a five-second fade-out;

(3) three recordings were made in public spaces, and three are indoor recordings in private flats;

(4) the choosing of these places was guided by the intention of creating a sonic space for the characters of the opera.

(5) the sonic material is obviously non-narrative: nothing happens beyond the constancy of a specific sonic place.

The *outdoor recordings* present a constant mumble of fragmented human speech captured as people walk by, filtered by the specific acoustics of the place. The *indoor recordings* reveal the waving drone of outdoor traffic that enters within city apartments and is filtered by the room's acoustic properties. Besides the constancy of these sonic atmospheres that makes them easily mixable with the opera's static music, these sounds also link to the *libretto* by contrasting the solitude of indoor human-less sound with the anonymous crowd conversations of the outdoor recordings, a theme that is somewhat transversal throughout the story of the two main characters in the opera.

But the 'tape' pieces also follow a diegetic intention: to place the characters within a specific environment. Hence, these pieces will tend to be perceived as part of the opera's story, as the background sound of wherever the characters are. However, the mingling of this sound with the quartets makes them a kind of a bridge between diegetic and non-diegetic material. The recording of a flux of passing cars filtered by the acoustics of an apartment room can easily blend with the long soft breaths of the clarinet quartet. At the right intensity, as in the film *Avus*, the clarinet quartet can be perceived as diegetic and, likewise, the 'tape' piece can be perceived as musical.

The sung voices too, by holding long notes that may correspond to the instrumental pitches can at some points fade into the overall ambiguity of diegetic and non-diegetic sound. The singing voice in opera is non-diegetic by nature, the characters seem to have no idea that they are singing. However, in *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada,* the proximity between their parts and the instrumental notes, and the fusing of these with the apparently diegetic sound of the 'tape' pieces may distort the frontiers of what is diegetic and what is not —the sung parts may become themselves diegetic. It is this ambiguous and quasi cinematographic effect that is intended (Fig. 108).

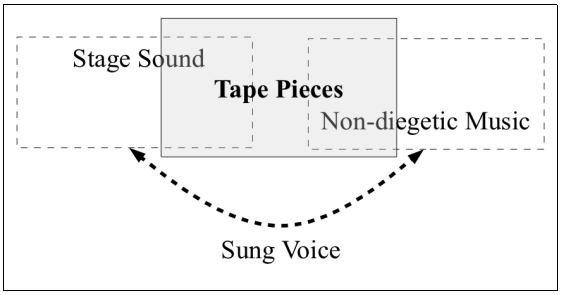


Fig. 108: Binding effect of both tape pieces and sung parts.

xii. *diegetic and non-diegetic video in* Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada

It should be stressed that the *libretto* of the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* is ambiguous as to where the action is taking place. The aleatoric system used to choose where the accompanying pieces should appear conforms with this unclearness. The sound of the 'tape' pieces in whatever scene they appear can always be understood as representing—miming—the natural environmental sound where things are happening. It was related to this idea of working the environment of the scenes within the same layer of importance as when composing the, so to say, opera proper that a group of six ten-minute films were made. The intension was to balance the whole video-graphic element in the opera and at the same time give an image counterpart to the recorded 'tape' pieces. This would mean that the projected films could be also understood both as diegetic or as non-diegetic; i.e., the projected image may or may not be seen by the characters, it may or may not reflect where they may be.[11]

Like the 'tape' recordings, the films are very constrained in their visual material:

(1) all films are made with fixed camera;
(2) all films last exactly ten minutes;
(3) three films are of waving trees and three films are of passing clouds;

The films are strictly non narrative and can be related aesthetically to both the music and the *libretto* of the opera. The *tree films* are slightly slow-motioned and show the passing of time through the windy movement of the trees' leaves. The *cloud films* are slightly fast-motioned and have a similar temporal content by showing the also windy sky-crossing clouds. Both

11 The attached DVD contains all the films that may appear in the opera.

these approaches link with the constancy of the static music, and with the emphatic passing of time and its unimpassioned weight expressed in the characters in the opera.

Two of these six films are to be randomly chosen and symmetrically distributed through two also randomly chosen scenes of the opera (Fig. 109). The fact of being six films provides the possibility of different presentations at each performance, rendering it coherent with the very flexibility of the musical material. The process of random choice is simple:

(1) from A to D one letter is picked;
(2) this letter correspond to two symmetrically related scenes;
(3) these scenes will project the two chance chosen films.

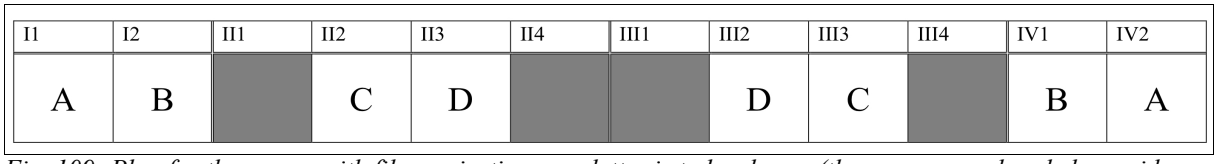


Fig. 109: Plan for the scenes with film projection; one letter is to be chosen (the grey areas already have video 'obligato').

As said, the idea was to have a balanced use of video projection throughout the whole opera. One has seen that three scenes have video-text projection—scenes II.1, III.1, and III.4—and the adaptation of the piece *Time Flies* for scene II.4 (see chapter one) also involves a video '*obligato*'. Hence, it seemed appropriate to have a total of six videos performed at each staging—three 'text projections' and three 'films'. The film for scene II.4—a a ten-minute slightly slow-motioned shot of flying flies—provided one of these films, the chosen films described above are the other two.

Since the projected text is clearly non-diegetic, it would seem that the films proper could be understood as diegetic. However, not even this is clear since no concrete relation is perceptible between what is seen in the video, what is sung by the characters, what is played by the instrumental pieces, and what is heard through the 'tape' pieces—in sum, between all of the structuring layers of the opera.

chapter ten: Non-Narrative Music and Opera

"o baton rodeava as sílabas de uma auréola vermelha"[1]

i. *intro*

Regardless of being recognised as a mixture of several art forms, and despite the ongoing historical dispute on which of these art forms should be prevalent,[2] opera has mainly been an object of study in the field of musicology. In fact, in aesthetic treatises, it is usually referred to as a musical genre (Lindenberger, 1998, p. 110). This somewhat reveals the main role that music occupies in opera and how, although several other art media are involved and essential to an opera's outcome, music is unquestionably its central element.

However, the relative importance of music in opera must not lead to thinking that its essence is not affected by the complementing arts. As in probably all multimedia productions, each artistic strata is contaminated by the others and necessarily becomes different through this process. It goes without saying that opera is, therefore, much more than a musical work. Despite the profitable industry of operatic side-products like audio CDs or libretto booklets, the perception of opera is only made fully complete before the whole staged act, where all arts join together to form this other entity: what Wagner referred to as the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

If one recalls Susan McClary's (1997) claim that narrativity in purely instrumental music can be traced through a timespan of works from Antonio Vivaldi to Gustav Mahler (p. 22; see chapter three), it may be interesting to acknowledge that, as already pointed out, had she named Claudio Monteverdi, a century earlier than Vivaldi, she would have encompassed instrumental narrative music in the same temporal frame of the history of opera —reaching from its first manifestations in the beginning of the seventeenth century, until its decline throughout the beginning of the twentieth century. Such coincidence may tempt one to postulate that narrativity in music may derive from this other artistic entity that is a result from the fusion between music and theatre. In other words, that opera may have opened music to its narrative potential; that narrativity is that otherness that music gains as a piece of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Nevertheless, when Herbert Lindenberger (1998) remarks that "like other theatrical

1 [The lipstick surrounded the syllables with a red halo. (trans. by author)]

2 It is not only the classical conflict between the primacy of text or music in opera history that is here in stake. When referring to opera as a multimedia artistic object, the complexity of such productions can also, as has been noticeable in recent stagings of old and new operas, evince the creative figure of the stage director. This widens the range of the operatic art from its textual content and its sonic essence, to its theatricality and its visual presentation.

styles, opera […] cultivates a forward-moving dramatic development" (p. 252) he is in fact emphasising an essential characteristic that can be found in almost all tonal music contemporary with opera, regardless of it being or not operatic. As has been argued (see chapters five and eight), music's motion is not necessarily derived from a dramatic representation—i.e., a succession of story-like moments causally linked. In fact, music's onward movement seems to be immediately implicit in the very note to note succession, in its speech-like articulation and rhythm. Pierre Boulez (1986) proposes that both the art of words and the art of sounds emerged simultaneously. He defends that "all poetry was originally designed for singing, and the evolution of poetic forms was inseparable from the corresponding musical process" (p. 186). Hence, from this point of view, if an operatic *libretto* seems to fit so well in its music it is not because theatre forced music to become narrative or unveiled its narrative force, but because music had already a long intimate relation with text (Boulez, 1986, pp. 183-198).

In this sense, music's narrativity may be, thus, considered as a result of music's primordial relation to language and not specifically of its use in the operatic context. In other words, opera may have emphasised how music can support or design a dramatic trajectory but its *forward-motion*, the tool that seems to make such trajectory so appealing, was already present in the very idea of melodic phrase, consequently, in almost all western music history, centuries before the concept of opera emerged. The breath-sized phrases and its articulation sequence, framed within short-term-memory timespan, leading to the glueing of discrete sounds into unified, moving gestures; all these are common elements both to language and to western music tradition, and contributed to the emergence of music's narrativity long before this narrativity became useful for supporting literary narratives in the forms of operas, oratorios, or other primordial forms of music theatre.

By what has been exposed, there are two perspectives on music's narrativity that must be understood when regarding its use in opera: (1) music's motion, perceived as the linking of the note-to-note sequence in a spoken-word-like configuration, an almost inevitability in western music up to the twentieth century; and (2) music's dramatic plotting, seen as the formal chaining of contrasting sections, their causal relations, and the development from one to the other in something close to a story-like succession. Throughout this dissertation, one has considered the first point as the essential element for music's narrative. It was argued that non-narrative music emerges from the blocking of this foreword linear motion. In this chapter, it will be seen that the formal ordering of musical events in point (2) can also become less

narrative due to the blocking of point (1)'s narrativity—i.e., in non-narrative music. However, this formal ordering that is motionless can still convey, as will be shown, a sense of direction: retrospectively, the listener can instinctively build, in memory, a somewhat narrative sequence of events, and this may support an operatic conception within non-narrative music. This will be discussed at the end of this chapter. First, it becomes necessary to survey the main conceptions and pre-conceptions of what an opera is and how it has evolved throughout its history. The main intention is to understand how some radical approaches to the concept of opera can still fit within its classifying range, provided a sufficiently broad definition is adopted—the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* is one example. This wide definition is fundamental not because these new works intend to be considered part of a specific tradition, but because it is the only way to coherently absorb within one single genre all the diversity resulting from four-hundred years of operatic production.

ii. *opera and human voice*

To begin, one must understand what in fact is meant by opera as a musical genre, and what the concept presupposes. "A genre," as David Beard and Kenneth Gloag (2005) remark, "necessarily constructs a set of codes and expectations and therefore may be understood as something that is imposed upon music by musical cultures […], influencing the way in which music is written" (p. 54). This means that opera, as a genre, limits itself, constructing its own paradigm and influencing not only its perception but also its making. Nevertheless, this does not imply a total crystallisation of the genre. Beard and Gloag stress that, although genres tend to fix a musical practice in its quest for consistency, "this does not take account of the fact that certain features used to determine genre, such as style, technique and form, will change through time" (p. 55). Hence, opera has inevitably changed and evolved, since its first manifestations in the last years of the sixteenth-century, to a point where only very specific features seem to hold a connection with its primordial form. These features end up being those that can define the genre up until the present historical point.

Somewhat unveiling these specific features, Carolyn Abbate (1991) calls attention to the importance of the sung voice in all operatic productions. As she states, "an attraction to opera means an attraction to singers' voices" (p. 10). This primordiality of the human voice seems to be an important operatic characteristic, albeit not an exclusive one. The singing voice, or even spoken voice, with its inevitable text, centres the listener's attention towards itself. Its musical role is a soloist one. Edward Cone (1974) explains that "the voice is

inevitably the most fully human element in any musical texture in which it takes part" (p. 123). In other words, Cone suggests that it is this human essence and the listener's natural affinity to it that assures the relevance of the human voice in the midst of all its instrumental surroundings, in whatever musical context that it may appear.

But the verbal text itself also plays a fundamental role in emphasising the sung voice. It gives the singer an extra layer of meaning that the other instruments cannot carry. It is also through this text that the individuality of the singer, or, better said, of her/his imprinted personage, may be enhanced. This opens the way for the handling of this personage as a theatrical function—as a singing character—and, consequently, gives rise to the operatic genre as one knows it. Such relations—from musical voice to text, from text to theatre—encompass the essential features of opera and may be considered as the only stable ongoing characteristic of the genre, independent of all disparate stylistic, formal, and technical approaches happening throughout its more than four-hundred years of history (Fig. 110).

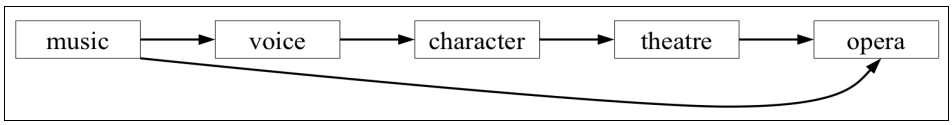


Fig. 110: The emancipation of sung voice into theatrical character as a main element for the emergence of opera.

iii. *the paradigmatic elements of opera*

Simply put, using Bernard Williams (2007) words, "opera is by definition *staged* sung drama." Any other more detailed definition tends to be grounded mainly on the model of some specific work, or group of works, and fails to reach far into the multiplicity of over four centuries of operatic production. A clear concept of opera has been, throughout history, constantly both questioned and moulded by new productions. This has made the genre both extremely diversified in its rich repertoire, and, consequently rather difficult to classify. As the music critic and musicologist Hans Keller said, "[what opera is] depends on the next one, not the last one" (cited in Ashby, 2005, p. 264). Hence, a definition of opera must elude precision and centre on the genre's basic recurring traits.

Between 1987 and 1991, John Cage composed five operas: *Europeras I* to *V*. When seeking to separate all components of the operatic tradition, in order to apply to them the characteristic chance operations of his composing method, Cage ended up unveiling most of

the essential elements of the european opera paradigm.[3] Through his compositional strategy it is possible, almost as a side-effect, to understand what is expected from the genre and which characteristics most clearly define it. Such features embrace both musical and theatrical elements, all of which Cage determined through chance operations. The first two *Europeras* are those that are most complete in terms of production complexity. In these two works, separate sets of instructions were conceived for: (1) the singers as soloists; (2) the singers as choir; (3) the orchestra as accompaniment; (4) the sung text; (5) the specific durations; (6) the stage lights; (7) the stage scenario; (8) the wardrobe; (9) stage action; (10) stage props; (11) the booklet for the audience; and (12) the dancers (Lindenberger, 1998, pp. 240-248). Some of these elements belong to the musical field—points (1) to (3)—and some are theatrical features —points (6) to (10). Others can be considered as shared by both artistic fields—points (4), (5) and (11). Finally, point (12) belongs to dance and, although quite common in several operas, cannot be historically considered as a *sine qua non* feature. If one would add to Cage's instructions the very design of the opera house that would receive such productions—it too a stereotypical paradigm in opera production—one would complete the whole set of paradigms that englobe the general contemporary concept of opera—a fusion of music and theatre in a specifically conceived, city-centred, tendentiously grandiose theatre house.[4] In sum, these decomposed elements, simply confirm Williams's all-embracing definition of opera as *staged sung drama* (Fig. 111).

Music & Theatre	**Music**	**Theatre**
sung text	*singers as soloists*	*stage light*
specific durations	*singers as choir*	*stage scenery*
booklet for audience	*orchestra as accompaniment*	*wardrobe*
		stage action
		stage props
"staged ...	… sung ...	… drama"

Fig. 111: John Cage's decomposed elements of opera used as a defining tool.

3 Cage's work on opera is the result of a series of commissions for staged music, all produced in the last five years of his life. Their titles, *Europeras I* to *V*, demonstrate Cage's reflection on the european tradition of opera in all its paradigms.

4 It is important to notice that this place of performance—the opera house—moulds the works not merely by demanding its conformity with the architectonical specificity of the hall and its stage facilities, but also by imposing its conformity with the expectations of the opera audience. The inevitably expensive productions and the sustainability of such colossal institutions as opera houses demand commercial success even if only within the not so large target audience of culturally prepared opera-goers.

John Cage's operas expose a set of elements that are recurrent in European opera and that have conditioned all intervening elements in operatic productions—from composer to audience, from singers to librettists, from musicians to managers.

iv. *the paradigmatic repertoire of opera*

Although Cage's objective perspective on what are the essential elements of opera may be helpful for an all-embracing definition of the genre, other scholars prefer to focus on stylistic elements that inevitably condition the definition of opera to a paradigmatic repertoire. In fact, the idea that opera is definable through some of its stylistic, formal, and technical features is recurrent in opera musicology. In his guide to twentieth century opera, for example, George Martin (2005) considers how Philip Glass's operas *Akhnaten* and *Satyagraha* are more "operatic" than his previous *Einstein on the Beach* because: (1) they bound scenes together with a tighter narrative—a stylistic element; (2) they have intermissions and a reduced running time—a formal element; (3) they make use of a standard orchestra—a technical element; and (4) they use operatically trained soloists and chorus (i.e., *bel-canto* voices)—another technical element (p. 81).

Arved Ashby (2005) also points to how the thematic material of the opera—the presented subjects and how they are treated—influence his perception of a work as being more or less operatic. In his survey of minimalist opera, Ashby considers John Adams's post modernist approach, using clearer linear plots and adapting his music to its unfolding and to the text's articulations, more appropriate to the operatic canon. Still, Ashby finds that, in Adams's works, the lack of a moral conclusion, a thematic element indispensable in pre-twentieth-century opera, may defy the genre by defying expectations based on the operatic tradition (pp. 260-264). Hence, Ashby adds the very theme and construction of the *libretto* to the list of paradigmatic elements to expect from opera, and, not less relevant, considers the musical style—its conformity with that stereotypical *libretto*—as an important issue for rendering a work operatic (Fig. 112).

Technical issues	Style issues
bel-canto voice	tight narrative
orchestral accompaniment	standardised lengths
neat syllabic articulation of text	story-like themes
tight music/text relation	moral conclusion

Fig. 112: Technical and stylistic elements as possible defining tools.

Regardless of these more specific intuitions of how opera should be or should evolve, it must be questioned whether such technicalities can in fact limit a genre and its classification. What the thematic material of new opera tends to reflect—whether in the *libretto*, whether in the music—is the evolution of the thematic material in theatre and in music proper. Likewise, the technical evolution of the singing voice in art music, eventually distancing itself from *bel-canto* practices, simply reflects how the singing voice has evolved with the advances of sound amplifying technology, and should not be a defining criteria for a genre that has produced works throughout more than four-hundred years.

It should be remarked that, according to these technical and stylistic definitions, non-narrative music would be, in whatever case, totally unfit for opera; and any *staged sung drama* using non-narrative music could not be considered an opera. Remembering Beard and Gloag's (2005) above stated considerations on the concept of genre, to consider these changing elements as less operatic would be to force a divorce between the two major artistic fields that created opera in the first place and, most importantly, to separate opera production from its contemporaneity—from the ongoing progression of technique and style.

v. *non-paradigmatic opera*

In fact, all these derivations from the operatic norm should be, and are often, considered as sub-genres, representing the multiplicity of opera's possible outcomes. Stanley Sadie (1980) stresses how thematic evolution in opera's history—from mythology to mundane realism—hasn't affected the concept of opera in its general perspective and merely has tended to demarcate sub-divisions of a genre. These sub-classifications permit scholars to group works that share certain specific contents (p. 547). Howard Brown (2007), on his part, calls attention to the fact that the term opera is already a sum up of multiple terms—*opera cenica*, *opera regia*, *favola*, *tragedia musicale*, *opera tragicomica musicale*, *dramma musicale*,

dramma per musica, among others—in use during the seventeenth century, each one emphasising certain specificities but still sharing one basic trait: "a drama in which the actors and actresses sing some or all of their parts."[5] Finally, Lindenberger (1998) demonstrates how even in situations where the formal and stylistic paradigm was voluntarily avoided, as with Richard Wagner's (1893; first published in 1852) strong opposition to the operatic genre in the middle of the nineteenth-century, demanding a new art form to replace it—the *through-composed* and symphonically consistent *music-drama*—even so, the same globalising term seems to absorb these revolutions integrating them in its tradition (p. 116). To prove Lindenberger's point, Wagner's works are today an indispensable part in each new season of western opera houses, side by side with the very works he condemned. As Lindenberger states, emphasising the only recurrent feature in the operatic genre: "the term 'opera' has maintained its hold for fully four centuries over a wide spectrum of works that have in common merely the fact that they enact a play by means of instrumentally accompanied song" (p. 129).

From this perspective, non-narrative music opera can be considered as a derivation from the main genre, in the sense that it avoids several traits that can be found in a large group of previous repertoire. If it could be considered as a sub genre it would inevitably depend on the amount of non-narrative music operas produced and its consistency. Sub-genres are useful to group several works that share unifying characteristics. Other disperse production will always have to be treated as a deviation from the genre's norm even if unquestionably part of that genre. It must be stressed that, if for some strange reason all operatic production from now on would avoid musical narrativity, in four-hundred years, using the same stylistic definitions, it would be the narrative repertoire that would start to be questioned as opera.

vi. *new paradigms, new stories*

Throughout the twentieth century, both in theatre and in opera, one recognises a shifting of the main thematic concerns. Themes that centre more an more on the loneliness of the individual and her/his interior journey, instead of the grand epic and heroic collective narratives, seem to have become the new paradigms (Grabócz, 2013, p. 102). This can be seen as the decaying of narrative's moving force. To focus on the character's sonic perspective, on

5 Being a genre centred on the human voice, it is only natural that the main subdivisions of the opera genre have to do with either the way the voice is used or the way the text is put to it. The use of *recitativo* or the plain use of spoken text, for instance, have been used as criteria for such stylistic subdivisions (Williams, 2007).

what goes on in her/his mind, is to follow a psychological narrative rather than the outside action—the musical material tends to put the audience within the inner world of the characters, their state of mind and their conflicting self. This aesthetic trait has slowly become a new operatic paradigm, paralleling with a similar shift in twentieth-century theatre towards psychological dramas, increasingly centred on only one character (Lehmann, 2006, pp. 46-67). This has led to an absence of real action in the traditional dramatic sense and, consequently, to the absence of drama proper. What slowly comes into focus is the less heroic adventure of living, of going through life. As Paul Griffiths (1980) stresses regarding Arnold Schoenberg's one character operatic monologue from 1909, *Erwartung*, "action is abandoned in favour of a study of volatile states of mind (p. 604).

One can also postulate that this focus on the characters' inner life, with a consequent abandonment of concrete dialogues and discussions, will tend to lead language into a point of near abstraction—to language as thought (Kristeva, 1969, p. 20; see chapter eight). And this shift towards inner language may have been the embryo for non-linearity and non-narrativity in temporal arts. Non-linear works tend to represent a flux of inconstant and unrelated ideas, replicating the multiplicity and conflicting nature of human inner-thought as opposed to neatly-structured language-based temporally-unfolding events; non-narrative works tend to focus on *de-languaged* static and contemplative states of mind.

Márta Grabócz (2013) refers to this thematic shift in theatre and in opera, and to its consequent narrative blocking. She notes how some opera and theatre music has avoided narrativity and drama, in what can be seen as an aesthetic parallel to some recent literary currents. She states:

> Close readings of texts drawn from contemporary scenic works of music reveal the near systematic presence of mythological beings accompanied not by a dramaturgy or by a traditional narrative or dramatic-narrative structure, but by juxtaposition or addition of repetitive states, similar phrases, and reiterated stages. (Grabócz. 2013, p. 102)

This sabotage of narrative threads signifies a paradigmatic change in the very concept of story, of what there is to tell, and what it means to do it. These new stories, or these absences of story, appear now as new themes for theatrical manifestations and of operatic productions.[6] In general, what is experienced through these works is either a fragmented and disperse

6 Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) remarks that new theatre seems to envision text more as sound than as meaning and to arrange "the compositional and formal structure of language as a soundscape" (p. 35). Within this concept it is clear that, in new theatre, traditional narrative is either absent or tends to become superfluous.

narrative, or simply a freezing of narrative's classical ongoing motion altogether—i.e.: non-narrativity. However, it should be stressed that what is at stake now is not how music should fit into these non-stories, or how stories should adapt to new music. What is naturally happening is a shift in the whole aesthetic paradigm, a shift of what an opera expresses both in its musical, its literary, and its scenic content. As has been proposed in this dissertation, much music has already become less- or non-narrative. The aesthetic shift has been happening simultaneously in all arts.

vii. *the text and the music*

The mixing of different arts is always a technically problematic issue, even when these arts share similar aesthetic paradigms. Elements from each artistic fields need to be, so to say, accommodated to each other. In opera, one might say that the main issue is how music and literary text articulate with each other, creating an interrelated net of meanings.[7] Throughout the history of the genre, composers and librettists have found different and sometimes opposing solutions to these problems. Bernard Williams (2007) exemplifies how Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi, having lived during the same historical period, proposed disparate ways of handling the roles of text and music in opera composition. In Verdi's work, music mimes the *outer world*, enhancing happening events and the plot in general. This means that what is going on on stage is somewhat commented by the music: as mimesis not merely of what one sees but of what it represents in the overall story, pointing to other past or future moments, or revealing its dramatic intentionality. Contrarily, Wagner's music refers to the characters' *inner world*. The music reveals the tensions and conflicts felt by the personages. The audience is, so to say, submerged into their ungraspable thoughts, and the drama becomes like a journey through their changing psychological states (Fig. 113).

7 It is important to note that, just as the musicality of language contributes to the overall meaning of the verbal text (Mithen, 2006, p. 15), so do all stage elements in an opera manipulate the final significance of the production. Therefore, it is not exclusively music that alters and/or deepens the audience's perception of the text, but the whole range of stimuli arriving from the stage. The conscience of the visual elements' manipulative force within the operatic context has in fact empowered throughout the twentieth century, as Lindenberger (1998) remarks, the role of the stage director over that of the librettist (p. 130).

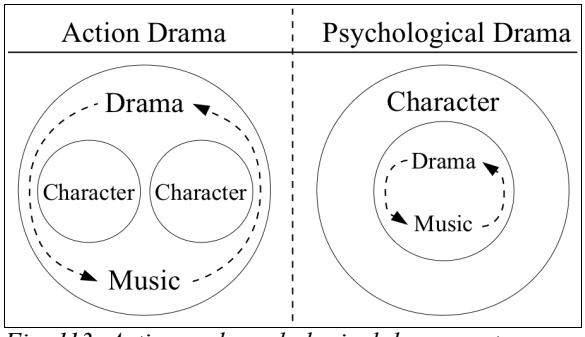


Fig. 113: Action and psychological drama as two different models of thematic focus in opera.

Wagner's and Verdi's musical approaches to the verbal text exemplify how, in overlapping text and music, it is music that seems to have the last 'word'. Edward T. Cone emphasises this fact when referring to the importance of the composer in the operatic chain of production. He states:

> In any opera, we may find that the musical and the verbal messages seem to reinforce or to contradict each other; but whether the one or the other, we must always rely on the music as our guide toward an understanding of the composer's conception of the text. It is this conception, not the bare text itself, that is authoritative in defining the ultimate meaning of the work. (cited in Kerman, 1988, p. xv)

The verbal text can be seen as delivering the referential meaning while music manipulates its emotional content. As Williams (2007) stresses, "perhaps the single most powerful resource of opera as a dramatic form is its capacity to use musical means not only to advance the action in time, but to deepen it."

Nevertheless, this emotional side can in fact interfere with the objective meaning. Steven Mithen (2006), while studying the common elements between language and music, remarked how the 'musical' side of language is extremely effective in manipulating the sense of what is being communicated. Considering that "emotional expression is more central to music than to language," he refers to how, listening "to the song-like cry of a mother who has lost her child, [… one] can more easily appreciate her grief than if she simply tells […] that her child has died and that she feels distraught" (p. 24). It is this ability to interfere with the objectivity of verbal text or even to replace it, that makes music the most central element in the operatic production. Pierre Boulez (1986) in fact suggests that, because of the "given conventions" of the operatic genre, where the audience "knows roughly what will happen to the chief characters," the "word-by-word understanding of the text no longer serves any real

purpose," it is the music that has the main role (p. 190). He summarises: "Once in possession of the necessary dramatic information, music has the right to make its own static commentary, in which words lose their capital importance as bearers of information" (p. 190).

This feature is essential to understand a possible role of non-narrative music in opera. Non-narrative music's motionless quality may be unusable to project ongoing motion but it may surely comment the ongoing events on stage, allowing the audience to build a wider idea of their nature, and, inclusively, changing or conditioning their meaning. But, most importantly, when the very action on stage tends to slow down to near static presentation, following the new theatrical paradigms mentioned above, then non-narrative music becomes, more than a sonic comment, an essential part of the whole meaningful work.

viii. *opera questioned*

In some recent operas, the absence of a clear narrative thread, or its complete erasure, has been considered not as a new aesthetic proposal but as a refusal of the operatic paradigm altogether. Arved Ashby (2005) considers Bob Wilson/Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* as an example of this operatic refusal. Comparing with Glass's later opera *Satyagraha*, Ashby remarks how the use of a more traditional narrative plot in the latter is crucial to its "opera-ness" (p. 232), and how the lack of an understandable narrative in the former purposely threatens the very concept of opera. He states that it is only through Wilson's posterior success that "opera has become reconciled to *Einstein on the Beach* rather that the other way round" (pp. 265-266). This means that the work became an opera through its slow acceptance in the repertoire of opera houses, despite it not really being, according to Ashby, an opera. The existence or not of a traditionally built story, plot, and narrative becomes, therefore, from Ashby's perspective, a criterion for the definition of opera, for its *opera-ness*.

Herbert Lindenberger seems to concur with Ashby when stating that

> With its refusal to develop a narrative, its conspicuous separation of the music from the words and actions going on, its use of an electronic synthesiser in place of traditional instruments, *Einstein* [*on the Beach*] still seems one of the more radical challenges to traditional opera mounted by an American. (Lindenberger, 1998, p. 260)

Despite considering other elements as contradicting the operatic cannon—the use of electronic instruments, for instance—Lindenberger also evokes narrative as an essential

feature for opera's definition. Such issue is again discussed when Lindenberger analyses John Cage's *Europeras* and their impact on the crystallised concept of opera. He states that

> Among recent experimentations with operatic form, only Steve Reich's multimedia *The Cave*, which eschews narrative even more resolutely than *Einstein on the Beach* and utilises the sort of nonvibrato voice that preceded the invention of opera, questions the aesthetics of opera in a manner commensurate with Cage's challenge. (Lindenberger, 1998, p. 260)

Independently of Cage's radical approach that necessarily poses several questions as to what opera really is, it is interesting that Lindenberger should consider Reich's narrative treatment, or even his choice of *nonvibrato* voice technique as more threatening to the concept of opera than other non-conforming elements, quite distant from the operatic paradigm, that Reich uses systematically in this work—for instance, the absence of any real character on stage, and the constant and imposing use of video projection. May it be that narrative conventions and vocal techniques are more important for the operatic perception than basic theatrical conventions?

As remarked at the beginning of this chapter, if these limiting concepts of opera were to be accepted, no opera could be composed using non-narrative music. It would simply fail to fulfil such strict stylistic criteria. These criteria are based on a group of pieces mainly produced in the second half of the nineteenth century that are now the canon of the genre. But, likewise, if one were to base a definition of opera on what were historically the first operatic productions at the beginning of the seventeenth century, if one were to use these first productions as the paradigms of the genre, then much of what is now the main repertoire of western opera houses would not be considered as opera; i.e., the more recent works, the very same ones that are nowadays used as paradigms would simply not conform with such a strict classification. To classify a genre, considering certain works as paradigmatic, limits that genre's evolution and becomes useless in cases like opera, where a long and diversified history has been responsible for profoundly different technical, stylistic, and aesthetic models.

ix. *non-narrative opera*

Instead of considering non-narrative and/or non-dramatic approaches to opera as the death of the genre, Jelena Novak (2008) proposes what seems a more productive perspective. She introduces the concept of *dramatic opera* to refer to that opera that maintains a minimum

of narrative, that is, a trace of a plot that can somehow still be structured and perceived as such by the audience. In other words, *dramatic opera* could be understood as the combination of *dramatic theatre* with dramatic/narrative music (pp. 1-3). All opera that avoids such narrative conventions can then be seen as grounded on *non-dramatic theatre* and non-dramatic/non-narrative music. Based on Hans-Thies Lehmann's influential book, *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), Novak chooses equivalent terms like *postdramatic opera* or *postoperatic opera* to classify these new operatic productions. This option permits regarding opera within what she considers a *postopera* scenario. As Novak puts it: "The world of opera after opera includes theories that consider and legitimise operatic works beyond the historical 'end of opera'" (p. 5). This turning point, this end that begins a new history, is, for Novak, represented by Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, the first *postopera* opera (p. 6).

Novak's perspective legitimates operatic works that confronted with a canonic view of the genre would not fit into it. Her terminology, however, especially the concept of *postopera opera*, although consistent with the concepts of postmodernism and Lyotard's (1984) idea of 'end of history', seems too paradoxical for a clear academical usage—the theorist is left with the awkward function of referring to the existence of something he simultaneously considers no longer existent.[8] Contrarily, terms like *non-narrative* or *post-dramatic* applied to opera, music, or theatre emphasise specific missing features that, although fundamental enough for one to remark their absence in the very terms used for classification, are not considered as *sine qua non* conditions for any of the three genres. These terms were therefore preferred throughout this dissertation and have been recurrently used. What has been defended is a classification of art genres through sufficiently simple and broad concepts that permit these same genres to evolve without constantly falling outside the very frames delimiting this classification. Opera, born out of music and theatre will very probably keep on changing according to these two arts, being affected by their developments and reciprocally stimulating their evolution.

x. *non-narrative music in the opera* Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada

The opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada*, as has been exposed through this dissertation, exemplifies one possible use of strict non-narrative music in an operatic context. It also emphasises how narrative can be understood at different time scales—i.e., how a narrative plot can be built at a formal, long-term memory scale by the juxtaposition of non-

8 A similar discussion is made in chapter seven, regarding the pertinence of the term *non-narrative music*.

narrative units that, avoiding short-term memory time scale, are themselves temporally static. It must be remembered that music is considered non-narrative when it manages to block the listeners' narrative impulse that arises when music is perceived as linearly moving. Hence, if retrospectively, in memory, a listener builds a narrative conception out of a sequence of static music units, this doesn't mean that music failed to be non-narrative[9]—at least not in the sense that the term non-narrative music has been used throughout this dissertation. What it actually means is that, regardless of the music's static nature and consequent non-narrativity, narrative structures can still be conceived beyond the time frame of short-term memory and beyond the time frame of motion.

Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada was composed with this intent. The music is non-narrative because all its elements avoid the traditional melodic and rhythmic progressions that induce causality and motion—from the sung parts and instrumental accompaniment, to the flowing of text in limited rhythmic models and its overlaying in strictly frozen ten-minute scenes. Nevertheless, the overall structure follows what can be considered as a 'dramatic' plan that corresponds to the *libretto*'s symmetrical structure:

(1) the twelve scenes are divided in two parts of six scenes each;
(2) each part has a four-scene central 'story';
(3) each of these four-scene 'stories' is introduced by a vocal quartet scene with text projection ;
(4) each of these stories is concluded by another musically distinct scene—a recorded spoken voice with film projection in the first part, and a instrumental duo with text projection in the second;
(5) the first part starts with a two-scene introduction;
(6) the second part ends with a two-scene conclusion;
(7) these introductory and concluding acts are introduced by a specific scene where the two main characters sing homo-rhythmically;
(8) these same acts are concluded by a scene where the secondary character, through two different singers, sings the text in an extremely long and uninterrupted note.

As can be understood from these eight points, the overall design is tendentiously symmetric, somewhat following a literary narrative arch (Fig. 114).

9 This has been in fact the main issue of this thesis: the conception of a narratively structured opera with a quite strict non-narrative music.

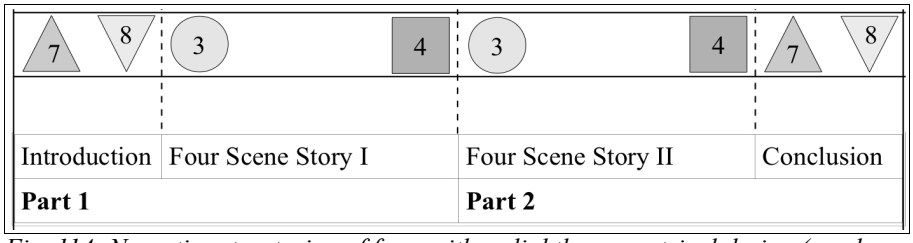


Fig. 114: Narrative structuring of form with a slightly symmetrical design (numbers relate to previous points; symbols indicate the specificity of the scenes).

However, this structure is only felt retrospectively, in memory, since the moment to moment sequence is temporally frozen. The twelve scenes of the opera last ten minutes each, which eliminates any idea of temporal progression. There is nothing in the relationship between the scenes that might lead to perceive this relationship as evolutionary, which eliminates the idea of causality—i.e., the idea that each scene would be a consequence of the previous one. Nevertheless, some care was taken in the ordering of musical elements, in the pursuit of a balanced temporal form. And it is this temporal construction that can be considered, like the *libretto* itself, vaguely narrative.

xi. *indeterminism in the opera* Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada

Another important factor in assuring non-narrativity in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* was its indeterminacy. As already discussed, this opera doesn't have a fixed musical sequence. Despite the fact that the text almost always follows a fixed order,[10] each scene can be substantially different at each new performance or staging. To clarify how all this is articulated in the opera, a sum up of indeterminate elements in the music and in the video projection may be useful:

(1) the singers may be male or female in any combination;
(2) the singers have a group of pitches to choose for each sung section within a scene;
(3) these sections have a time window to start, meaning that singers may start earlier or later at each performance and that their parts possibly overlap in some performances and don't overlap in other performances;
(4) the vocal, the clarinet, and the sine-wave quartets permit each part separately to start at any chosen point within the score, permitting different harmonic outcomes at each performance;

10 The exceptions are: scene II.4, where a recorded voice is heard reciting randomly ordered fragments (see chapter one); and scene III.2, where two characters are free to chose the order of the three sections in their scores (see chapter eight).

(5) the duration of the notes within these quartets and also within the string quartet are determined by rather large time windows;
(6) the projected text may appear in different points of the screen at every new performance;
(7) two films out of six will be projected in chance chosen symmetrical scenes;
(8) two to five 'tape' pieces out of six will be heard in randomly chosen scenes;
(9) all possible combinations of zero, one, two, or four accompanying pieces will be presented at each staging in nine different randomly chosen scenes.

All these points confer to the opera an openness that interferes with the very meaning of the text being sung. Nevertheless, it is point (9)—the fact that a single sung part may be unaccompanied, or merely accompanied by a recording of passing cars heard from inside an apartment room, or accompanied by a string quartet and four sine-waves, or accompanied by any other possibility this point permits—that can make each scene have strikingly different meanings, whether within itself, whether within the whole structural context of the opera.

As seen in chapter nine, these accompanying pieces may sometimes be perceived as diegetic and sometimes as non-diegetic. But, in all cases, because of their appearance within a staged drama, they will be understood as mimetic: i.e., as representing or commenting upon what the singers are singing, and what they are doing. The audience will search for a relationship between heard and seen elements and these will start to contribute to the expressive meaning of the sung parts—a mimetic act whose outcome cannot be predicted, an open operatic function. All that is sound is part of the musical score and emerges from that unreal world that the audience may hear as musical but sees as *being there*. Likewise, all that is seen represents that world and is affected by the musical identity of what is heard. It is through this conflicting relationship between what the listener hears and what the listener sees that an opera, as a multimedia art form, builds its layers for meaningful interpretations. As James Webster (1989) states, "an opera functions in numerous distinct domains; operatic form arises from patternings in these domains which often are not congruent and may even conflict; and these conflicts, far from being defects, are often a primary source of richness and meaning" (p. 44). The openness of such elements merely makes possible different combinations of these domains and, consequently, different interpretations at every new performance (Fig. 115).

sung part	+ nothing			
	+ string quartet			
		+ clarinet quartet		
			+ sine-wave quartet	
				+ 'tape' piece
	+ string quartet	+ clarinet quartet		
	+ string quartet		+ sine-wave quartet	
	+ string quartet			+ 'tape' piece
		+ clarinet quartet	+ sine-wave quartet	
		+ clarinet quartet		+ 'tape' piece
			+ sine-wave quartet	+ 'tape' piece
	+ string quartet	+ clarinet quartet	+ sine-wave quartet	+ 'tape' piece

Fig. 115: List of possible accompanying outcomes for any of the nine open sung parts.

The paradigm of a musical composition that carefully follows every small nuance in the sung verbal text is here avoided by the most radical opposition—music keeps its mimetic function of deepening the reach of what is sung, but it is chance that rules how and where all this is going to happen. Hence, it is not only the overall sonic form of the opera that is an open work, the very meaning of the *libretto* becomes volatile and dependent on what chance will define for the *libretto*'s musical accompaniment.

A final point should be discussed regarding the technical approach to the sung parts. This is another element that may not be considered as strictly determined. There is no reference as to how the singers, whether soloists or secondary characters should use their voice. The intention here is also to leave open the possibility of using different voice styles—from *bel-canto* to plain *non-vibrato*. However, the fact that all the opera is sung in very low intensity—the loudest sung note is *piano* (*p*)—already conditions what is expected from the singer: a very constant and unexpressive articulation of syllabic sequences, as if immune to all sonic and visual atmosphere that may randomly surround her/him. As with all the instrumental parts, the mimetic understanding—the idea that sounds are somewhat commenting the verbal text and the action going on on stage—should happen in the listeners' perception and not in the musicians' intention.

xii. *identity in non-narrative units*

A compositional process based on indeterminate superimposition of different pieces implies the conception of these pieces almost as autonomous works. In fact, all the

accompanying pieces—all the pieces that are not specifically attributed to a specific portion of the *libretto*—can be, and are, understood as individual and autonomous pieces. They can be performed and heard outside the operatic context as a string quartet, a clarinet quartet, a sine-wave quartet, and as field recording pieces.[11] And they can, again, be superimposed on each other forming different pieces, or variations of pieces, to be performed in any music concert context. Even the vocal quartets, with their real-time video projection (see chapter four); the clarinet and violin duo, with live electronics and real-time video projection (see chapter five); and the preparatory study—*Time Flies*—for sine-waves, video, and shuffled recorded voice (see chapter one), can be conceived as independent multimedia works, apt to be shown separated from the opera. From this conception, the opera may be understood as a superimposition and juxtaposition of independent but strongly linked musical unit/pieces.

Actually, although the remaining elements—the soloist sung parts—are naturally related to the *libretto* and, hence, considerably in need of its contextualising structure, each scene in this particular opera has a certain musical autonomy, obtained through some recognisable feature (Fig. 116).

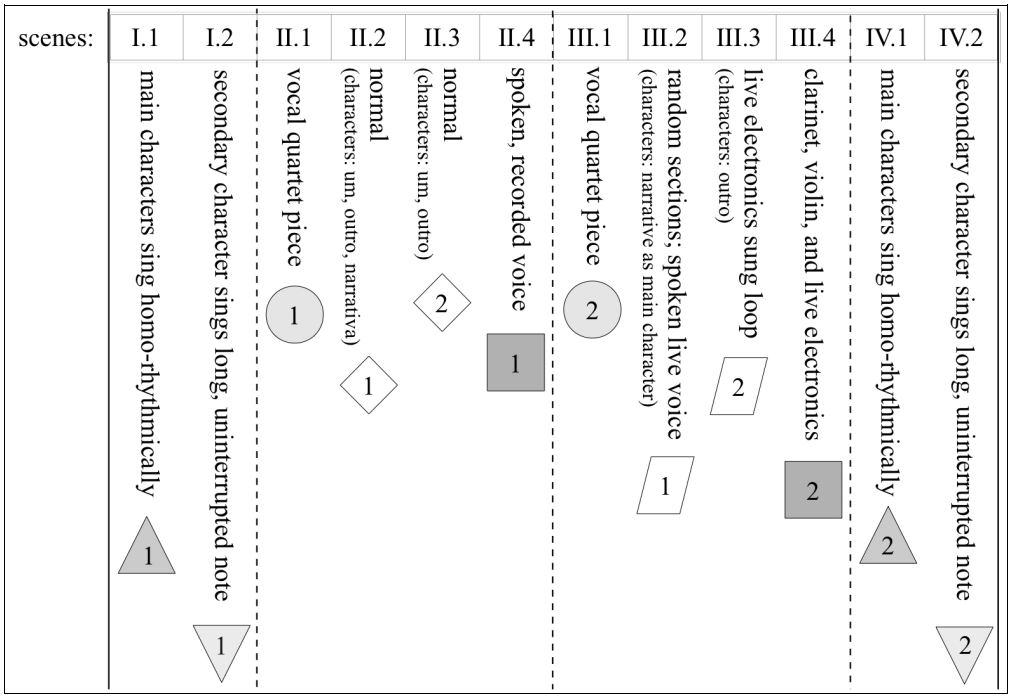


Fig. 116: Map of recognisable features within each scene of the opera Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada.

These features, which are derived from specific non-narrative music techniques and give some identity to each scene, are grouped in pairs, somehow complying with the tendentiously

11 The attached DVD contains a possible outcome of each of these instrumental pieces.

symmetric overall form of the opera. Figure 117 shows how this pairing is processed forming the whole two-hour structure of the opera:

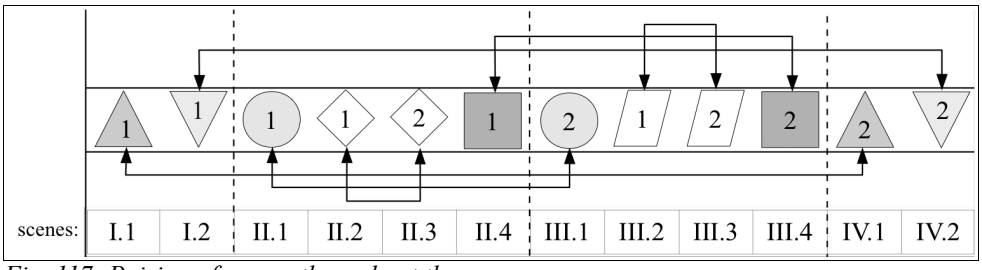


Fig. 117: Pairing of scenes throughout the opera.

It is this different identity of each ten-minute unit that permits the building of a narrative design, of a meaningful order of events—remembering Ferdinand Saussure's (1959) statement, "differences carry signification" (p. 118). But, this meaning, as with any narrative music, remains recognised but intangible.

conclusion: Finale

"niemand muss allein bleiben"[1]

Throughout this dissertation the concept of musical narrative has been directly associated with the perception of musical motion. Oppositely and in consequence, non-narrative music is related to musical stasis—not to specific moments where music seems to stop moving, but to entire musical pieces that thoroughly avoid and block the listener's instinctive perception of motion. The opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* was composed as an objective example of this concept.

The main issue of this compositional study was the use of verbal language whether sung or graphically displayed. It was suggested that verbal language is intrinsically motional, and that this characteristic could be incompatible with static music; in other words, that non-narrative music and verbal language might not be satisfactorily joined. To avoid this issue, composers using non-narrative music tend to fragment language into sonic meaningless portions, conforming this language with the sterile essence of non-narrative music. This is a valid and consistent option. Nevertheless, in order to return language to its canonical function in opera this thesis searched for a more linear use of the verbal text despite the static essence of its music. The material linearity of language—the linearity contained in each sentence, phrase, or word—was not avoided but, instead, faced as the main compositional challenge—i.e., to find ways by which static, non-narrative music could articulate verbal language in a homogeneous way, preserving both an aesthetic concern—non-narrativity—and the basis of the operatic genre—language. It was merely music as a language-like medium that was refused, and not language itself.

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Chapter six showed how non-narrative music derives from a refusal of artificiality that can be traced, to a lesser or greater degree, in almost all recent arts. Naturally, the very concept of opera contradicts this aesthetic ideal. A world where characters sing what they speak, in that otherness that is framed within the stage, cannot aspire to be anti-illusory. Nevertheless, refusing musical gestures, turning music into pure sound, moves music away from illusionistic features of motion and narrativity. And using language in a depurated way,

1 [No one should remain alone . (trans. by author)]

free of emotive manipulation, constrained in the minimal limits of the music that carries it, also makes all perception more objective—the frontier between what is staged and what is real tends to become blurred.

Non-narrative music also questions the framing of a different reality that separates the artistic object from the real world. Chapter seven explained how indeterminate scores tend to dilute this sonic frame, absorbing in some way the sonic environment as part of the work. By using a strongly indeterminate score, the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* also somewhat removes this frontier. What is visually framed on stage becomes sonically unframed. Again, the artificiality of music blends with the listener's reality. The 'tape' pieces, with environmental recordings of people speaking or passing traffic strongly contributes to this effect of fusing the artistic entity with the outside reality (chapter nine).

As seen in chapter one, narrative is an artificial construct. Narratives don't exist previously to one's understanding of them (Smith, 1980, p. 226). They are built by humans either to organise transmission or to organise perception (Bruner, 1991b, p. 4). Opera, as a "staged sung drama" (Williams, 2007), is also an artificiality. It creates a world to show to the spectators this world's happenings. Non-narrative music in opera doesn't free the genre from its artificiality but creates an opening, so to say, in its framing borders, sharing the acoustic space of the audience with that of the characters. What was obtained by freezing rhythm and the perception of time in *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* was a sound that never looses its identity as sound. This sound is music because it suggests an aesthetic appreciation (López, 1998), but it doesn't transform itself into patterns beyond pure sound: sound stays what it is. On the other hand, by preserving verbal text and its meaningfulness, the 'sung sound' transports another world within it and links reality to illusion, to the *world of opera*.

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The compositional process of *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* followed a methodology that ended up reflected in the structure of the dissertation. A group of preparatory studies was composed evincing different elements to be considered in the opera. *Time Flies* for recorded speaking voice, sine-waves, and video demonstrated how linear text could be dealt with in a non-linear way and still either keep its meaning or gain another somewhat similar meaning (chapter one). *Uma História Única* for orchestra and live

electronics showed how the superimposition of independently composed material could produce different musical pieces simply by arranging different combinations of this material (chapter two). The complete soundtrack for the film *Avus* from Ralph Meiling articulates diegetic and non-diegetic sound/music in a borderless way. It demonstrates how the whole sonic environment of a dramatic situation can be perceived both as musical and as pure sound (chapter nine). Finally the study piece *Para Soprano, Trompa, e Piano* exemplified how text could be sung in a syllabic manner while still keeping a strongly static identity (chapter six).

Having dealt with these preliminary issues, the next step was to conceive the *libretto*. Following the conclusions taken from the piece *Time Flies*, the *libretto* was done by structuring strongly diverging texts in such a way that a unified meaning emerged from this almost chaotic mixture (chapter one). This mixture of disparate elements, creating new meanings by changing combinations, was replicated in the composition of the background sound pieces—the instrumental quartets. By providing the main pitch material, these pieces served as the unifying thread throughout the whole opera. They also introduce the main rhythmic material or, shall one say, its absence—an ever-changing sonic continuum (chapter three). This continuum of sound, which is a constant in the opera, was then articulated with text. The vocal quartets for scenes II.1 and III.1, and the duo for clarinet and violin for scene III.4 show how this articulation of text can be done through graphic means without sacrificing the drone-like identity of the pieces. Each of these scenes has its text projected in synch with the sound events, inducing the idea that these sound events are in fact articulating verbal text (chapters four and five, respectively).

The *libretto* was then integrated in the composition as sung text proper. The preservation of the drone-like sound of the instrumental quartets and the non-narrative character of all the music was achieved by the complete abolition of any melodic gesture—the singers maintain a single note throughout long periods of time, somewhat corresponding to the durations of each instrumental part (chapter seven). The syllabic articulation of the text was also fundamental. It was demonstrated how keeping a strict and minimal palette of rhythmic possibilities the sung voices avoid patterns that would induce narrative perception. It was this system and its very restrict variations that kept the sung voices and their articulated text within a non-narrative sonic identity (chapter eight).

Finally, all these elements were joined into a whole structure. Despite the indeterminate character that presides the arrangement of all the twelve scenes of the opera, providing different results for each staging, the structure of the opera will always render a narrative

perception. It was shown that the listener will inevitably build a linear conclusion out of the twelve scene sequence of the opera. This narrative is, however, dependent on the chance elements of the indeterminate score and, ultimately, on the audience's instinct to build it, and not in any manipulative musical material. As Michael Klein (2004) points out, "it is not that music wants to narrate, but that we want to hear music in the ways that we hear narration. We want to hear stories" (pp. 23-24).

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Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada is a static opera where, nevertheless, verbal text is articulated in an ongoing linear way. This opera does not avoid language's intrinsic qualities and functions, nor the appearance of fully identifiable dramatic characters. Although there is no plot, in the dramatic sense of the word, a certain thread of events, a shadow of a story can still be inferred from the *libretto* and from this *libretto's* sung articulation.

Non-narrative music avoids music's communicative essence by refusing music's language-like sonic articulation. Because of this, the listener is confronted with a sonic reality devoid of the artificiality of musical gestures, goal directed rhythmic patterns, and clearly designed melodic lines. As a result, non-narrative music is felt as non-communicative and non-linguistic, and, as a final consequence of this communicative blocking, the very notion of the composer's presence, reaching his audience through his talkative work, is erased.

The opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* demonstrates how, despite the absence of the composer's voice, in the sense used by Edward T. Cone (1974), verbal text can still be sung through *non-narrative* music. And this sung text can emerge as a dramatic character, while its surrounding music can be felt either as commenting that sung text or as coming from within the dramatic character that sings it. In other words, the relation between music and stage characters in the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* does not substantially differ from what happens in western traditional opera.

Hence, what was explored in this thesis was, in some way, the resolution of a conceptual paradox: an opera where characters communicate through a non-communicative music. But, again paradoxically, while in canonical western opera one may have the feeling that the composer is speaking to the listener through his operatic characters, what is hinted at in this study is that, because this music erases the presence of the composer, with non-narrative

music these operatic characters, freed from their omnipresent composer/creator, may finally seem to talk for themselves.

This dissertation strived for a clearer understanding of what non-narrative music is, what this music implies in the acts of composing and listening, and how it could still relate to sung text and an operatic context. Hence, the opera *Tudo Nunca Sempre o Mesmo Diferente Nada* served simultaneously as a point of departure for, as a conclusion to, and as an example of this aesthetic study.

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