Methodological foundations of Eero Tarasti's musical semiotics

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Preface

by Eero Tarasti

Christian Vassilev from the National Music Academy in Sofia, Bulgaria has pursued a substantial contribution to such a new discipline as musical semiotics with his overview and critical examination of my theories in the study of semiotics of music. Yet, it may be good to 'contextualize' still a little bit this approach, since even now we cannot take it as granted that everyone in the field of musicology or semiotics would be aware of what is involved.

I took the liberty to say 'discipline' since after about sixty years' work this particular research deserves that title; the several sessions in major international congresses of both musicology and semiotics are a firm proof for the existence of such an approach.

As we know, there are several possible and alternative notions covering its scope: sign, sense, meaning, signification, because music can express, convey, signify – like Roger Scruton once said – and even represent. One major issue in the history of musical aesthetics in the Western erudite music is, whether music is mere stimulus of our senses in order to bring us pleasure by its sound... or whether it has some kind of contents, psychological

or cultural units to be transmitted. This was the eternal conflict between the absolute music, Brahms and Eduard Hanslick party in the nineteenth century – and its opposed pole in the idea of musical hermeneutics, program music, opera etc. by Liszt and Wagner. Nowadays the controversy may no longer seem so relevant, once it has been shown that the absolute music was after all not so absolute as it was believed and the program music sometimes even more symphonic than its abstract counterparts in the other side. However, with musical semiotics situation becomes even more complicated when it supposes to be the 'universal' science of musical meaning covering also non-European music cultures.

Anyway, when time flows even scholars change and grow into something different than they were at the beginning. Therefore, it is fascinating to read a study like the one by Christian Vassilev, which traces the whole history of one's personal development through several decades. The role of the musical semiotician is problematic in many senses. When you go to a congress of musicology, people say: No, he is not a musicologist, he is a semiotician! And when you go to a convention of semioticians they say: No, he is not a semiotician, he is a musician!

How does one become a musical semiotician? We may ask, similarly to Claude Lévi-Strauss in a chapter from his *Tristes tropiques*, *Comment devient on un ethnologue?*. There are, of course, several avenues to be followed: one and most general is that one is first a linguist and then expands the idea of 'language' into a broader sense even when avoiding the truism of music as a 'universal' language

understood by all. Yet, another option is to first be a cultural researcher, anthropologian, and view music as culture. In its extreme this attitude has led to the idea that we do not need any music itself, no scores, music sheets, because everything is cultural behaviour. Then there are those following the fashions: cognitive scholars, neuroscientists, digital believers, etc. However, and fortunately, there is also one path which is that one starts as a musician and then miraculously – albeit music is certainly non-conceptual (in the sense of Immanuel Kant) – finds the way to scrutinize music by verbal discourse. Most conservatories, having become music universities, have adopted research as one of their goals and would favour this idea. Yet, to study music as a part of humanities in general is very challenging in the conservatory background... Musicians have no time to learn how to write about music.

In any case let us agree that it is very hard to talk about music without music, i.e., both musical competence and performance, which are needed in order to 'generate' musical utterances.

Christian Vassilev opens us very vast landscapes of varieties of musical semiotics in the case of one scholar. However, the hard point is that this scholar is indeed such one who is transforming, developing (hopefully), changing himself all the time in the continuous effort to understand our musical heritages more and more profoundly. In fact, musical semiotics grows from a certain basis, ground and worldview 'organically' in all its phases.

I have sometimes distinguished three phases in my methodological orientations: 1) the Lévi-Straussian period

around the topics of myth and music (1975-1979); 2) the Paris school period under the theories of A. J. Greimas and efforts to renew them and make adaptable to musical facts (1980-2000); 3) existential semiotics i.e. aiming for establishing a new epistemic ground also for music studies on the basis of the so-called continental philosophy in the line of Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Arendt, Jaspers, Marcel, Sartre, de Beauvoir.

This may seem extremely diverse indeed and one may wonder whether any common denominator could be found there, any stable scholarly identity. Nevertheless, I have to answer affirmatively. All has been based upon an education into European culture in its roots in ancient Greek and Latin adopted at early education in Normal Lyceum in Helsinki, and at the same time studies of German philosophy, and even endeavours to translate central texts into one's own mother tongue supposing that only then they were truly assumed and understood! So in the list were Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* and Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, Carnap's *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*... and then later also texts from French like Greimas's *Sémantique structurale*. Seen against this background, the whole development and story of my musical semiotics may seem more coherent and logical. I have never abandoned this ground, but only returned to it. And even when changing the theoretical context rather radically the previous approach has proved to be only a special case in the framework of the new one. It is like Greimas once said in Toronto: you understand, my theory is *englobant*, surrounding, and your theory is *englobé*, surrounded.

The moments Vassilev picks up and foregrounds in my scientific career have been well elucidated and motivated. They start with linguistically based analyses by Nicholas Ruwet who brought the paradigmatic method to music studies (see his analysis of a medieval *Geisslerlied*). Yet, even before him there was Lévi-Strauss with his discovery that a myth, like the story of Oedipus, could be studied like an orchestral score, dividing it into smallest units mythemes, and then considering them in major blocks.

So emerged this method which was later adopted by Jean-Jacques Nattiez. Its advantage was evident in studies of monodic music whose musical substance could be seen at once in the chart of paradigmatic elements of the melody. However, even Nattiez admitted that one cannot use it as a purely 'objective', automatic method because in order to recognize the paradigmatic elements one must have a previous knowledge of the style of the piece; this was evident in his analysis of Debussy's *Syrinx*, for instance. Still, the method is also not semiotic in the proper sense, i.e., dealing with contents. The problem is that as important in the analysis are elements *in absentia,* not manifest in the linear chain of musical signs (I would now say: transcendental!).

Later, the efforts to apply the so-called generative grammars to music tried to find the solution by showing that what was seemingly mere syntagm, as we say, was in fact based upon hierarchy among its entities, revealed by a deep structure.

However, also Peirce's semiotics is relevant, his categories of signs have become part of classical vocabulary in

any semiotics analysis. The quarrels between, say, European Saussure-based semiotic theories and Peirce have become outdated a long time ago (although some semioticians like John Deely still believed in this dichotomy).

I followed the generative course of Greimassian semiotics in my *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (1994), which is so richly and comprehensively presented by Vassilev. Difference with earlier music semiotics was certainly that now the semantics entered strongly, particularly via a new route of modalities, the invention of which was, according to Greimas, the third semiotic revolution. However, my 'generative' model for music was not quite rigorously axiomatic in the sense that only certain levels of the original Greimas model were brought to musical consideration. Moreover, all the illustrations of this theory by different musical pieces and composers from various style periods, were also different, following the musical facts and sense in the music itself; so, it was from Beethoven to Chopin, Liszt to Mussorgsky, from Sibelius to Martinů and Debussy and even minimalism. The effort was to show that musical semiotics covered all style periods.

The approach was sensitive for the context, and therefore I needed an intermediate phase between concrete musical facts and abstract semiotic theories. Therefore, many traditional musicological approaches were called to build the bridge from one area to the other. This explains why Ernst Kurth, L. B. Meyer, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Mieczyslaw Tomaszewski, Erik Tawaststjerna and others were included in the reflection. Even literature was helpful, such as the vision of music by Marcel Proust in his

A la recherche du temps perdu. Later, also topic theory was relevant (Leonard Ratner, Raymond Monelle, Robert S. Hatten).

Then, in the next period, come those thinkers who started as semioticians and structuralists but then turned into what we call postmodernists – Derrida, Foucault and Kristeva. In my own case they prepared the *soi*l for my third phase that of existential semiotics. Albeit in the first place it was a return to my own temporarily 'lost time', namely the continental philosophy of my quite young years. Vassilev has found interesting parallels between Kristeva's distinction of the semiotic, i.e., *khora,* and the symbolic order. This is important since the whole American New Musicology movement accepted semiotics in the Kristevan and not in the Saussurean sense, as a sphere of *khora*, kinetic energy (see for instance Richard Taruskin). Later in my 'zemic' model the categories of *Moi* and *Soi* seem to correspond to *khora* and patriarchal order. Vassilev finds the whole psychoanalytic approach as central and that is certainly true for many semioticians of music. But we distinguish *Moi* and *Soi* as well in the sense of Ricoeur and Fontanille, and it overlaps with Theodor Adorno and his vision of *Ich und Gesellschaft*, which were always in conflict.

Furthermore, Vassilev goes to the narratological phase, which became one line especially in the European music semiotics thanks to the endeavours of Márta Grabocz in France. Finally, we reach the existential study of music which preserves faithfully certain elements from Greimas like the isotopies and modalities, but also launches s lot of

new sign categories like presigns, actsigns, postsigns, pheno- and genosigns, quasisigns, transsigns etc... which are understandable only in the light of the philosophical new theory behind them. Nevertheless, it is helpful for a reader that Vassilev summarizes the results of some most important analyses of existential nature, like when dealing with Schumann's Phantasy in C major.

Let me still add here one aspect: namely, I mostly study only such works which I thoroughly know as a musician and have played and performed as a pianist or chamber musician. The other thing is that I have always wanted to enter into personal contact with creators of something important in science. Thus, gradually large circles of scholars have gathered around me and led into also organisational activities. They have constituted communities of understanding, which are indispensable for a scholar working in a totally new field. Greimas once said to me that it is rare that a scholar is at the same time interested in theoretical thought and organisational issues of learned societies.

Let me stop here, and allow the reader to penetrate into the conceptual jungle of my methodological orientations. And it is good to note that those theories are even now not yet completed, one never knows what happens next. *Människan hon vet aldrig sitt öde*, it is said in Swedish: One never knows one's destiny.

Introduction

Eero Tarasti is among the most important musical semioticians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, who helped establish musical semiotics as an academic discipline worldwide. His work spans several decades, during which some of his ideas have endured, some have changed, and others have become less significant over time. In one respect, however, Tarasti's thought has remained constant throughout every stage of its development: the intention that musical semiotics should rise to the level of an academic field on an equal footing with musicology, if not as something more. The methodological underpinnings of Tarasti's musical semiotics form the premises of a scientific field from which all aspects of music – analytical, historical, cognitive, socio-cultural, etc. – can be studied. Thus, the questions of music's nature and of the adequate methodological tools for its study are posed anew, and in a different key from that of traditional musicology.

The multidisciplinary character of Tarasti's musical semiotics is linked to the discipline's thrust to make its way among the traditional divisions of the sciences of music. Structural semiotics offers a methodological foundation that can, in theory, be applied in some way to all scientific fields that have music as their subject matter. Hence, Tarasti's first fundamental methodological premise

– music is a *sign system*. Only as a sign system among other such systems can music be semiotically investigated. In taking music to be a sign system, the musical semiotician draws on the methodological arsenal of structuralism and all disciplines that use this arsenal – semiotics, linguistics, cognitive science, anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, etc. In addition to a sign system, Tarasti conceives of music as *discourse*, drawing on both linguistic and post-structuralist uses of the term. These two treatments of music in their semiotic and philosophical horizons are the main methodological orientations in Tarasti's musical semiotics. In the present study, the latter's methodological cornerstones are examined in three perspectives: their use by Tarasti himself; their semiotic, philosophical, psychoanalytic or other origins; and their specifically musical semiotic context (use by other musical semioticians).

The multidisciplinary foundations of Tarasti's musical semiotics do not allow for an easy methodological comparison between semiotics and musicology as disciplines dealing with music. Only after the methodological orientations of a musical semiotic system have been revealed can one seek avenues towards a comparative meta-analysis of musical semiotics and traditional musicology. For this reason, this paper does not undertake such a comparison, but is focused on outlining the methodological conditions that make Tarastian musical semiotics possible. Tarasti's conceptual apparatus and methods of musical analysis are examined critically not from the position of traditional musicology, but only from the position of musical semiotics as a scientific field with its own dynamics. Yet, on the

basis of the present study, one could eventually build a critical apparatus which would make a rigorous methodological analysis of musical semiotics from a musicological position possible. This, however, remains beyond the scope of this study.

In his early narrative semiotics, Tarasti reflects on the nature of music as a scientific object in relation to discourse about music. Later, he develops the existential semiotics of music to analyse the musical work as an existential narrative. In his later writings, Tarasti sought to overcome the contradictions underlying the existential narrative of music through the idea of "transcending" definitions that are constitutive of the human being. His diverse analytical efforts give rise to the question whether his legacy can be grasped as a unified whole, for while these efforts are mostly placed within the field of musical semiotics, they are in fact based on different methodological positions. This paper focuses on the analysis of the dynamics of Tarasti's methodology that allows for continuity and unity in the development of his views.

Tarasti's musical semiotics proceeds from semiotic and philosophical methodological points of departure. Semiotically, his theory rests on a mixture of concepts and ideas related to European structuralism – Ferdinand de Saussure, Algirdas Greimas, Roman Jakobson and Umberto Eco – as well as to the semiotics of Charles Peirce. On the musical semiotic plane, he enters into implicit and explicit dialogue with Raymond Monelle, Kofi Agawu, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Robert Hatten, and Nicolas Ruwet. In this context, Tarasti occupies an important place in the

debate surrounding the central question of the nature of musical signification and musical meaning. Further, he makes use of the ideas of musical discourse and discourse *about* music associated with the semiotics of Greimas and Charles Morris, as well as poststructuralist writers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The structure of musical discourse in Tarasti draws on the musical semiotic debate surrounding the coded and uncoded aspects of discourse. Here, thinkers such as Agawu and Monelle, who develop the idea of the musical code as a conventional system of musical rules, play a central role, as do Nattiez and Ruwet, who consider methodologically the conditions for the systematic construction of a discourse about music. In addition, a number of musicologists and music analysts have been regular references in Tarasti's analyses in musicological terms, including Heinrich Schenker, Ernst Kurth, Vincent d'Endy, Boris Assafiev, and others. In his later theory, where the idea of an existential semiotics of music is developed, the psychoanalytic views of Julia Kristeva in the field of literary studies have played a major role, as well as some ideas from the field of biosemiotics, such as those of Jakob von Uexküll.

The intention of this paper is to produce a methodological analysis specifically related to the different stages of Tarasti's work and the trajectory of his ideas. This implies an analysis of three types of sources: Tarasti's own conceptions, the sources of his methodological ideas, and the research on his work. Since such research, especially in light of his methodology, is scarce, the task of the following investigation is complicated in that the first two types

of sources must be read with methodological percipience. This is the main aim of the present text: to form a comprehensive overview of Tarasti's musical semiotics and its rootedness in the fields of the humanities that have served as the basis for the interdisciplinary development of his theory.

Part 1

Semiotic Foundations of Tarasti's Musical Semiotics

Music as a sign system

Semiotic foundations

A basic premise of Tarasti's theory is the idea that music is a sign system (Tarasti 1994: 4). Therefore, before approaching some key notions of Tarastian musical semiotics, the idea of sign system must be examined in its semiotic origins and in its paradigmatic application to music. This idea is fundamental to semiotics. In one of its variants, it originated with the father of European structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, who defined language as "a system of signs"[1] (2011: 16). Another model

[1] Saussure had, of course, verbal language in mind. According to semioticians such as Juri Lotman and Émile Benveniste, verbal language can be considered a primary modelling system of any semiotic system, i.e., as a model for any other sign system. In this sense, the structure of language is transferred to other semiotic systems, for example music (See e.g., Gramigna 2013; Benveniste 1981; Lotman 2012). Greimas and Courtés also note that the analysis of language serves as a prototype for the analysis of other semiotic systems, and linguistics is a model for semiotics as a science: "We must also remember that natural language is not merely defined as a semiotic system (as a language) but is also viewed, explicitly or implicitly, as a model according to which the other semiotic systems can and must be conceived" (1982: 84). The problem of the exemplary nature of language has been widely debated in semiotics, and solutions to this

that is frequently used in musical semiotics, and by Tarasti in particular, is that of the American pragmatist Charles Peirce.

Structural semiotics

For Saussure, the linguistic sign[2] is divided into two interrelated parts, the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*) (2011: 67). The signifier is an acoustic image, for example the word "dog". The other component of the sign is the 'concept', the signified, e.g., the concept of dog. The sign is the relationship between these two components. In Hjelmslev, who worked in the tradition of Saussure, the signifier is treated as the *expression plane* and the signified as the *content plane*. The expression plane consists of phonetic matter, it pertains to sounds and their articulation; the content plane carries a message, it pertains to concepts. The two planes cannot exist independently of each other, but only as functions of the sign (Hjelmslev 1961:

problem have varied. According to other semioticians such as Eco, language is not a "basic" model for semiotics, but "the most powerful semiotic device that man has invented" (1976: 174). The question, however, always pertains to how we classify semiotic systems and signs – whether the criterion is the structure of the linguistic sign, or not.

[2] Hjelmslev observes that this use of the term "sign" differs significantly from the everyday use of the word (1961: 47). According to the classical and widespread view, a sign is a sign of something other than itself. Some road signs are signs for particular localities, clock hands are signs for a particular hour and minute. In Saussure's definition, however, the sign is the totality of the signifier (the hands of the clock) and the signified (the hour).

48–49). According to one classical interpretation, the relation of signifier and signified in Saussure is *arbitrary*: one signified (the concept "dog") can be "represented" by many signifiers ("dog", "Hund", "chien", etc.) (Saussure 2011: 67). Famously, this is partially disproved in postmodern semiotics.

The notion of "sign" as applied to music in a musical semiotic sense is not identical to the same notion in musicology. Musical signs or symbols, as defined and used in musicology and musical analysis, encompass "single" musical signifiers – notes, pauses, articulation signs, ornaments, tempo signifiers. In musical semiotics, however, a sign can be an entire phrase, even an entire musical movement – the first theme of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 ("Waldstein"), for example, can be a sign of heroism; and the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat major, Op. 81 ("Les adieux"), a sign of farewell.[3] The concept of sign in musical semiotics does not originate in the practice of notating music, but rather in the semiotical usage of the term. It is important to underscore this otherwise well-known fact because the interdisciplinary constituted music studies today (still) do not presuppose a universal analytical language to differentiate between

[3] Here we are not talking just about the inscription "Lebewohl" and the meaning of the opening motive, but about the meaning of the entire first movement as a purely musical text (for the inscription in semiotic terms, see Karbusicky 1982. Such an interpretation subordinates to some extent "pure" music to its semantic references. But in semiotic terms this is not seen as an example of programmatic, but of musical signification: a musical text (the entire first movement of the sonata) becomes the signifier by which the signified, the farewell, is signified.

different terminological backgrounds, such as the ones of musicology and musical semiotics. Even within the same field, there are sometimes immense differences in the usage of terms, as pointed out by Jean-Jacques Nattiez.

In Saussure's linguistics, language (*langue*) is the system of rules of a language. *Langue* is "a quantity of necessary conventions which are accepted by the social whole to permit the use of the faculty of *langage* [faculté de langage; trans. "faculty of language"] in the [individual]..." (Saussure 2011: 9). If language is a system of rules, then speech (*parole*) is any act of speaking: "By *Parole* one denotes the act of the individual exercising his faculty by means of the social convention which is *Langue*" (Saussure 2011: 9). Language (as a sign system) and speech are two separate things. The sign system is entirely abstract and contains only the rules for the use of language. Speech is this use itself, which may include various peculiarities of the speaker. The persistent use of certain signs in speech can change the rules of a language.

In the structuralist tradition, the notion of "code" displaces the notion of *langue* and finds wide use in musical semiotics. In semiotics it was introduced by Roman Jakobson[4]. Under the influence of communication theory, Jakobson replaced the *langue-parole* dichotomy with the *code-message* dichotomy. A code predefines the relation between signifier and signified, i.e. the sign.

Every code is historically conditioned. Against the background of historical philologies dealing with the

[4] See Jakobson 1990. For the main theory of communication that influenced semiotics, the Shannon-Weaver model, see Shannon and Weaver 1963.

diachronic study of language – i.e. the study of its origin and development – Saussure proposes to study language in its *synchronicity*, i.e. as a static object (Saussure 2011: 81). Diachronic analysis is associated with the historical development of language, with the changes that occur in it by itself or in its encounter with other linguistic cultures. Diachronic analysis is characteristic of philology. In a sense, Saussure's synchronic analysis marked a breakthrough. It is concerned with the state of the linguistic code at a particular historical moment. The rules of use of a language in the competence of an ideal user form its synchronic state. The linguistic analysis with which Saussure is concerned is primarily based on the synchronic approach, the purpose of which is to reveal all aspects of a *langue* or code.

Early structuralism worked in this tradition of thinking about code, for example in the Prague and Copenhagen schools. With later semioticians such as Eco, the idea of linguistic "code" is methodologically assumed without being postulated as *real*. According to Eco, the code is a cultural phenomenon that is constructed through a "*combinational interplay*, a highly indeterminate *game*" (1976: 126). The stable code is only a methodologically necessary abstraction: "*code is not a natural condition of the Global Semantic Universe nor a stable structure underlying the complex of links and branches of every semiosic process*" (1976: 126). However stable over time, any code is transient, and the attempt to reflect on it as a structure can only be accepted as a "working hypothesis". Code is in a state of continuous change.

Broadly speaking, a *musical code* can be said to contain the rules or conventions of a musical system. The rules of good voice-leading, of varying a theme, of building a musical form, and others, can all be part of a musical code.[5] Of course, the rules of a musical code are historically conditioned. This is why musical semiotic studies are usually "synchronic" insofar as they limit themselves to a particular period or even composer, regulatively assuming the chosen musical "universe" to be complete and coherent.[6] For example, the musical code of Viennese Classicism can be considered a closed musical system in which specific rules play a role. These rules become tools for musical semiotic analysis.[7]

In this regard, Tarasti's theory starts from a "canonical" view on musical code, which he then modifies for his own analyses. Every sign can only be understood with the help of a code: "In this canonical view, the very premise of semiotics is provided by precisely such 'social conventions', without which a sign could not exist. A sign appears as a code, which is a symbolic system and which is intended to transmit information between a sender and a receiver. All forms of communication function by sending messages, which are in turn based upon codes. Furthermore, every

5 The list can be extended to the factors of performance: correct intonation, correct execution of embellishments, etc.

6 See, for example, Agawu 2014, Hatten 2004 and Tarasti 2012.

7 Sometimes attempts are made to diachronically track certain parts of the musical code. See, e.g., Monelle 2006. In such cases, however, the problem of the limits of musical code appears very serious. In the above monograph, Monelle explores the manifestations of the pastoral topos from antiquity to late Romanticism, including not only musical but also literary and visual works of art.

act of communication is based upon a pre-existing 'competence', since all speech (*parole*) presupposes language (*langue*)" (Tarasti 2002: 65). Tarasti notes that, under the influence of this semiotic position, much of musical semiotics has traditionally strove "to reduce a musical sign to a normative, constraining set of rules, whether it be a generative grammar, style norms, or various classes of signs as defined by general semiotics" (Tarasti 2002: 65). Tarasti himself does not reject these theoretical models, but is seeking to go beyond the strict confines of the code to the "uniqueness" of phenomena: "Yet general semiotics has lately moved in another direction, namely, toward the study of unique, individual phenomena. In this case, one need not try to reduce the object to a code system, but may conceive of it in a more phenomenological and hermeneutic way so as to understand its originality" (Tarasti 2002: 66). Tarasti attempts to develop such a theory with regard to music. As we shall see, his theory remains semiotic but becomes an *existential* semiotics of music.

For the description of a language, structural semiotic makes use of some basic concepts. In Saussure, signs are organised into syntagms and paradigms. *A syntagm* is an ordered combination of signifiers that form a meaningful whole (Saussure 2011: 123). This combination is sometimes called a "chain". Such combinations are formed according to syntactic rules and conventions. A sentence, a paragraph, or a chapter of a book are syntagms of words. A syntagm may contain smaller syntagms. If in the sentence "I rejoiced" one replaces "rejoiced" with "blockhead", the result ("I blockhead") makes no sense. The rules for

forming a syntagm require that a verb be inserted in this place. *A paradigm* is a group of signifiers or signifieds located in a category according to a certain criterion (Saussure 2011: 123).[8] In a given context, one member of a paradigm is structurally interchangeable with another; choosing one precludes choosing the other. Different paradigms can be found in the sentence "I rejoiced". "I" can be replaced by "he", "the dog", "the heavens" – the members of this paradigm are united by the property that they can rejoice. But I can also replace "rejoiced" with "wept", "slept", "got drunk" – these words are united by the category of actions that "I" can perform.

Music can also be thought of in terms of syntagms and paradigms, as Kofi Agawu concisely demonstrates: "For example, the harmonic progression I–ii6–V–I constitutes a musical syntagm. Each member of the progression represents a class of chords, and members of a class may substitute for one another. Instead of ii6, for example, I may prefer IV or ii6/5, the assumption being that all three chords are equivalent (in harmonic-functional terms and, presumably, also morphologically); therefore, from a syntactic point of view, substituting one chord for another member of its class does not alter the meaning of the progression. (One should, however, not underestimate the impact in effect, affect, and 'semantic' meaning that such substitution engenders.)" (2014: 164). Of course, this example is tentative and abstract in terms of musical practice. Indeed, from a semiotical perspective, each chord

[8] Saussure himself does not introduce the notion of "paradigm" but speaks of "associative relations". The term "paradigm" is introduced by Jakobson.

of the T-S-D-T progression can be viewed as a paradigm expressed in different syntagms. The tonic chord in its root position and first inversion, and even the first inversion of the triad on the submediant can be viewed as interchangeable members of a tonic paradigm (or class). But, as Agawu himself notes, in practice these substitutions can be crucial to the "effect, affect, and 'semantic' meaning" that a particular composer is seeking. The same principle applies not only to harmonic analysis but also to the structure of a melody or to musical form.

The syntagm is expressed in the so-called *syntagmatic (horizontal) axis*: the conjunction of "this-and-that-and-that" (as in the sentence "I rejoiced"); while the paradigm is expressed in the *paradigmatic (vertical) axis*: the conjunction of "this-or-that-or-that" (e.g. replacing the last word of the same sentence with "wept" or "slept"). Syntagmatic relations express combination possibilities, and paradigmatic relations express functional contrasts. The former are based on presence, the latter on absence: "The syntagmatic relation is *in praesentia*. It is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series. Against this, the associative [i.e., paradigmatic] relation unites terms *in absentia* in a potential mnemonic series" (Saussure 2011: 123). Syntagmatic relations are established between what is present in a syntagmatic series, and paradigmatic relations are established between one present and other absent terms. Thus, even a sign that is not present in a syntagmatic series could be paradigmatically related to the sign which is present.

Every musical utterance has a syntagmatic and paradigmatic character. A syntagmatic series is a series of

sounds or notes – depending on the medium of the signifier. Each element of this series has a particular paradigmatic function. This can easily be exemplified. In classical music, the deceptive cadence that ends on the chord on the sixth degree (the submediant) is paradigmatically associated with the tonic chord on the first degree. The tonic chord on the first degree is "absent", but it has the same paradigmatic function because it could step into the place of the chord on the sixth degree. In this sense, musical grammar implies many paradigmatic series of possibilities, among which one is always realised in a musical utterance. The deceptive cadence is a good example, because what is absent, but *could* be there, is, so to speak, implicitly perceived – as its name suggests.

The idea of musical paradigm led to the creation of the so-called *paradigmatic analysis* developed by Nicolas Ruwet, later elaborated by Jean-Jacques Nattiez and applied by other musical semioticians such as Agawu and Tarasti. As we shall see, although he supports this analytical method and makes use of some of its tools, Tarasti is nevertheless critical of it and considers it too limited. This aspect of Tarasti's theory is particularly important because it situates his view unequivocally within a fundamental musical semiotic debate, which will be examined further below. However, in order to make Tarasti's position clear, it would be necessary to examine Ruwet's paradigmatic analytical method in more detail.

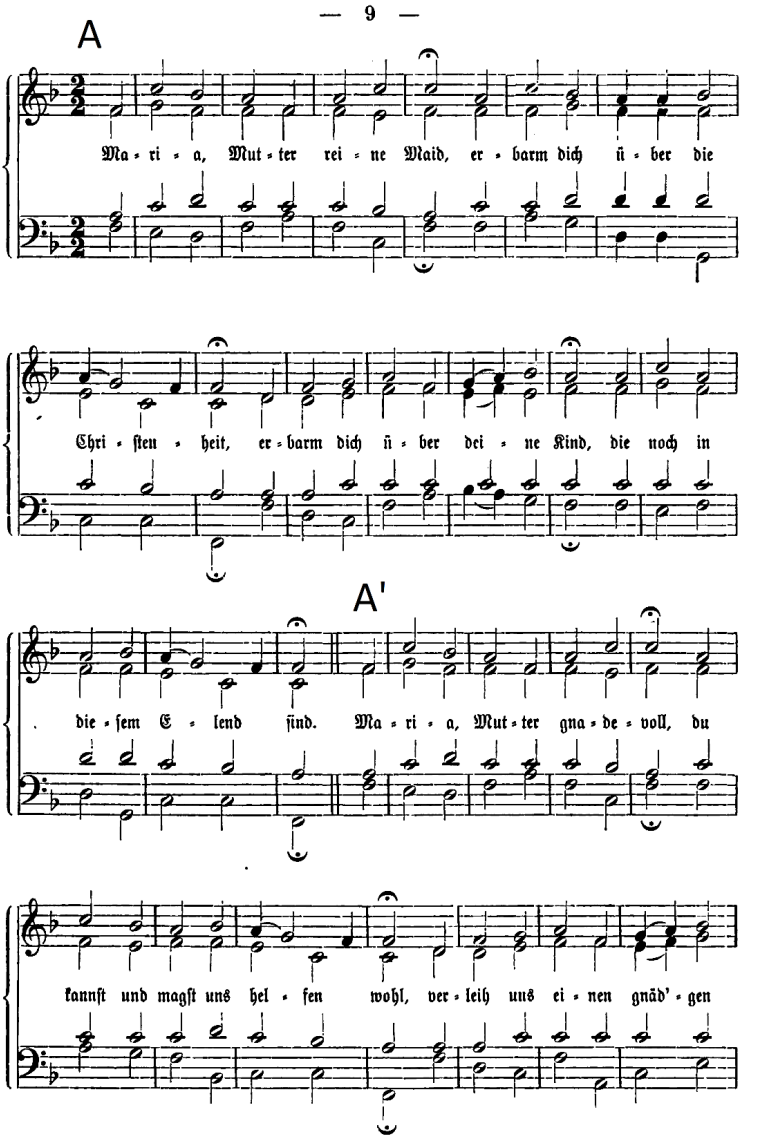
Ruwet's idea was to design a method that would be a "machine for identifying elementary identities" (Ruwet 1987: 17). The main criterion he chooses is the criterion

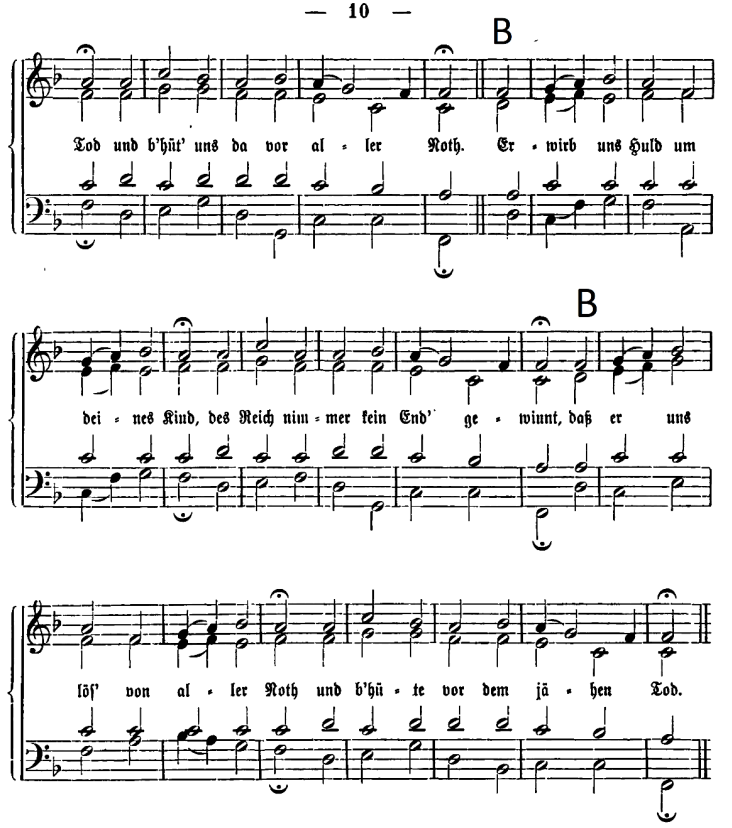
of *repetition*. According to this explicit procedure, music is broken down into segments that are repeated and segments that are not repeated by marking them with certain symbols. Segmentation has different levels corresponding to the length of the segments. There are also criteria for *transformation* that determine whether a segment that does not completely match another segment is a *variant* of it.

What paradigmatic analysis is can be illustrated by a brief example. In the article cited, Ruwet analyses several works, mostly from the Middle Ages. One of them is the German Geisslerlied, *Maria muoter reinû maît*.

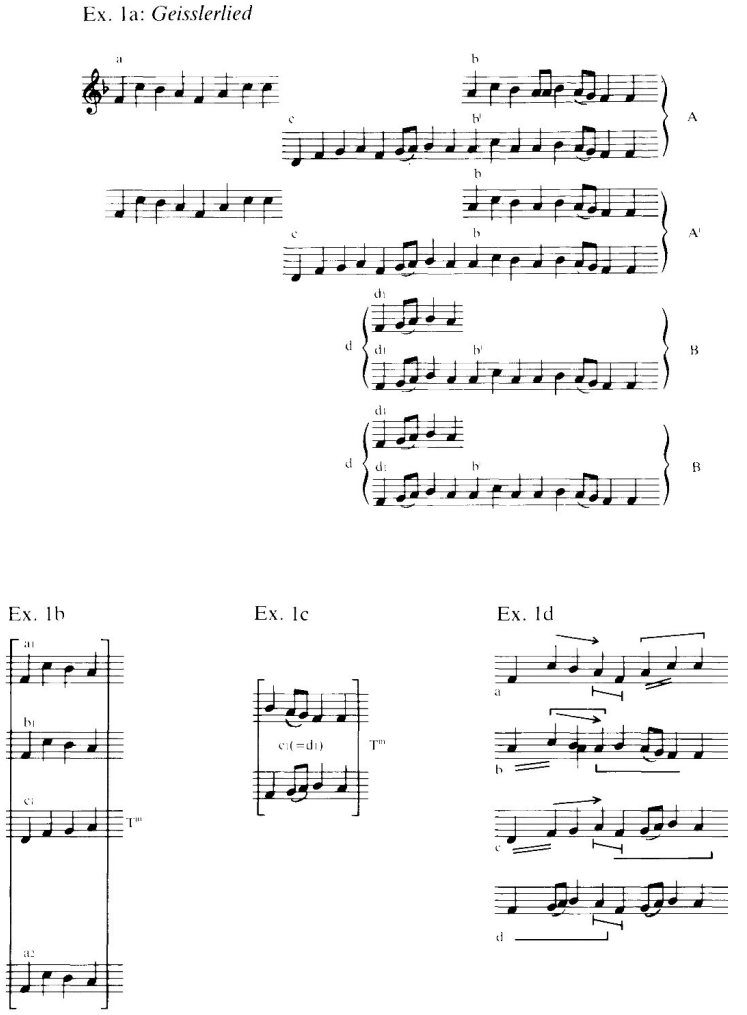
Ruwet analyses only the melody of the song, though in the version I am in possession of it is harmonised in four-part harmony and has additional parts (I have not included them here). Also, in his analysis, Ruwet does not handle the bar division of the musical text and uses fourths and eighth notes as the main rhythmic values, whereas in the score above the song is written out in halves and fourths. But since at this point in Ruwet's work pulse *per se* is not important, this difference can be ignored. Ruwet's example can be appreciated as an attempt to apply paradigmatic analysis to a monodic musical text.[9] The song is segmented into three levels, and repetitions and transformations of different length segments are found. At the highest level, the song structure is A + A' + B + B, where the difference between A and A' is due to a rhythmic variation in the sixth measure of A' and a melodic variation in the thirteenth measure of A'. The second level of the structure highlights the segments that are repeated within the higher

[9] See also Nattiez 1982: 243.


— 9 —
A
Ma - ri - a, Mut - ter rei - ne Maid, er - barm dich ü - ber die
Chri - sten - heit, er - barm dich ü - ber dei - ne Kind, die noch in
A'
die - sem E - lend sind. Ma - ri - a, Mut - ter gna - de - voll, du
kannst und magst uns hel - fen wohl, ver - leih uns ei - nen gnäd' - gen



Ex. 1 *Maria muoter reinů maît* (Runge 1900: 9–10).



Ex. 2 Paradigmatic analysis of *Maria muoter reinû maît*

levels. These are depicted in a graph in which the text is broken into segments, and the equivalent segments are arranged in a column where possible.

The graph (Ruwet 1987: 21) should be read from left to right and top to bottom.[10] As can be seen, the segment A = a + b + c + b', where b' is a "melodic transformation" of b. The segment A' = a + b + c + b (to clarify: the first segment of A' is also a, which is why it is placed in the same column). Thus, the difference between A and A' comes down to the difference in the last segment of the second level of the structure. The segment B = d + b' and remains the same in its repetition.

At the third level of the structure, the segments of the second level are broken down into smaller segments (symbolically they are denoted by a subscript). This procedure produces the following results: d = d_1 + d_1; c = c1 + d_1; a = a_1 + a2; b = b_1 + b2; b'= b'$_1$1$_1$ + b2. As can be seen, the second level segments also share the same third level segments. For example, the third-level segment d_1 is present in both the second-level segment d and the second-level segment c. The segments a_1, a2, b_1, b2, b'1, c1 and d_1 are of equal length. The segments a_1, a2, b_1, b'1, c1 are all melodic transformations of the same rhythmic structure (four quarter notes). In addition, an "asymmetry" is found between the segments at each level: "an asymmetry between A (varied in A', and composed of three sub-units) and B (not varied on repetition, and composed of two sub-units), an asymmetry between a, b, c (composed of two different segments)

[10] In my copy, some of the smaller designations are hard to read, for which I apologise in advance to the reader.

and d (composed of two identical segments), a more subtle asymmetry between a (whose two sections are only [melodic transformations] of each other) and b, c (whose two sections are varied at once melodically and rhythmically)"[11] (Ruwet 1987: 22).

If we come back to the examples of syntagms and paradigms in language given above, parallels can easily be drawn. So far, Ruwet describes the syntagmatic series of the musical text and breaks it down into stable segments that are repeated. In doing so, Ruwet is building on not only Saussure's theory of paradigms and syntagms, but also the idea of "discourse analysis" by linguist Zellig Harris. Discourse analysis analyses sentences and whole texts. Sentences are analysed in terms of their distribution. For example, if the sentences "Musical expression employs various tools and the composer should have a good command of them" and "Participating in the life of the court requires many social skills and the composer should have a good command of them" are found in a text, the sentences "Musical expression employs various tools" and "Participation in the life of the court requires many social skills" are "equivalent" and part of an *equivalence class.* From the perspective of Saussure's theory, they can be said to be part of the same paradigm (expressed in terms of the this-or-that-or-that relation) because both sentences can be used alternatively before the sentence "[and] the composer must have a good command of them". A whole text can be segmented on this principle. In Harris, when sentences

[11] I do not report all the results of the analysis here because it serves us only as an example of a paradigmatic analysis procedure.

in a discourse are ordered with respect to the principle of equivalence, they are given an index: the symbolic form of the above two sentences would be a1b and a2b, where a1 and a2 are part of the same equivalence class but different in content. This introduces an additional parameter concerning the discourse segments: their *sequence*. The segments are classified in a diagram which, horizontally, shows the sequence of the parts of the sentence, and vertically shows the sequence of the sentences (Harris 1952: 9).

Drawing on Harris, Ruwet denotes the segments of the musical text with the use of symbols. He also takes the form of the diagram from Harris, modifying it to clearly denote the repeated segments vertically and to trace the entire musical text horizontally. What Harris develops under the banner of discursive (or: distributional) analysis, Ruwet calls paradigmatic analysis. Ruwet traces the distribution of segments from different levels of the musical structure and draws certain conclusions from this analysis about the structure of the musical text. However, these conclusions do not offer a model for stable musical paradigms – and this, as we shall see, is precisely one of Tarasti's critiques of paradigmatic analysis.

At the end of this stage of the analysis, Ruwet derives a hierarchy of tones according to which the most important ones are determined. The main criterion for this is their position, not their quantity: "The principal criterion singled out is that of the initial, final or intermediary position which the notes occupy in various units. Initial and final positions are considered as taking priority, and it is accepted that the initial and/or final positions in the

units of a higher level carry more weight than the same position in units on a lower level" (Ruwet 1987: 22–23). For example, F is the first and last tone of A, A' and B, as well as a2 and d_1; C is the last tone of a; A is the first tone of b, the last tone of c, and the last tone of a_1, b_1, b'1, c_1, d_1 (Ruwet 1987: 23). As a result of these and other patterns found in the text, Ruwet found that highest in the hierarchy were the tones of F major with "an oscillation towards the relative minor in c[12], and some traces of pentatonicism" (Ruwet 1987: 23). Yet some of the basic features of F major – the leading tone, E – and of pentatonicism are absent (of pentatonicism, because B-flat is present alongside the pentatonic tones of F-G-A-C-D).

From a musicological point of view, Ruwet's analysis arrives at a "trivial" conclusion: the Geisslerlied "Maria muoter reinû maît" is in F major. But this is precisely the purpose of Ruwet's analysis. He is looking for a way to derive certain "rules" and "concepts" of music – such as tonality, motivic work, etc. – from the "immanent" musical text. The musicologist's theoretical apparatus must temporarily be bracketed in order to attempt to derive it from the text itself. In semiotic terms, the musicologist is dealing with a musical "code" composed both of an inventory of musical tools for expression and of rules for their use. Ruwet's paradigmatic analysis aims not to find manifestations of the code in the music, but to derive the code from the musical message by first segmenting the message according to certain criteria, and then inferring the rules

[12] This seems to be a typo, as the relative minor of F major is d, not c.

by which these segments interact. The segmentation of the musical message cannot be based on preconceived notions (such as the notion of "F major") because that would reverse the direction of the analysis – instead of proceeding from the message to the code, it would proceed from the code to the message. The procedure of segmentation that Ruwet proposes has analytical advantages, but it does not exclude traditional musicology. On the contrary, musical segmentation is seen as an opportunity to confirm the intuitions that guide traditional musical analysis and to complement them from another methodological position (Ruwet 1987: 15).

It is not clear, however, to what extent Ruwet succeeds in convincingly proposing a genuine alternative to musical analysis, even in methodological terms. Even with the explicit intention not to presuppose certain analytical premises (ideas such as tonality, musical form, etc.), Ruwet cannot avoid some prior abstractions – for example, the definition of repetition: "Repetition means identity between segments placed at different places in the syntagmatic chain" (Ruwet 1987: 17). The very concept of repetition poses a problem because it is not self-evident. Ruwet himself admits that no two segments are ever completely identical. Moreover, repetition can be established with respect to any musical parameter – melody, harmony, timbre, dynamics, etc. It is not clear when identity in one aspect, and difference in another, preserves the identity of a segment and when it does not. In the analysis presented, there is also one other preliminary analytical principle, namely the principle of hierarchization of tones. It is not

clear why the initial and final tones are more significant than the others. Additionally, the actual derivation of a musical code (in the example given, the F major key and the pentatonic scale) would probably not be possible without the prior existence of such concepts (key, major scale, the key of F, pentatonic scale). Certainly, Ruwet does not claim that paradigmatic analysis can build a new musicology or destroy the old one. He simply offers a method for confirming or rejecting certain musical intuitions. However, there seem to be some methodological gaps in his own analyses, which remain unsolved.

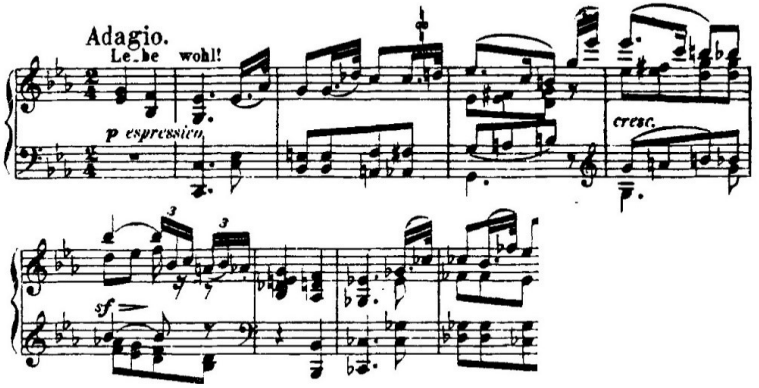
While acknowledging the importance of paradigmatic analysis for the development of musical semiotics, and while using aspects of this method for his own analyses, Tarasti remains critical of the idea that it can achieve decisive analytic results – that is, that it can exhaust what can be analysed about music from a scientific standpoint. For one thing, paradigmatic analysis cannot fulfil its own intentions. The purpose of paradigmatic analysis is to create a mechanism for segmenting the musical message that does not presuppose any reference to a predefined musical code. As we have seen, some a priori methodological conditions are unavoidable even in paradigmatic analysis – for example, the idea of repetition. Tarasti notes that without prior knowledge of a musical style, it is impossible to determine which segments are "relevant" to the musical text in question: in paradigmatic analysis, "before starting to analyse a given piece [an analyst] had to know several other works by a composer in order to obtain the style

competency required for selecting the correct paradigms"[13] (2002: 58). Without prior musical competence, the analyst has no criterion for where to stop with paradigmatic analysis and which levels are relevant to the whole of the musical work. According to Tarasti, by abandoning all prior competence in the relevant musical code, Ruwet fails to notice precisely the paradigmatic relations in the musical text (though paradoxically his method is called "paradigmatic"). Ruwet analyses only "elements and relations *in praesentia*" (Tarasti 1994: 11), i.e. the syntagmatic relations that are immanent to the musical text. But, according to Tarasti, the relations of the immanent musical segments to the absent ones are also of great importance, the absent ones being, however, in a paradigmatic relation with the former: "Relations *in absentia* are inferred on the basis of signifiers (surface phenomena) as well as the musical competence of listener and analyst, and are at least as important as relations *in praesentia* on the syntactic level" (1994: 11). In other words, what is absent from the sequence of signifiers in a musical text is as important to it as the signifiers themselves. These absent signifiers are "latent potentials for development" (1994: 11), which relate "paradigmatically" to what is present in the text. For example, the presence of a deceptive cadence paradigmatically hints at the absence of the tonic chord, which may be an essential part of the meaning of a musical moment. This is, for example, the meaning of the first motive of the first

[13] Tarasti is referring to Nattiez' methodologically more developed analyses, which build Ruwet's.

movement of Beethoven's Sonata 26 ("Les adieux") according to Karbusicky:

> Beethoven wrote the words 'Lebe wohl' [farewell] as a *concretizing* clarification of the *generally* intoned contents in the descent [Gefälle] of the main motive (uncertainty, anxious question, nostalgia...) (...) In a particularly affective intonation, the word 'wohl' [presents itself as a sonic symptom of the mood expressed], i.e., the third value of the musical structure (where the stabilizing tonic normally appears), where the voice 'collapses' – where instead of the normal utterance, foreign *Klang*-spectra are ringing. Beethoven modelled this harmonically, i.e. in the quality of consonance, as it is purely phonetically:



Ex. 3 Beginning of first movement of Beethoven's Sonata 26 ("Les adieux") (Karbusicky 1982: 418).

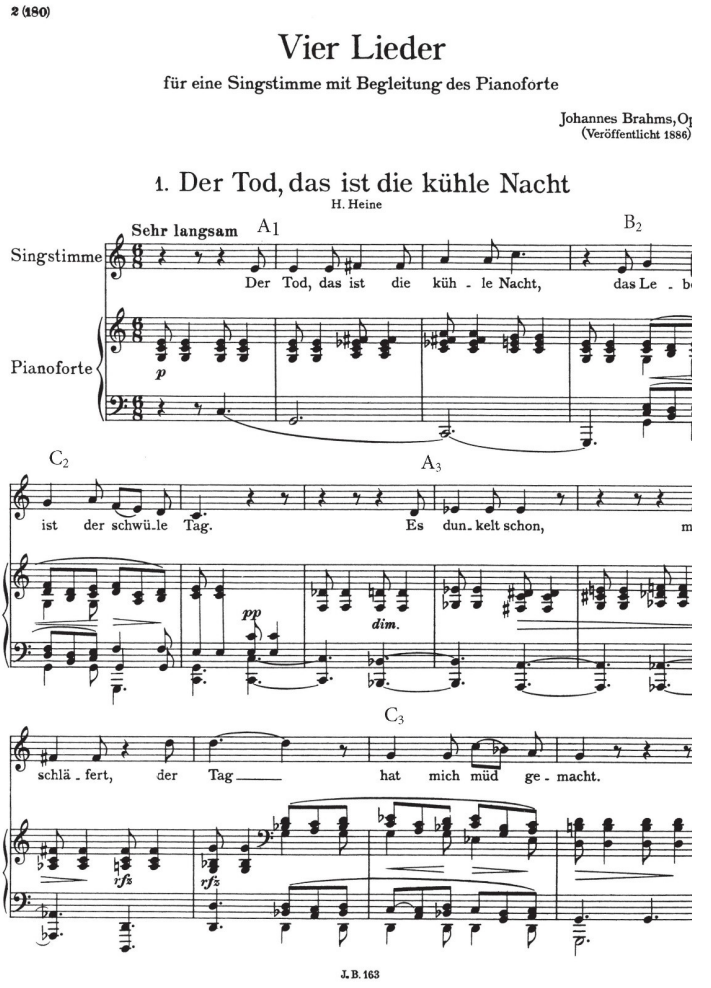
> the conclusion 'deceives', instead of the normal E flat major, C minor is sounded (Karbusicky 1982: 419).

Karbusicky traces how the three syllables of the word "Lebewohl" in Beethoven's manuscript fall on the first three chords of the "main motive". According to him, the sequence

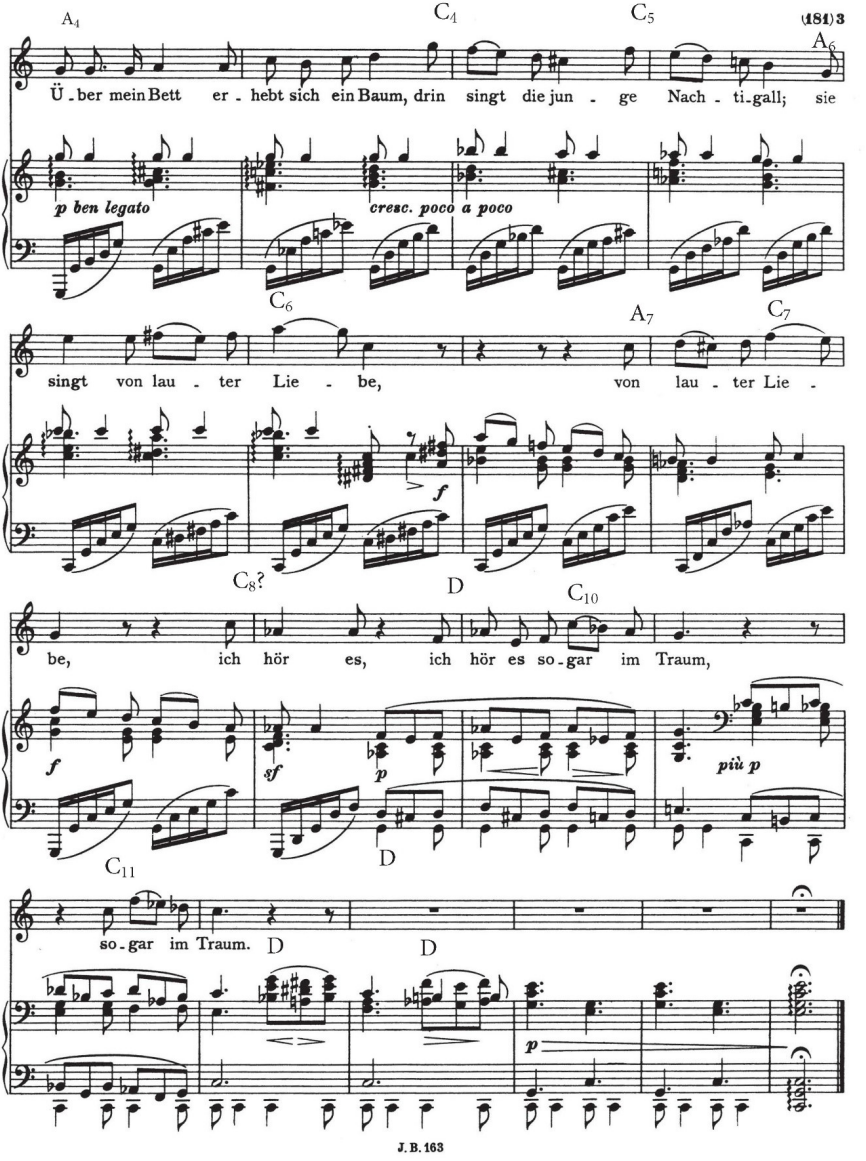
uncertainty-anxious question-nostalgia delineates the semantic line of the signified of the first three chords. In German, the word "Lebewohl" should be translated literally as "live well". In other words, the placement of "wohl" over the last chord of the phrase is also associated with the idea of "nostalgia" in the sense of "the good old days". But these suggestions would not be possible without the deceptive cadence, whose impact lies precisely in the absence of the E flat major chord and the introduction of the C minor chord. In this sense, Karbusicky's interpretation – whose semiotic underpinnings we will deal with below – is based on the same intuition as Tarasti's.

But the semantic plane revealed by Karbusicky in this example also cannot be explored with the help of paradigmatic analysis. Herein lies Tarasti's main criticism of Ruwet and the paradigmatic method: "Yet neither Ruwet's nor Nattiez's paradigmatic procedure took into account the fact that musical signifiers were also supposed to have another side, that of signifieds" (Tarasti 2002: 59). In other words, a paradigmatic analysis does not allow for the exploration of the meanings of musical signs. According to Tarasti, however, this is a major drawback of the method, since one of the most important contributions of musical semiotics to the study of music is the possibility of a detailed study of the musical signified.

Tarasti does, however, use some of the methodological tools of the paradigmatic analysis. As an example of his use of the paradigmatic method, one can consider an analysis of the song *Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht*, Op. 96 No. 1 by Johannes Brahms.



Ex. 4 *Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht*, Op. 96 No. 1 by Johannes Brahms (Brahms 1926).


A4
C4
C5
(181)3
A6
Ü - ber mein Bett er - hebt sich ein Baum, drin singt die jun - ge Nach - ti - gall; sie
p ben legato
cresc. poco a poco
C6
A7
C7
singt von lau - ter Lie - be, von lau - ter Lie -
f
C8?
D
C10
be, ich hör es, ich hör es so - gar im Traum,
f
sf
p
più p
C11
D
so - gar im Traum.
D
D
p
J. B. 163

After a detailed analysis of the poetic text in semantic terms (Tarasti 2012: 174–176) – grounded methodologically in Greimas' semiotics, which will be discussed below – and of its phonemics (2012: 177–178), he proceeds to a paradigmatic analysis of the vocal melody. He notes explicitly that paradigmatic analysis can only be a stage within a larger analytical procedure: "Some paradigmatic analysis is in order here; not because the analysis should remain on this level, but because it reveals the basis upon which the system of differences of this song can be built up melodically" (Tarasti 2012: 178).

Tarasti's paradigmatic analysis uses a graph, similar to Ruwet's model, but there are some significant differences.[14] The segments of the melody that are in the same column are treated as variants of the same paradigm, even though they are not identical. Thus, Tarasti adjusts the method based on his own critique, namely that related to the segmentation criteria – unlike Ruwet, he openly employs his musical competence in the analysis of the song. Therefore, each segment – as well as its paradigmatic alternatives – is considered more generally, and not only through immanent characteristics of the musical text. The melody is mainly formed by paradigmatic variants of segment A and segment C. Segment A is "an ascending gesture made up of gradually expanding intervals and sometimes quickened rhythmic values" (Tarasti 2012: 179–180).

[14] In Tarasti's figure, I have added the numerals for clarity. In the score, the individual paradigmatic groups of segments are indicated by letters, and the numeral is given as an index so that one can see exactly which segment of the analysis each segment of the score refers to. For example, the arpeggio marked B2 in the score corresponds to segment B of line 2 in the analysis.

Segment C "appears as a descending tetrachord or pentachord. As a variant, the latter sometimes descends further, by expanding stepwise to a sixth" (Tarasti 2012: 180). The B and D segments appear only once: B as a motive, consisting in an arpeggiated triad, and D as a "cyclic motive" (Tarasti 2012: 180). But these motives are related to the instrumental accompaniment: "Motive (B) moves from the vocal line to dominate the figurations of the piano part in the latter section. The cyclic motive (D) derives from the heavy, "horn call" motives of the piano, which tend to center on the same note, and which in Romantic music always symbolise hunting and farewell" (Tarasti 2012: 180).

As it becomes clear, Tarasti uses the methodological tools of paradigmatic analysis much more freely and is not constrained to them as far as a more comprehensive musical semiotic analysis of a work is concerned. This is because he views paradigmatic analysis as a useful but not sufficient tool for the analysis of musical texts. An important addition in the methodological tools for the analysis of *Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht* is topic theory (to be discussed below), which introduces the level of the signified or the content plane into the analysis. Paradigmatic analysis is thus utilised only to the extent that it accurately segments the musical signifier. Its meaning, however, remains the object of further inquiry based on other theories.

Some fundamental aspects of Tarasti's work are related to the concepts of *sense*, *meaning*, *signification* and *reference*. In contemporary semiotics, the problem associated with the use of these concepts is well known: these concepts are sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes as

opposites, and very often the concept assumes a meaning with one author that another concept assumes with a different author. Thus, practically every researcher uses these concepts, referring (most often implicitly) to different authors, schools and traditions. In some Western languages, such as English, German and French, there are several words that can mean the same thing in different contexts: in English these are *sense, meaning, signification*, and *reference;* in German, *Sinn, Bedeutung, Bezeichnung, Referent*; in French, *sens, signification, référence*. To these words are added others, such as "object", "expression", etc., which have relevant meanings in some theories. The usage of these concepts in English necessarily introduces the problem that their possible correspondences in other languages may have.

Historically – and in relation to musical semiotics – these ambiguities have been explored.[15] Here is not the place to pursue them or to seek justification for one usage or the other, because, on the one hand, this problem is not a crucial one for Tarasti, and, on the other hand, it would be difficult to judge what implicit position he takes on the matter without examining it fundamentally. It is only important to bear in mind that the use of the terms "sense", "meaning" and "significance" in the present text is necessarily somewhat provisional.

By "meaning" most musical semiotic authors seem to connote some variety of what Saussure means by "signified". The musical semioticians we will consider here, including Tarasti, do not raise the problem of the

[15] See Faltin 1985.

difference between "sense" and "meaning" on a methodological level – so I will not raise this problem either. Among Tarasti's main influences, only Greimas makes this distinction. What Greimas calls "sens" certainly does not coincide with Saussure's signified (*signifié*) or the concept of "meaning" in most musical semiotical theories. On the contrary, much closer to these notions is Greimas' French "signification", which I will translate, naturally, as "signification".

If the question of musical sense, meaning or signification is to be raised more radically, this will have to include discussions of a more philosophical nature. The semiotic usage of these concepts seems to be more a problem of definition, rather than a fundamental methodological issue. However, semiotics is rarely just about semiotics. As will become clear later on, semioticians (Tarasti included) appropriate theories from philosophy, psychoanalysis, literary theory and other fields in order to better articulate their own ideas. But they rarely unpack the baggage that goes along with the theories they utilise. This becomes a problem if one tries to understand how semiotics, and particularly musical semiotics, fits in with other academic fields pertaining to the same object (e.g., music). And it becomes a problem even if one simply wants to understand the full grasp of a semiotic theory as such. With regard to sense-meaning-signification-reference group the problem should be eminent if one decides to trace back the connotations of these concepts to their respective sources. Raymond Monelle (2000), for example, understands "sense" not only in semiotic terms, but also having Derrida's

différance in mind – an idea which has a lot to do with Derrida's critique of *presence* as a philosophical (metaphysical and phenomenological) idea (see e.g., Derrida 1973). One expects Monelle – if we assume he embraces wholeheartedly Derrida's ideas, as I think we should – to adhere also to Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence in a philosophical sense – a critique which has itself provoked much debate, especially with regard to his attacks on Husserl (White 2017, Evans 1991, Waldenfels 1994). But I have found no such discussion in Monelle's writings and I don't think he thought it necessary because of a situation that one often faces in musical semiotics, namely the purely operational utilisation of otherwise dense and complex concepts. This is not to say that Monelle or other semioticians have a superficial understanding of these concepts, but that they do not find it necessary to tackle them as *problems*.

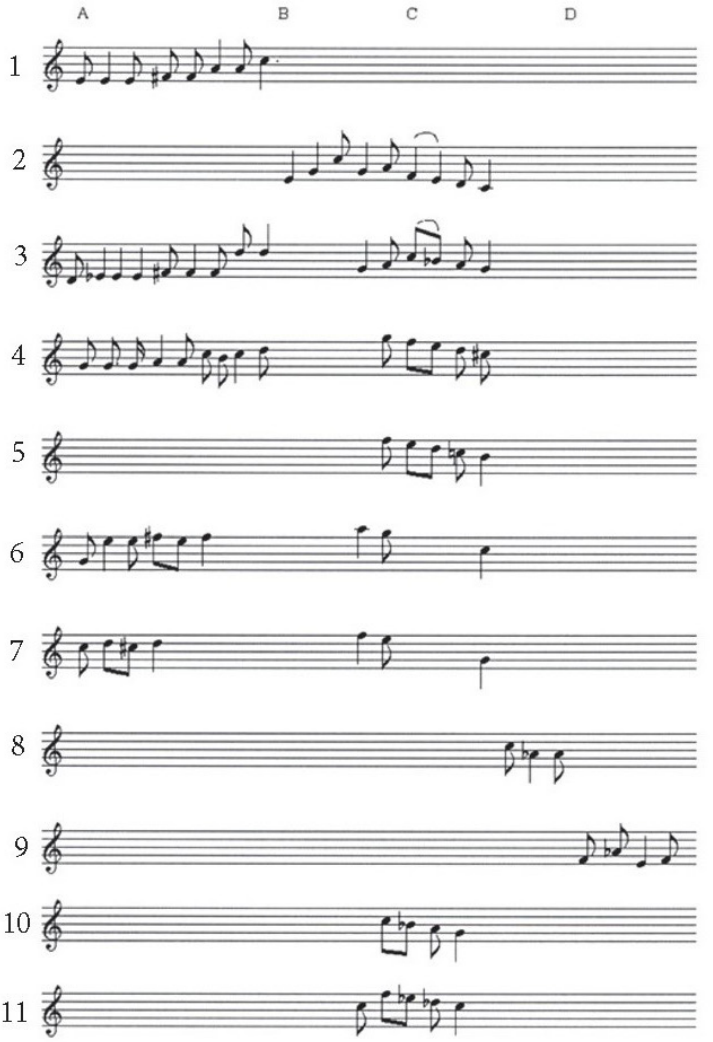
This should not be considered a petty remark with regard to the way musical semiotic "normal science" (Kuhn 1996) treats ideas from other fields. To the contrary, I believe it is of utmost importance for authors to clarify their stances on different issues which may surface in the appropriation of these ideas. It is also not rare for musical semioticians to pursue a more (self-)reflective and rigorous coming to terms with other academic fields or strands. Monelle for one once made the claim that "[i]f the linguist wishes to know what a text is like, in this final sense in which dialectics [between form and content, signifier and signified – CV] is overcome, she should listen to music" (Monelle 2000: 150) – and, in fact, he makes his

case convincingly, as this idea permeates all of his methodological inquiries. This is a positive example of disciplinary interchange, even if it concerns fields as close as musical semiotics and linguistics. One should expect that musical semiotics tackles philosophical problems as well, at least to the extent that it utilises philosophical concepts.

Peirce's semiotics

Tarasti has often discussed music as a sign system using basic concepts from Charles Peirce's semiotics. According to Peirce, semiosis, the process of signification, takes place in the presence of a *sign (representamen),* an *object* and an *interpretant*. A sign-representamen is something that signifies (serves as a sign for) another thing. It corresponds roughly to what Saussure calls the "signifier". The sign-representamen has a material existence – it is the tangible side of semiosis. The object is what is signified, but in Peirce, unlike Saussure, it can be quite real – the word "dog" can mean a real dog, an imaginary dog, or the dog as a concept. Thus, the object in Peirce does not correspond to the "signified" in Saussure, i.e. to the ideal concept signified by the signifier. The object can be both a material and a mental referent. A certain reality always corresponds to it. This reality is presupposed in the sign function, but it remains an epistemological problem that does not directly concern semiotics.[16]

[16] Pearce's idea of the "object" is the most heavily criticised aspect of his theory of the sign, precisely because of the many confusions it can lead to (cf. Lyons 1977: 99, Ayer 1968: 166 and



Ex. 5 Paradigmatic melodic chart of *Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht*

The interpretant is also a multi-layered concept. First, it is the idea that is understood *in* semiosis – the "mental effect, or thought" (CP 1.564)[17], arising from semiosis. Second, it is the starting point *for* understanding the semiotic object, i.e., it provides the key to the meaning of semiosis. And, third, it is itself a sign because it refers to another interpretant for its own meaning. For Peirce, a sign is "something, A, which denotes some fact or object, B, to some interpretant thought, C" (CP 1.346). Peirce gives the following, more detailed definition of this relation: "A sign stands ***for*** something ***to*** the idea which it produces, or modifies. Or, it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called its ***object;*** that which it conveys, its ***meaning;*** and the idea to which it gives rise, its ***interpretant.*** The object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant... So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series" (CP 1.339). According to Silverman (1983: 15), the interpretant is similar to the signified in Saussure. In Peirce's system, the sign function is mostly associated with the sign-representamen and the interpretant; the object is a referent in reality that has an epistemological role – to justify the existence of a sign to

Greenlee 1973).

[17] All quotations from Peirce are cited from Peirce 1958. Here, the so-called Cross-Ref-numbers are given to indicate the volume and paragraph in which the quotation is found.

begin with – but no role in the construction of the sign function.

To better understand the sign function in Peirce's semiotics, the following example can be used. I see a pen in front of me. The *sign* in all cases is the visual image of the pen. The *object* may be a writing person, when the *interpretant* is the thought "the pen is a writing instrument belonging to someone". But the object may also be a gift from x... when the interpretant is the thought "a pen that was given to me by x..."; the object may be "an object that I will measure y with" if the interpretant is the thought that "pens can be used to measure y", etc. We understand from Peirce that a sign always refers to its interpretant, which is also, like it, a sign... The idea that occurs to the interpreter when he looks at the pen as a sign is, say, "the pen is a writing instrument belonging to someone". And the object, the writing person, receives its meaning only through an interpretant. Eco, in discussing Pierce's semiotics, gives the following definition of interpretant: "*another representation* [other than the sign] *which is referred to the same 'object'*" (Eco 1976: 68). As an idea, the interpretant itself also has its own interpretant. A writing instrument belonging to someone can be interpreted as an instrument with which letters are written (via the interpretant "writing instruments are used to write letters"); or as a product of scientific development (via the interpretant "writing instruments are a sign of scientific development"). Semiosis thus becomes an infinite regress or series, because each successive interpretant is interpreted through a different interpretant.

Three different classifications of signs derive from Peirce's concept of the sign. The second classification, which consists in the *icon-index-symbol* trichotomy, is the most utilised one in musical semiotics of the three. An icon is "a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses" (CP 2.247). Any sign based on likeness (e.g. a portrait, a walking man at a traffic light) is an icon. An index is "sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object" (CP 2.248). A knock on the door, for example, is a sign that there is someone at the door. A symbol is "sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object" (CP 2.249). Within a culture, symbols are accepted as conventional signs.

The application of the Peirce's second trichotomy to music can easily be illustrated. Musical *icons* can be any musical units that signify something else by direct similarity. The imitation of a cuckoo in musical works is a typical example of a musical icon. A musical *index* can be any musical sign signifying an object and under its influence – an emotion, a mood, a natural circumstance (the coming of spring in the cuckoo example). At a third level, assuming it is conventionally accepted as such – i.e., as a stable part of the system of musical language – the same musical sign can be considered as a *symbol* for nature as a whole.

In this vein, Tarasti applies Peirce's trichotomy to the opening phrase of the first movement of Beethoven's

sonata *Les adieux*. He deals specifically with the opening three chords of the first movement, defining the phrase they form as an imitation of a characteristic hunting signal of Beethoven's time: "the horn signal at the beginning of Beethoven's '*Les adieux*' sonata. It is an iconic sign in the sense that, although played on piano, it imitates the horn signals of late eighteenth-century huntsmen. It is also indexical – because of the deceptive cadence – in the sense that it evokes a certain emotional state, both in the composer who wrote and sent the sign, and in the listener who feels such a sentiment of farewell or at least recognises it as such. The opening horn call is also a symbol: one does need to learn the language of tonal music in order to understand the meaning of this sign. Otherwise it would be nothing more than acoustic arousal" (Tarasti 2002: 11). Thus, the same musical sign – the opening phrase of the first movement of *Les adieux* – is interpreted as an icon, an index and a symbol.

The trichotomous character of one and the same musical sign is discussed in detail by Monelle. Drawing on Karbusicky (1986: 60–61), Monelle (2000: 15) shows how the same musical phrase, which iconically signifies the song of the cuckoo, can be understood as an index of the coming of spring: "Thus, it is possible for a musical syntagma to signify iconically an object which itself functions indexically in a given case; the example given above of the cuckoo's call (cited by Karbusicky) is such an item, for the heralding of spring is an indexical function of the cuckoo itself, not of its musical representation" (Monelle 2000: 17). If we were to represent this scheme in Peirce's system,

it would look like this: as a sign-representamen, the sound sensation does not yet mean anything; it is perceived as a distinct object depending on the respective interpretant; through an iconic interpretant it is recognised as a representation of the cuckoo's song, which through an indexical interpretant is recognised as a sign of the coming spring. So far, we have a chain of at least two interpretants. In the given scheme, the cuckoo's song through two interpretants is first an icon and then an index. Finally, according to Monelle, many of the icons used in music are in fact conventionally established signs, i.e. symbols: "The commonest musical icons — portrayals of waves, clouds, storms, horses — are not at all 'pure', but are dependent on well-known conventions" (Monelle 2000: 17). Depending on whether we take the imitation of a cuckoo in music to be an icon, an index or a symbol, it will have a different meaning.

Eco's influence: the cultural unit and the musical topos

At the level of the signified – i.e., when musical meaning is considered – one can detect a strong influence of Umberto Eco's semiotics in musical semiotics. Tarasti often refers to Eco and Eco's semiotic theory belongs to his methodological orientations.[18] In musical semiotics, Eco is influential especially with the concept of *cultural unit*. (Eco 1976: 62) Eco expounds on an idea by anthropologist David Schneider, according to whom in culture

[18] See e.g. Tarasti 1978: 15, 78 and Tarasti 1994: 17–18..

"a unit … is simply anything that is culturally defined and distinguished as an entity. It may be a person, place, thing, feeling, state of affairs, sense of foreboding, fantasy, hallucination, hope or idea. In American culture such units as uncle, town, blue (depressed), a mess, a hunch, the idea of progress, hope and art are cultural units" (Schneider 1980: 2; Eco 1976: 67). A cultural unit is possible only in the infinite chain of interpretants: "[t]he series of clarifications which circumscribed the cultural units of a society in a continuous progression (always defining them in the form of sign-vehicles) represents the chain of what Peirce called the *interpretants*" (Eco 1976: 68).

In Tarasti's writings, the idea of a cultural unit plays an important role.[19] Tarasti understands the cultural unit just as Eco does, only he finds it expressed through musical means. When a timbre, for example, repeatedly evokes associations with a certain semantic content, it can be argued that it forms a cultural unit (Tarasti 1978: 78). As an example, Tarasti points to studies by Paul Claudel, according to whom, in Wagner's music the French horn (or, to be more precise, *le timbre étrange du cor,* the strange timbre of the horn) is associated with "paradise lost" (Claudel 1970). By interpreting the cultural unit in this way, Tarasti places it between the signifier and the signified in the sign function, i.e., he identifies the cultural unit with the sign as a whole, even though in a strict sense, according to Eco, the cultural unit is firmly on the side of

[19] See Tarasti 1978: 15, 78, 135, 230; In Semiotics of Classical Music he defines "Beethoven" as a cultural unit (Tarasti 2012: 103).

the signified.[20] To explain this more clearly, it would seem that according to Tarasti, timbre and its signification are inextricably linked, i.e. neither can the timbre (in a given context) signify something else, nor can its "meaning" or "signification" be (in a given context) signified by another timbre (or another musical signifier). That is, the signifier (the timbre) and the signified (paradise lost) cannot be thought apart from each other. The cultural unit of the "French horn" in Wagner, which Tarasti discovers in Romantic music in general (Tarasti 1978: 78), is therefore understood as a stable sign with its own signifier and signified.

In musical semiotics, the idea of a cultural unit is closely related to the concept of musical *topos* or *topic*[21].

[20] With such an interpretation, Tarasti takes the position of the non-arbitrariness of the sign, thus taking on a different position from Saussure's.

[21] The term "topos" in musical semiotics should be distinguished from other, classical usages of the term. The term originally comes from the Greek *topos* - place; Lat. *locus*; Eng. topic or commonplace. In Aristotle, the notion of topos is "an argument scheme of universal applicability" (Rubinelli 2009: 14). In Cicero, topoi (Latin loci) are used for "ready-made arguments": "A locus communis is a ready-made argument that (...) may be transferable (...) to several similar cases. Thus, the adjective communis refers precisely to the extensive applicability of this kind of arguments; (...) As for its function, a locus communis does not prove anything specific to the case being examined. It contains an amplification either of a statement whose truth is generally recognised by the majority of people, or of a statement that can be argued from different and opposite perspectives (...) In this respect, the loci communes do not add any factual information. But they are used to put the audience in a favourable frame of mind by presenting evaluations and interpretations of the facts at issue" (Rubinelli 2009: 107). In Baroque music theory, topoi had a similar purpose. For Johann David Heinichen, topoi are a

The concept of "topos" in musical semiotics is developed on the basis of the works of Leonard Ratner (1980). What in Peirce's semiotics is seen as a symbol, and in Eco's as a cultural unit, is often treated as a topos: "The topic is essentially a symbol, its iconic or indexical features governed by convention and thus by rule"[22] (Monelle 2000: 17). As a symbol, the topos has historical, cultural and social correlates. The musical topos is a cultural entity with historical genealogy: "Social and cultural history must be investigated for the central meaning of the topic. Since topics normally have roots in distant times, this means returning to the literature of much earlier eras" (Monelle 2006: 30). Within the symbolic sphere of the topos, the musical code is linked to other cultural codes, and musical meaning goes beyond the "purely musical".

Tarasti uses the term "topos" to refer to stable cultural semantic fields in the realm of music, distinguishing between different eras. It must be underlined that such distinctions do not concern the acts of composing or

primary means to "to move the listener's affections" (Heinichen 2000: 10). Cited in: Mirka 2014: 39) Cicero's topoi are also used by Mattheson (2012). See Mirka 2014: 37–43). Under Ratner's influence, topoi in musical semiotic theory are thought of not so much as a musical-rhetorical device, but as themes and styles fundamental to musical discourse. Ratner (1980) draws on Baroque and later musical practices, but in a different key.

[22] The grounds for such a view can be found in the semiotics of Umberto Eco, according to whom iconic resemblance is based entirely on cultural conventions – a graphic of a horse, for example, cannot be seen as a sign of a real horse, based on resemblance, since a real horse does not contain black lines. Instead, there is a graphic convention that makes us recognise a horse in a simple tracing of its outline.

listening to music in a particular historical period, but refer to the "anachronistic" applicability of topics in the analysis of a previous era in music history. Tarasti notes such differences between the Classical, Baroque, and Romantic eras: "In the Classical style, [topoi] refer to signs from the lower musical styles, such as functional music, military music, dance forms and so on, which are embedded in the surface texture of a musical piece... Topics could also include musical styles from an earlier period, such as Baroque counterpoint in the *gebunden* style (with suspensions) or the 'learned style' (...) In Romanticism, however, the relationship between music and the other arts intensified, and the impact of literature and painting could be felt more and more deeply in musical texts" (Tarasti 2002: 32–33). In other words, a topos is often associated with whole eras of music history. The semiotic interpretation of music must take into account these semantic spaces in which music acquires certain meaning. Topoi form a musical-cultural vocabulary that regulates the use of musical signs, i.e., rhythms, melodies, harmonies, timbres, orchestrations, musical forms, etc.

Musical topoi may often be systematised into inventories similar to a lexicon. When fixed in such a way, they are conceived as fundamental elements of musical enunciation. The musical topoi of a musical epoch are subject to reconstruction (Agawu 2014: 43). Only musical competence makes it possible to recognise the topos as a "commonplace", which immediately evokes a semiotic (associative) chain in the perception of the listener. For each musical historical period (or author) a certain lexicon

or inventory of musical topoi can be created. Any lexicon of topoi is potentially open, even though for methodological reasons a limited number of topoi are preselected to allow a complete analysis (Agawu 2014: 50). Agawu (2014: 43–44) proposes such a lexicon for classical music (Ex. 6).

As can be seen, the list of topoi encompasses styles, genres, forms, expressive and compositional techniques, instruments, tempos. Their value and meaning as concepts in traditional musicology are by no means denied, but insofar as they are topoi, they are considered in a musical semiotic key as signifiers or signifieds with specific

The Universe of Topic for Classic Music

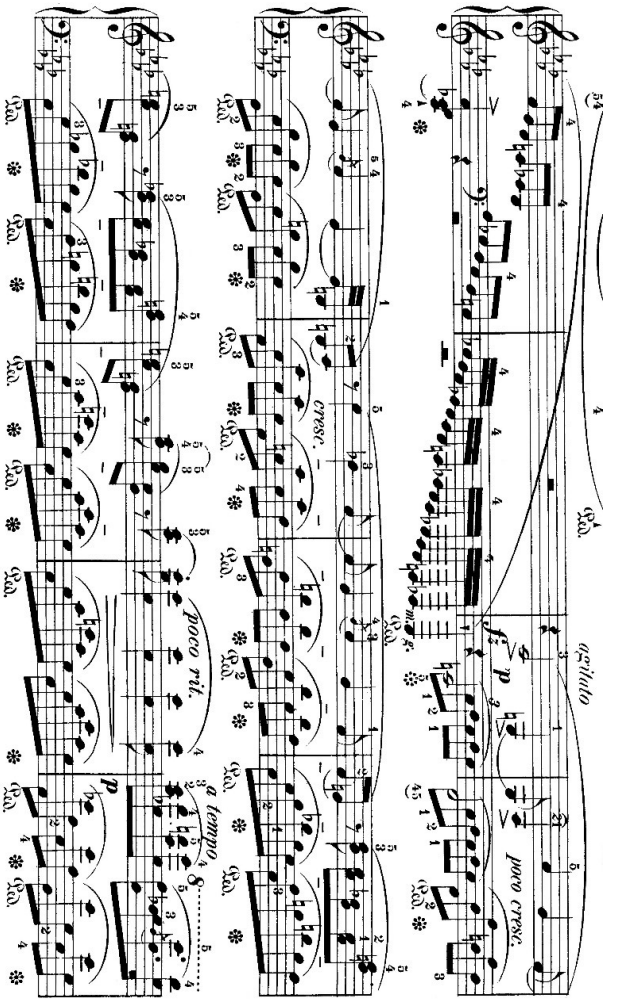
1. Alberti bass
2. alla breve
3. alla zoppa
4. allemande
5. amoroso style
6. aria style
7. arioso
8. bound style or stile legato
9. bourrée
10. brilliant style
11. buffa style
12. cadenza
13. chaconne bass
14. chorale
15. commedia dell'arte
16. concerto style
17. contredanse
18. ecclesiastical style
19. *Empfindsamer* style
20. *Empfindsamkeit* (sensibility)
21. fanfare
22. fantasia style
23. French overture style
24. fugal style
25. fugato
26. galant style
27. gavotte
28. gigue
29. high style
30. horn call
31. hunt style
32. hunting fanfare
33. Italian style
34. *Ländler*
35. learned style
36. *Lebewohl* (horn figure)
37. low style
38. march
39. middle style
40. military figures
41. minuet
42. murky bass
43. musette
44. ombra style
45. passepied
46. pastorale
47. pathetic style
48. polonaise
49. popular style
50. recitative (simple, accompanied, obligé)
51. romanza
52. sarabande
53. siciliano
54. singing allegro
55. singing style
56. strict style
57. Sturm und Drang (storm and stress)
58. tragic style
59. Trommelbass
60. Turkish music
61. waltz

Ex. 6 Lexicon of topics for classic(al) music by Kofi Agawu

meaning. The topos "learned style" (*gelehrte Schreibart*), for example, is associated with a number of markers of mastery or "skillful" musical technique: "fugato, equal polyphony, suspensions, long note values set against rhythmically regularised accompaniment patterns" (Chapin 2014: 301). The idea of a "learned style" was not formulated in this way in the Baroque, nor in later periods in the history of music theory – the topos is quite deliberately anachronistic. It combines a variety of stylistic concepts used in eighteenth-century music theory: "strict" [German: *streng*, French: *strict* or *rigoreux*, Italian: *ligato*], church, a cappella, bound [*gebundene Schreibart*], antique [*stile antico*], grave, fugal [*fugierte Schreibart*], elaborate [*gearbeitete Schreibart*], artful/artificial, etc. Each of these terms referred to a different issue, such as compositional technique, social function, place of performance, historicity, and affective register" (Chapin 2014: 302–303). From the perspective of the semiotic theory of musical topoi, the concept is considered, on the one hand, on the expression plane or signifier: in "prestigious" techniques such as imitation and complex counterpunctal technique, etc., and, on the other hand, on content plane or signified, as a sign of education and balance, tradition and conservatism. It is on this semantic plane that the topos of the learned style is contrasted with the topos of the gallant style, which is associated with a more relaxed mood, worldly sophistication and a more liberal use of technical tools. In some form, the contrast is already stated by seventeenth-century contemporaries: "And if he [the composer] uses a different manner today, with more gallantry "alla moderna" – which does not

appeal so much to your Excellency – he must do so because he has learned by experience that, when he wants to appeal to all people, this kind [Art] is just more gallant, though it is less academic [than the strict style]" (Hammond 2002: 156–157). The topos of the gallant style is distinguished with technical devices, which are found in the signifier or plan of expression: "unprepared dominant seventh chords, homophonic separation of melody and accompaniment, and clarity and concision of melody" (Chapin 2014: 301). Although each topos can be defined in extraordinary detail in terms of both signifier and signified, the musical "vocabulary", unlike the verbal vocabulary, is "itself already contested and elusive [and] remains diffuse, amorphous, and devoid of a priori meaning" (Agawu 2014: 26). The same topos can change depending on the era, the composer and the work.

Tarasti uses topoi occasionally in his analytical inquiry. After a formal analysis of Chopin's Fantasia in F Minor, Op. 49, for example, he traces the main characteristics of all the movements of the fantasia in terms of topics: "The main part starts with a motive that unites two ancient topics: (7) the *learned style* in the contrapuntal motion and suspended notes between the melody and bass lines, and the (8) *Storm and Stress style* manifested in the syncopated melody, its agitation, and its passionate, upward, octave leaps" (Tarasti 2002: 145). He introduces topic theory as a reservoir for meanings on the level of the signified based on certain aspects of the signifier. Syncopated melody and upward octave leaps signify the *Sturm und Drang* topos in the F minor Fantasia. And this topos connects the



Ex. 7 Excerpt from Fantasia in F Minor, Op. 49 by F. Chopin (Chopin 1879: 390–400.)

Chopin's work to a significative network associated not only with music, but with a movement in all arts.

One of the main questions in defining the role of musical topoi in the construction of a work is the extent to which the semantic sequence they form guides the "intra-musical", structural flow of music. In other words, to what extent does the semantic suggestion influence the immanent structural regularities in the work? In this respect, Tarasti draws a distinction between different musical eras. In Classicism, "the presence of *topics,* as signs referring to extrinsic reality, did not yet disturb the tonal hierarchy... The topics served only to animate the basic tonal unfolding of a piece" (2002: 32). In Romanticism, on the other hand, many composers such as Liszt, for example, produced their own universes of topoi.[23] One of the topoi that Liszt introduced was the topos of the "Faustian question 'why?', i.e. the search for something"[24] (2002: 33). Tarasti explains its musical structure as follows: "The iconic form of a Faustian question and its topic may be based on ascending speech intonations accompanied by certain bodily gestures; these are iconically imitated in music by a rising melody that does not reach its culmination but is interrupted, thereby causing expectation on the part of the listener" (2002: 33). Here, Tarasti's attempt to synthesise topos theory with his – by this time already developing – cognitive-existential theory of the musical listener as an implicit factor in the work is evident. In semiotic terms, iconism is a reference to Peirce's theory of iconic signs. But

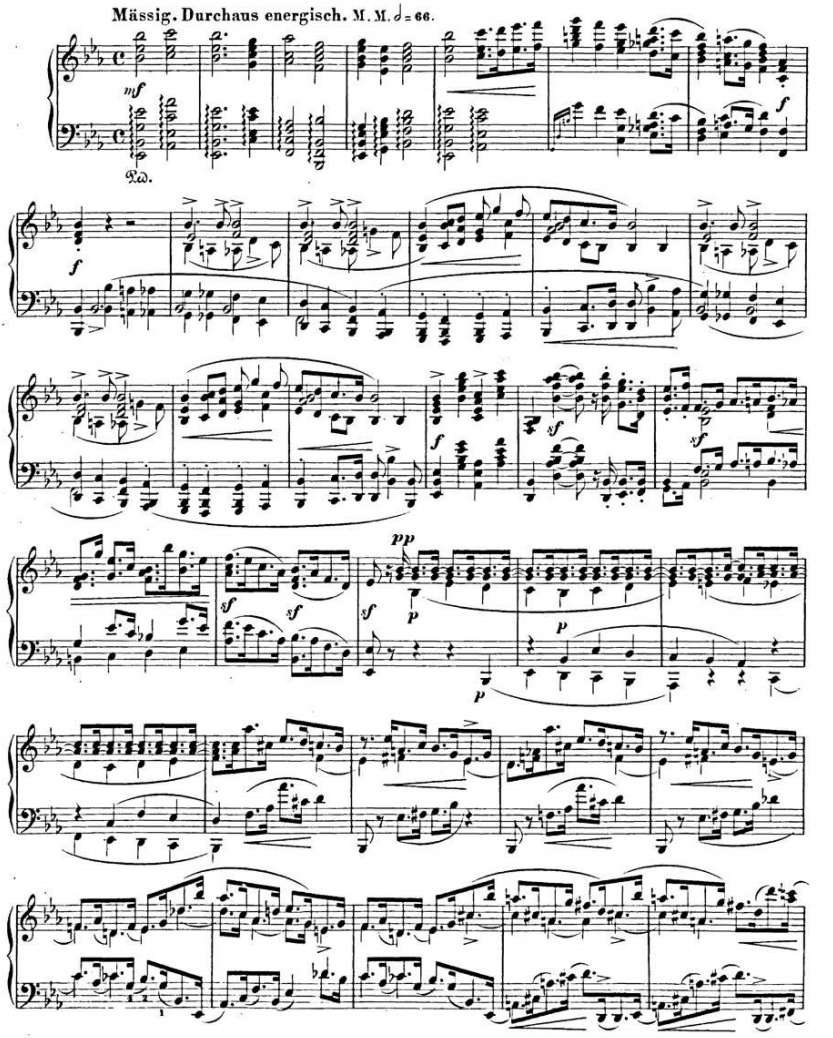
[23] For Liszt's topos universe, cf. Grabócz 1996.

[24] Tarasti refers to Grabócz 1996: 121.

Tarasti adds to this a notion of "corporeality" – the musical iconic sign mimics "bodily gestures" – thereby attempting to pave the way for a kinetic psychoanalytic theory of musical processuality (see below).

In Romanticism, topoi from past eras begin to be reinterpreted, parodied, and hyperbolised. In an analysis of Schumann's *Fantasia* in C Major, Op. 17, for example, Tarasti discusses the parodic use of the classical "march" topos: "the second movement is a march, but a march that transcends its topic. It is rather Nietzschean *Rausch* music, which stands in opposition to the dreamy Apollonian atmosphere of the last movement" (Tarasti 2012: 162). Against this background, Schumann creates his own topos: "The metrical dissonances may be seen as Schumann's own private topos of 'constructed madness'" (Tarasti 2012: 162–163).

As an example of an extensive topical analysis in semiotical terms, let us briefly discuss the *pastoral topos*, which has been of interest to Tarasti as well: "Pastorality was created through the use of particular instruments and timbres, which evoked the pleasures of rustic life. In addition, the lilting, dotted *Siciliano* rhythm in compound meter was felt to be pastoral, in the same way as open fifths were considered an imitation of bagpipe drones in *musette* movements of Baroque dance suites" (Tarasti 2002: 33). This topos has been explored most extensively by Monelle, as evidenced by Tarasti, who repeats the main results of Monelle's research on the subject. Tarasti's methodological orientations include those references to Monelle and thus a more detailed treatment of Monelle's



Ex. 7 Excerpt from second movement of Fantasia in C Major, Op. 17 by R. Schumann (Schumann 1879).

own research could be important here as well. We will, however, mostly limit ourselves to those features of the pastoral topos in Monelle's study of which Tarasti himself takes note. Monelle introduces a "diachronic" treatment of the musical topos, detailing the historical preconditions for its semantic and expressive formation. This historical approach accompanies Tarasti's attempts to ground the topos and the changes it undergoes in a historical perspective.

According to Monelle, at the level of the signified – the semantic layer – the pastoral topos is indeed associated with an idyllic "memory" of the happiness of rural life, and can perhaps even be traced to the idylls of Theocritus written in the 3rd century BC, and certainly to the eclogues of Virgil. Although these authors have nothing to do with the creation of music (in the strict modern sense), but rather with the creation of poetry, the semantic plan of the pastoral topos in music contains the "overtones" of the images they introduced into European literature. Virgil describes *Arcadia*, a mountainous region of the Peloponnese, as a utopian place where it is always spring: but, as Monelle points out, "his pastoral is within his own mind, a state of being that he can imagine but can never attain, which is delineated precisely by that which is excluded from real life" (Monelle 2006: 186). In this sense, the pastoral topos takes on a fantastic and unreal existence by definition, which nevertheless remains relevant throughout the history of European theatre, whence it enters music.[25]

[25] During the Renaissance, the pastoral developed narratively and gave birth to the genre of pastoral drama (Monelle 2006: 187). One of the members of the Arcadia Academy whose name

In the idyll of the pastoral, time and space merge together. Time is not conceptualised as subject to historical development, but is static. The static nature of time is linked to the space inhabited by the generations before and the generations after the present moment: "Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where the fathers and grandfathers lived and where one's children and their children will live" (Bakhtin 1981: 225).

The instruments and timbres that Tarasti discusses are also described in detail by Monelle. This aspect of the topos, already part of the signifier, opens a view not only to musical analysis – insofar as the composer is looking for an effect similar to the one produced by instruments traditionally associated with the pastoral topos – but also to instrumental studies. The pastoral is usually embodied in the image of a shepherd playing a pipe. The musette, an instrument of the bagpipe family, was created for the French nobility in the late 16th century because of the "fashion of pastoral literature" (Monelle 2006: 210). According to Monelle, the sound of the musette is gentle, refined, and intimate. As the pastoral topos entered the opera, the musette became a constructive part of it, as Charles Emmanuel Borjon observed: "Pastoral and rustic

speaks to its connection with the pastoral idea was Giovanni Vincenzo Gravina, who discovered and adopted the child Pietro Metastasio, one of the most famous librettists of the eighteenth century (Monelle 2006: 192). Metastasio also entered the academy in 1718. Consequently, he immediately began to write "pastoral feste teatrali and serenate" (Monelle 2006: 192). Even his drammi per musica, which served as the basis for the opera seria, contain numerous pastoral motives (Monelle 2006: 193).

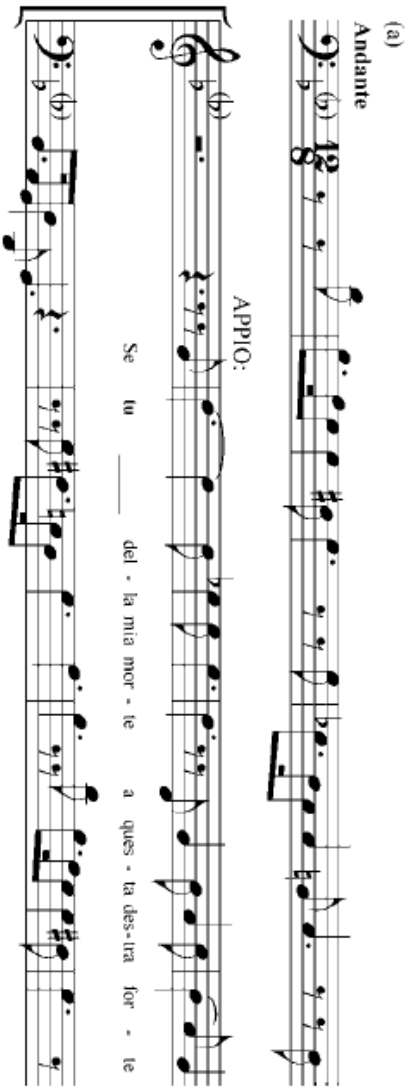
spectacles cannot do without them [the musette players], and we see them almost every year in the King's ballets."[26]

The relationship of the siciliana dance to the pastoral topos noted by Tarasti is also considered by Monelle. Alessandro Scarlatti, born in Sicily, is considered important for the establishment of the siciliana as a pastoral signifier. In his operas one finds numerous arias in slow or moderate tempo and 12/8 metre, although only two of them are called "aria siciliana" (Monelle 2006: 217). Many of them use the Neapolitan chord and are in minor.

As an example of the beginnings of the pastoral topos in the works of A. Scarlatti, Monelle chooses two arias: "Se tu della mia morte" and "S'io non t'amassi tanto" from the opera *La Caduta de' Decemviri (*1697). Both arias by Scarlatti are in "12/8 ... slow or leisurely tempi, with dotted figures... the texts are usually emotional, lamenting, or melancholy" (Monelle 2006: 219).

Western music is, of course, full of works and parts of works that suggest the pastoral topos thus defined. In the music of J. S. Bach, the pastoral topos can be heard in its "sacred" variants. The second movement of the Christmas Oratorio begins with a siciliana in 12/8. According to Albert Schweitzer, it "presents angels and shepherds as they make music together" (Schweitzer 1911). According to Monelle, here and in other pieces by Bach it is a matter of associating "Virgil's Golden Age with the Christian heaven, and of Polybius's piping shepherds with the world of biblical pastoralism, [e.g. the nativity scene]" (Monelle 2006: 232). Cantata BWV. 8, "Liebster Gott, wenn werd'

[26] Cited in Leppert 1978: 36. Cited in Monelle 2006: 214.



Ex. 8 Excerpt from "Se tu della mia morte" (Monelle 2006: 218).

ich sterben", is in the meter of a siciliana (12/8), and the wind instruments include a horn, a fluto piccolo, and two oboes d'amore: "The strings play detached chords while the two heavenly shepherds concertise with each other" (Monelle 2006: 232). According to Monelle, the suggestion of eternal peace, coming from the theme of the cantata and its musical embodiment, is linked to the idyll of the mythical shepherds through the pastoral topos.

To highlight the historical change of the topos, it can be considered in different eras of music history. While Tarasti notes the epochal change in the use of topoi between the Classical and the Romantic periods, Monelle notes the same difference between the Baroque and the Classical periods. In the Classical period, the pastoral topos changed its meaning (the signified, the plan of content) while retaining its basic musical-expressive characteristics (the signifier, the plan of expression). It became much more associated with the romantic worship of nature than with the idyll of the classical pastoral. In the oratorio *The Creation of the World* Haydn (Hob. XXI:2) depicts the cow and the sheep (No. 21. "Gleich öffnet sich der Erde Schoß") using Sicilian metre and woodwinds. In the second movement of the Quartet in G Major (Hob. III: 58), Haydn suggests the pastoral topos by using a three-measure 6/8 time, expressive melody over a bourdon bass, with phrases three bars long. According to Monelle, here the signified of the pastoral topos has already undergone a change. These pastorals are now "strongly subjectivised": "In place of the rustic skirl of the *pifferari* or the courtly elegance of the siciliana, there is an intimacy, a

personal quality that arises from the songlike melody and its affecting accompaniment." (Monelle 2006: 239)[27]

This overview of the pastoral topos, based on Monelle's study, shows the dimensions of the idea of topos in musical semiotics that underlie Tarasti's use of the same concept. As a persistent part of the musical code, the topos plays for Tarasti a particular role in the construction of his later theories in which, as we shall see, any normativity in music is reduced to one main existential relation to music. This side of topos theory that Monelle deploys appears as one of many methodological devices in Tarasti's existential semiotics, which attempts to grasp the terms of musical conventions – such as the normatively defined pastoral topos – as a function of a lived relation to music on the part of composer, performer and listener. Topoi, according to Tarasti, "originated in the outer conditions of musical communication... [and] typify structures of communication in music" (Tarasti 1994: 26), which, being common to composer, performer and listener alike, do not realise the "individuality" of each. While serving as a means of communication in music, the topos must be overcome as such if the composer's profound and intimate message – or the performer's or listener's interpretation – is to be realised. The musical text thus takes on supernormative

[27] Interestingly, in his commentary on Haydn, Monelle finds within the pastoral topos an association with rural life. This suggestion is now achieved not only by the traditional musical means of the pifferari, but also by quotations of folk songs. Listen, for example, to the second movement of Symphony No. 103, which uses a song from the Hungarian town of Sopron; or the finale of Symphony No. 104 with a song from Eisenstadt. See Rosemary 1970: 115–116.

characteristics that cannot be reduced to aspects of the musical code such as the topos. On the other hand, the topos remains the carrier of stable meanings in musical language, which are realised by concrete means of expression. These differences will be explored below when we consider Tarasti's existential musical semiotics in more detail.

The specifics of music: general issues

Tarasti confronts some common methodological problems associated with the semiotic analysis of music. Musical semiotics faces the challenge of defining the sign system of music on the basis of already available semiotic theories – many of them modelled on verbal language – on the one hand, and taking into account some specific features of musical semiosis on the other. Tarasti observes that music differs from verbal language in some basic characteristics: in music "expression and content are inseparably connected with each other. The slightest change on the level of expression produces a change of content as well" (Tarasti 1994: 11). In other words, the condition of arbitrariness of sign that Saussure applies to language does not seem to apply to music.[28]

From a semiotic point of view, a musical expression with well-defined immanent characteristics should have

[28] According to Monelle, music is the poststructuralist phenomenon par excellence precisely because it presupposes the indissoluble unity of signifier and signified. Cf. Monelle 2000: 16.

specific musical content. A musical signifier (expression) refers to a musical signified (content). As an example, we can again take Monelle's study of the pastoral topos. According to Monelle, in Western music between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, a sustained bourdon accompanied by a 6/8 or 12/8 metre is a signifier for pastoral content. In other words, when the seventeenth-century listener hears a bourdon in this size, it is likely – debatable really to what extent, but this is the hypothesis – that it will suggest to them that they are hearing something pastoral. However, when the bourdon is interrupted too soon, or the metre is different, the pastoral suggestion may be lost. It is also lost when the same musical elements are placed in another context, for example as a dominant before the recapitulation in sonata form.

Examples can be given entirely within Western music, but can also be deployed across musical cultures. From a semiotic standpoint, it is clear that a non-mensural, unequally tempered, and non-tonal musical message with a particular acoustic image cannot retain its content (i.e., its meaning) if it is communicated with the expressive means of the metric system, the tempered system, or the tonal system of Western music. A change in the immanent characteristics of the acoustic image, the signifier, results in a change in the content, the signified.

In relation to these features of musical signs, there arises one of the main problems before Tarastian musical semiotics: the positive definition of *musical meaning*. It is often thought that musical meanings cannot be specifically named. Shades of moods – grave, celebratory, heroic – or

suggestions of particular social contexts – religious, courtly, rural – are discernible in music. But these are much more abstract meanings than the ones which verbal language employs – names of objects, ideas, emotions or people. Thus, among semiotic systems, music is poorly developed in terms of its ability to communicate information.

Although most semioticians do not question the existence of a musical signified, there is a debate concerning the structure of this signified and the adequate means to investigate it. In the palette of solutions to the problem, a question stands out: what determines the meaning of music? As we will see below, according to the early Tarasti, it is the narrative structure of the musical text; in his later writings the narrative structure is transformed into an existential structure that affects the composer, the performer and the listener quite concretely. In general, semiotic positions on musical meaning differ primarily for methodological reasons. In the structuralist idea of the musical *code* lies the notion that musical language has an "inventory" or "vocabulary" of stable sign relations and, more precisely, that particular musical signifiers correspond to particular musical signifieds. Understanding a musical signifier (in the semiotic sense of the term) starts from the frame of reference of the code, which predefines the signs in music. As a counterpoint to the structuralist idea of the code in semiotic terms, Peirce's idea of the interpretant is put forward. According to the application of this idea to musical semiotics, the infinite chain of interpretants that enables semiosis to take place can lead to different interpretations of musical meaning. The same

musical "sign" (in the semiotic sense) can mean something different depending on who is listening or reading and in what context. Thus, instead of a stable, intersubjective code there emerges the unstable, always different interpretant. In this way, the dispute over musical meaning effectively becomes a dispute over the nature of signs in general. On one side is the thesis that musical language is a closed system that predetermines all possible meanings in a musical text. On the other side is the idea that musical language is an open system, i.e. the interpreter or analyst is to one degree or another entitled to free interpretations of the musical text.

Tarasti makes room for both views, seeking a synthesis between them. In short, he finds musical works (and parts of them) that confirm to one theory or the other. For him, the unifying factor is the musical subject, who can behave "by the rules", i.e. conform to established musical conventions, or break them, thereby introducing his own interpretive route into the work. The nature of the musical subject will be discussed below in relation to the musical narrative.

Music and musical semiotics as discourse

In musical semiotics, music as well as musical semiotics itself, are often regarded as *discourses*. The idea of discourse has had a profound influence on Tarasti's semiotics: "The nature of musical discourse can be articulated with a model that is semiotic in two senses: first, because it accounts for the external conditions of musical communication, not only the creation of a musical work but also the communicative factors manifested in a composition itself; second, because it seeks to perceive musical reality in depth, and thus distinguishes between manifest and immanent levels" (Tarasti 1994: 16). Tarasti uses various theories as a starting point for the analysis of musical discourse. At the same time, he examines the metanarrative of musical discourse by drawing connections with other discourses – social, historical, mythological, etc. Musical semiotics itself is seen methodologically as a form of academic discourse with its own specificities. Therefore, the notion of "discourse" appears to be the main point of reference for Tarastian semiotics throughout all stages of its development.

The term "discourse" emerged in linguistics as part of an attempt to go beyond the level of the sentence. If syntax and grammar are limited to the sentence, discourse analysis promises to bring linguistic problems down to the level

of an entire text.[29] The most concise definition of discourse is *organised text*. Discourse, like a sign, is subject to linguistic analysis. However, it now requires other methodological tools:

> yet it is evident that discourse itself (as a set of sentences) is organized and that, through this organization, it can be seen as the message of another language, one operating at a higher level than the language of the linguists. Discourse has its units, its rules, its 'grammar': beyond the sentence, and though consisting solely of sentences, it must naturally form the object of a second linguistics (Barthes 1977: 83).

Apart from music, musical analysis is itself also a discourse. In this respect, music and its analysis are in the same sense organised texts.[30]

Semiotics goes one step further by including in the concept of "discourse" those semiotic systems that are not linguistic in nature – such as all sign systems in nature (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 81). Such "discourses" are, for example, the sign systems that tell bees which flowers to pollinate; or migratory birds when and where to fly. In the human world, there are also non-linguistic discourses,

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[29] Benveniste was one of the first linguists to recognise the important role of discourse in human communication. Although linguistic analysis divides language into many smaller parts, "language begins" only in discourse (Benveniste 1971: 111). Nevertheless, Benveniste places discourse beyond linguistic (i.e., grammatical, syntactic, phonetic) analysis. Thus, "language begins" where linguistic analysis ends. In later writers, such as Roland Barthes, this is no longer the case.

[30] This relationship has been elaborated in detail by Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990).

which include various rituals, gestures, or road signs, for example. The practice of their usage takes place on the basis of sign systems that do not necessarily have a linguistic equivalent.

Since discourse is often treated as text in linguistic terms, in some semiotic theories "by extrapolation and as an hypothesis which seems to be fruitful" (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 81), various non-linguistic discourses are considered "texts". Traditional rituals, bodily gestures, the car lane thus become "texts". Tarasti, for example, pays particular attention to the bodily and gestural aspects in music.[31] Thus an analytic paradigm concerned with the structure and organisation of verbal texts – including those with presuppositions that are not semiotic in a narrow sense, such as psychoanalytic ones – applies to nonverbal discourses. It is from this position that music as text can be viewed.

Beyond linguistics and semiotics in a narrow sense, but based on them, the concept of discourse takes on a broader meaning, affecting the cultural, social and political world of an individual or a society. This use of the term was introduced by postmodern thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and is also embedded in Tarasti's musical semiotic understanding of discourse. In this reading, discursivity refers to social and political practices and encompasses all established understandings and rituals within a social unit. Thus, a discursive analysis of music in a postmodern key creates the conditions for deciphering

[31] See Tarasti 2002: 117–154.

the social, cultural and other meanings of music in a particular historical and cultural context.

Semiotic discourse in Greimas

One of Tarasti's main semiotic sources is Greimas and his theory of narrative discourse. Greimas' theory of signs, which Tarasti utilises, only makes sense within the overall framework of his theory of discourse. Greimas is representative of a narrower understanding of the concept of discourse related to its specifically semiotic uses. In the context of Greimasian semiotics, discourse is that which is "put in place by the enunciation" (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 83). According to Greimas, behind every utterance are what are called "semio-narrative" structures, which are used to explore the fundamental structural levels of discourse (these will be discussed below). Discourse is a set of utterances whose organisation is given by semio-narrative structures: discursive competence "constituted during the enunciation, and governs, by molding them, the uttered discoursive forms... putting into discourse—or **discoursivization**—consists in taking over the semionarrative structures and in transforming them into discoursive structures" (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 83). Thus, in Greimas' theory, discourse is a whole *below* which there are other structures which regulate its organisation.

Poststructuralist discourse in Derrida and Foucault

Another major methodological reference point for Tarasti is the postmodern notion of discourse as a site for the exercise of social and political power. Tarasti uses this view of discourse in his later writings, emphasising the interconnectedness of musical and other discourses within a common discursive framework of a work or a particular composer. In terms of the history of these ideas, it should be mentioned that it was only after linguistic and semiotic theories of discourse were introduced into literary theory and linked to other academic fields such as psychoanalysis (Kristeva) or hermeneutics (Ricoeur), that a new, highly socially and politically impregnated use of the term "discourse" emerged. This is most clearly seen in the work of postmodern writers such as Derrida and Foucault.

Discourse in Derrida's Idea of Deconstruction

Derrida's view of discourse influenced Tarasti insofar as the latter has developed a theory, which asserts that certain moments within the musical text leave the boundaries of the conventional and stable musical code. Thus, the free interpretative possibilities in relation to music, as well as the free compositional decisions within it, are associated with the breakdown of the idea of a unified linguistic code, for which Derrida's philosophy is a major influence.

The idea of discourse plays an important role in the philosophy of Derrida, who identifies it as a central concept in the method of "deconstruction". The idea of deconstruction usually begins with linguistic topics, which are then hypostasised to fundamental philosophical problems. Deconstruction questions the universality of a linguistic system even for those who are knowledgable in it.[32] Derrida describes the traditional communication model that is subject to deconstruction as follows:

> This equivocality, which weighs upon the model of the sign, marks the 'semiological' project itself and the organic totality of its concepts, in particular that of *communication,* which in effect implies a *transmission charged with making pass, from one subject to another, the identity* of a *signified* object, of a *meaning* or of a *concept* rightfully separable from the process of passage and from the signifying operation. Communication presupposes subjects (whose identity and presence are constituted before the signifying operation) and objects (signified concepts, a thought meaning that the passage of communication will have neither to constitute, nor, by all rights, to transform). *A* communicates B to C (Derrida 1981: 23–24).

Contrarily, according to Derrida, language is primarily based on *differences* – when I use a word, I inevitably distinguish it from other words. This idea can already be found in Saussure. Saussure introduced the notion of *value* – the quality of a sign in relation to all other signs in a language system. A sign receives its "identity" only in relation to all the other signs

[32] See Derrida 1988.

in the system. It does not simply refer to an entity present in itself, but is also defined by all that it is *not*. Saussure gives the following example:

> A few examples will show clearly that this is true. Modern French *mouton* can have the same signification as English *sheep* but not the same value, and this for several reasons, particularly because in speaking of a piece of meat ready to be served on the table, English uses *mutton* and not *sheep*. The difference in value between *sheep* and *mouton* is due to the fact that *sheep* has beside it a second term while the French word does not (Saussure 2011: 115–116).

Language in general is based on *differences*: "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system" (Saussure 2011: 121). The reason is that "*language is a form and not a substance*" (Saussure 2011: 122).

Within the structuralist tradition, this thesis has generally been accepted, but only insofar as the relation of the different concepts is structurally defined – a notion that poststructuralism usually rejects. Tarasti seems to remain undecided in this context, borrowing ideas from structuralism at one stage and ideas from poststructuralism at another. Tarasti considers *some* musical discourses following the example of Greimas, who sees structure as "the presence of two terms and the relation between them" (Greimas 1971: 14). Such a definition is unacceptable to poststructuralist thought, and therefore to Tarasti's later views, insofar as he considers forms of musical expression

in discourse that are found outside the structures of the established musical code. According to the poststructuralist view, a concept cannot be said to be "present", even in opposition. Derrida defines the act of signification as an act of differentiating:

> The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present (Derrida 1981: 26).

In structuralism, the web of differences is defined according to so-called *binary oppositions*, which are regulated by the structure itself and are stable in character:

> In an oppositive duality, if one of the terms is given, then the other, though not present, is evoked in thought. To the idea of white there is opposed only that of black, to the idea of beauty that of ugliness, to the idea of large that of small, to the idea of closed that of open, and so on. Opposites are so intimately interconnected that the appearance of one of them inevitably elicits the other (Jakobson 1990: 235).

For Derrida, the principle of *différance*[33] is in a state of instability and *play*: "*Différance* is play of differences, of the traces

[33] Derrida's concept of différance is a neologism derived from the word "difference" in French. The changing of the letter can only be perceived by the reader, but not by the listener. In this way Derrida wants to emphasise the importance of written language, which, in his view, has always, implicitly or not, been placed below spoken language. Reading can perceive differences that for listening leave inaudible: "The deconstructionist theories of

of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other" (Derrida 1981: 27). For him, binary oppositions are metaphysically established relations of *power*: "One of the two terms rules the other (axiologically, logically, etc.) or has achieved supremacy" (Derrida 1981: 41). It is precisely this hierarchy that ensures that one term is always "present" at the expense of the other: "[All these oppositions] at one time or another amount to a subordination of the movement of *différance* in favour of a presence of value or *meaning* that is thought to precede *différance*, to be more primordial than it, transcending it and, ultimately, governing it" (Derrida 1981: 29). *Différance* refers to both the signifier and the signified, because one always exists in relation to the other.[34] The closedness and comprehensiveness of a linguistic system is called into question because no linguistic structure can condition every use of language.[35]

Jacques Derrida stress how changing even the slightest piece of the signifier can call forth extensive reflections on the signified, as do the letters e and a in the words difference and différance" (Tarasti 1994: 281).

[34] Derrida also criticises the very distinction between signifier and signified as a "conceptual opposition of metaphysics." The idea of différance makes all metaphysical oppositions "nonpertinent" (see Derrida 1981: 28–30.)

[35] The signifier and the signified are equally affected by the play of différance, but at the same time they cannot exist outside the function of the sign that connects them. The question of whether the same musical signified – for example, the concept of the tonic – is signified by different signifiers remains undeveloped in its specificity: the acoustic image of the word "tonic", the acoustic voicing of the chord in the music, and the chord written out in the score. According to Derrida's theory, and according to his interpretation of Saussure, these are different concepts of tonic. When the signifier changes, the signified also

From a methodological point of view, this poststructuralist idea influences Tarasti primarily in a general sense, i.e., in that he seeks to investigate aspects of musical discourse that cannot be reduced to a conventionally accepted musical language. After searching for a means of describing the relationship between musical conventions and the specific style of a composition that lies beyond them, he eventually discovered a musical moment in which the contradiction appeared to be lifted, a moment Tarasti terms "transcending" (see below).

For Derrida, discourse is where the metaphysical idea of a "transcendent signified" finally gives way to the principle of *différance*:

> Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely (Derrida 1978: 353–354).

In discourse, "differences" come into play. This play also exists at the level of the linguistic system, but there it can

changes. To hear the tonic, to "read" the tonic in the score, and to say "tonic" during a class in music theory are events in which one does not refer to the same concept (i.e., signified).

only refer to individual sentences. Here, however, the game of *différance* is no longer played by words, but by sentences and other elements of discourse. It is only at the level of discourse that text is realised as *différance*.

As was made clear in his critique of Ruwet's paradigmatic method, Tarasti, similarly to Derrida, understands the (musical) text as a play of differences, i.e., as a web of signifieds based on absence. For him, the principle of *différance* is realised in that it is not the present but rather the *absent* meanings, which define musical discourse: "Relations *in absentia* are inferred on the basis of signifiers (surface phenomena) as well as the musical competence of listener and analyst, and are at least as important as relations *in praesentia* on the syntactic level" (Tarasti 1994: 11). Musical *différance* is perceptible in music "which is only slightly present" and "leaves abundant space for absent meanings" (Tarasti 1994: 281). *Différance* seems to becomes apparent only at certain moments in discourse when the individual style of the composer overrides conventionally established norms and the relations of all musical "signifieds" are altered. But Tarasti, unlike Derrida, finds this only in particular instances of musical discourse and leaves other parts completely subject to the traditional conception of the musical code.

One may, however, find a divergence between Derrida and Tarasti in the latter's embrace of the idea of "transcendence" (which will be discussed below). Of course, the two thinkers mean different things by this term. While Derrida questions the validity of a transcendent signified, given as an absolutely present entity, independent of others,

Tarasti employs the term to describe a particular working of the (musical) text, wherein the most fundamental forces which govern it – *Moi* and *Soi* – are suspended. Transcendence is not a state of the signified, but rather a state of the text as a whole – transcendence is the fulfilment of the text in its entirety. How this occurs, will be discussed in more detail below.

Discourse in Foucault's thought

Perhaps most influential in introducing the concept of "discourse" into musical semiotics is Michel Foucault. For Foucault, discourse defines any practice within a culture or society. A discursive analysis describes all the relations between discourse and the institutions, laws and practices of a society – sexual, professional, educational, etc. At their core, these relations are *power* relations: "This is the problem that defines almost all my books: how does the production, in Western societies, of discourses that (at least for a given time) are invested with truth value relate to the various power mechanisms and institutions?" (Foucault 1983: 8). Thus, the idea of discourse leaves the confines of linguistics and becomes determinative for the analysis of social relations. Discourse is the consequence of a certain cognitive position or *episteme*:

> what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which

Ex. 10 *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez (here in grayscale).

> is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility (Foucault 1970: xxi).

The study of discourse reveals the hidden presuppositions of social codes, including (potentially) musical codes.

Tarasti (2002: 68–69) details Foucault's analysis of the painting *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez to show how an analysis of an artwork can reflect the discursive

relations of an era. According to Foucault, Velázquez's painting reflects the episteme of the classical era, whose discourse is characteristic in that it "ensured the initial, spontaneous, unconsidered deployment of representation in a table" (Foucault 1970: 303). The classical episteme is structured in a table, i.e. "The profound vocation of Classical language has always been to create a table – a 'picture': whether it be in the form of natural discourse, the accumulation of truth, descriptions of things, a body of exact knowledge, or an encyclopaedic dictionary. It exists, therefore, only in order to be transparent" (Foucault 1970: 310). The guarantee of this tabular representation of things is the absent centre, which is at the same time always represented, but just *as* absent. This is what *Las Meninas* depicts:

> and lastly, in the centre, in the very heart of the representation, nearest to what is essential, the mirror, showing us what is represented, but as a reflection so distant, so deeply buried in an unreal space, so foreign to all the gazes being directed elsewhere, that it is no more than the frailest duplication of representation. All the interior lines of the painting, and above all those that come from the central reflection, point towards the very thing that is represented, but absent. At once object – since it is what the artist represented is copying onto his canvas – and subject – since what the painter had in front of his eyes, as he represented himself in the course of his work, was himself, since the gazes portrayed in the picture are all directed towards the fictitious position occupied by the royal personage, which is also the painter's real place, since the occupier of that ambiguous place in which the painter and the sovereign alternate, in a never-ending flicker, as it were, is the spectator, whose gaze transforms the painting into an object, the pure

> representation of that essential absence (Foucault 1970: 307).

This image is characteristic of classical thinking (in Foucault's sense) because it represents people and objects "tabularly", i.e., in transparent presence. At the same time, what ought to be at the centre of the picture, the royal couple, is reduced to a mirror image, diminished and almost invisible, i.e., merely a "duplication of representation", but not this representation itself. But what is it then? Foucault tells us that the representation is in a position that is absent from what is present in the picture. While the painter in the painting is painting the royal couple, the representation is just that couple as an object for the painter; at the same time, that same painter is painting the painting we see (*Las Meninas*), but this time as the subject-observer of the whole situation painted in *Las Meninas*, in which he himself participates. But from the point of view of the picture that we see – *Las Meninas* – it is at the same time the position of the sovereign, the royal couple. And in the end, in the flickering play between the artist and the sovereign, we find ourselves as observers. It is this absence of a centre that makes possible the transparent tabularity of the "classical" work of art.

Tarasti seeks to apply this kind of analysis to music: "Foucault's interpretation shows how an analysis of an artwork can step outside a rigorously textual approach and at the same time reveal, by observing the communicational relations within it, how the work reflects the epistemes of the age, the latter's archaeology of knowledge and feeling. Musical analysis has not yet reached such a level, but it might be approached in the manner of Foucault" (Tarasti

2002: 69). In his musical semiotics, such an attempt is the idea of an existential situation in the work: "*Situation,* as an existential semiotic concept, first of all refers always to a certain particularity... Situation is that part of the world with which one enters into a relationship. One relates to the world via his/her situation. Situation is the whole of all those phenomena, objects, and states of affairs under which and by which a person's organic and conscious existence is realized" (Tarasti 2002: 71–72). In the existential semiotics of music, each musical discourse is seen as a collection of different existential situations played out between subjects or actors.

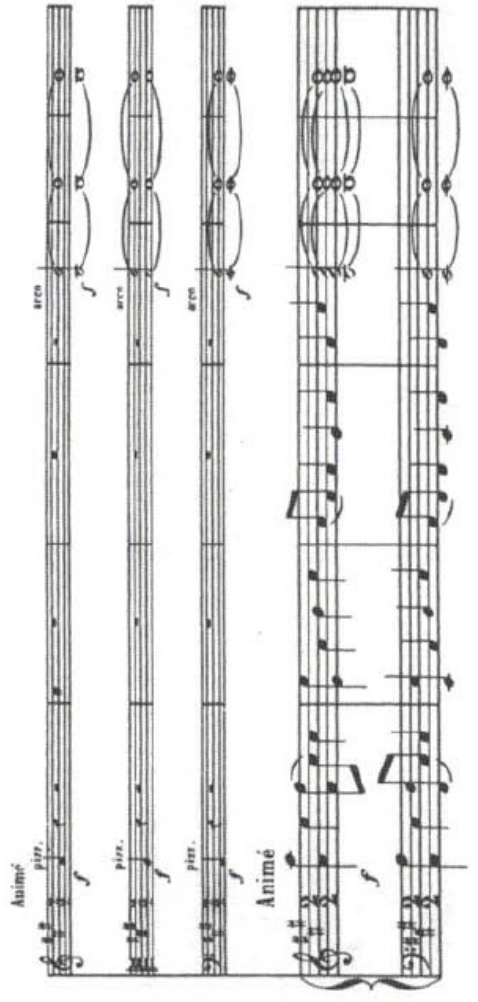
Tarasti (2002: 125) applies the idea of power relations to musical discourse, using a piano quartet by Ernest Chausson as an example: "a piece whose highly organic and lively gestural level ceaselessly puts in question any kind of pre-established musical form" (2002: 124). The problem of the work is not simply the musical form as such: the vital gesture of the work questions the "patriarchal" order of the strict German notion of form: Chausson is "a composer whose music, on the corporeal level of its signs, overturns the Germanic formal hegemony, or 'patriarchal' order" (2002: 124).

The opening gesture of the work is "masculine" and full of "Mediterranean energy" – which is why it is perfectly capable of establishing a conventional square eight-bar period for the beginning of a work in sonata form (Tarasti 2002: 124). But as early as the fourth measure the periodic form is called into question by a "rhythmic asymmetry". Within the first thirty bars, Chausson's highly

impressionistic style becomes apparent: "we realize in what country and century we are, i.e., what the real musical situation of this message is" (2002: 124–125). Tarasti discovered that the opening motive is found in the chorale from Caesar Franck's Prelude, Chorale and Fugue FWV 21, as well as in the bell motive on the specially prepared instrument (*Parsifal Klavier Instrument*) from Wagner's *Parsifal*.

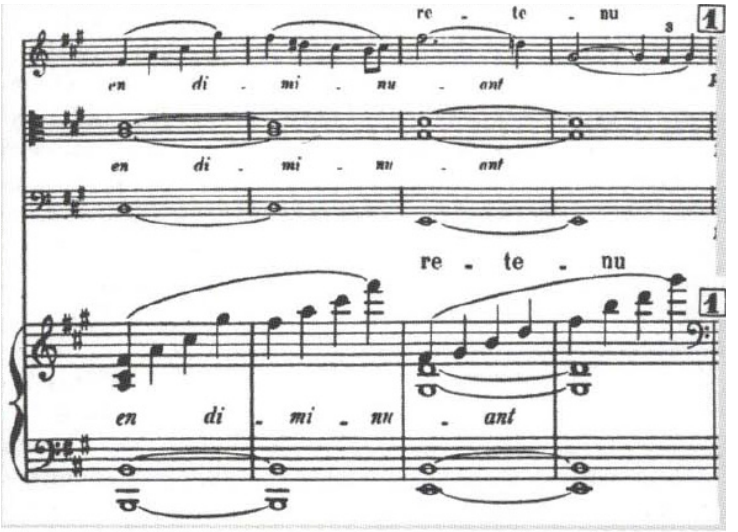
The historical background of the motive contributes to the parodic effect in Chausson's interpretation: "In the Chausson quartet, what at the outset seemed to be a purely masculine, naively corporeal sign of a vital musical body now seems to be a parody of a much more profound, internal, and psychologically complex chorale-motive" (Tarasti 2002: 126). It is this strong contrast that highlights Chausson's non-adherence to the "German" – strict and patriarchal – formal order, which makes his work discursively defined in a Foucauldian sense. Musical discourse here appears as a vehicle of social power, able to subvert an existing hegemonic discourse.

But to what extent can musical discourse be grasped through a semiotic system based on the structure of verbal language? Can discourse be non-verbal or non-verbal *and* musical? Foucault himself left open the question of the linguistic character of discourse. The problem becomes palpable when one has to define the *objects* with which discourse is concerned: "A task that consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs;

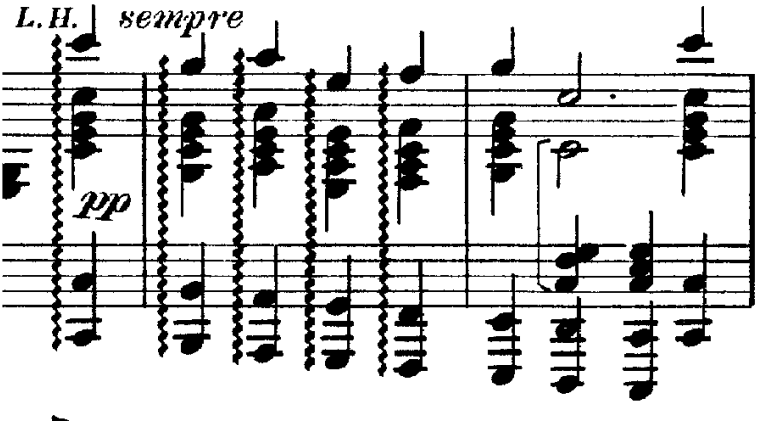


Ex. 12. Opening to Chausson's Piano Quartet in A major, op. 30.

Ex. 11 Opening to Piano Quartet in A major, op. 30 by E. Chausson.



Ex. 12 Chausson, Piano Quartet in A major, op. 30, bars 27-30.



Ex. 13 Excerpt from C. Franck, Prelude, Chorale and Fugue FWV 21 (Franck 1976).

but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe" (Foucault 2002: 54). Discourses should not be understood as wholes of signs, as in some linguistic theories. They are more than sign systems insofar as they are also practices that "form" (i.e., define) their objects. From this position, all reality is discursively determined, i.e., created and sustained by discourse, and therefore intelligible only within its limits.[36]

In Tarasti's theory, too, musical discourse must go beyond linguistic form. There are, he believes, aspects of musical signification that cannot be reduced to verbal language: "The view that meaning pre-exists theoretical formulation also emphasises the content, the signified, which, however, can be non-verbal, 'ineffable', expressible only in terms of a quasi-corporeal experience" (Tarasti 2002: 128). In Foucault, as in Tarasti, corporeality plays a central role in the enactment of discursive practices. But in this respect

[36] Indeed, even the early Foucault spoke of the so-called non-discursive, but without developing it methodologically. The non-discursive refers to "primary relations" that "can be described independently of any discourse or any discursive object between institutions, techniques, social forms, etc." (Foucault 1998: 69). However, these relations are closely connected to the discursive and do not receive a "proper" modality of existence that can be understood as permanently "non-discursive". Primary relations are "somehow at the limit of discourse: they offer to it the objects it can talk about, or rather (...) they define the group of relations over which discourse must exert influence in order to be able to talk about these or those objects, to work with them, to name them, to analyse them, to classify them, to clarify them" (Foucault 1998: 70).

the latter, as we shall see, draws on Kristeva's ideas, which have psychoanalytic roots.

Within the framework of musical semiotics, the question of the limits of discourse and its relation to the musical "object" has rarely been explicitly posed. In other words, musical semiotics, at least to my knowledge, has not yet definitively asked the question "is there a non-discursive musical phenomenon?" in methodological terms. From a semiotic point of view, where discourse is chosen as a point of reference to music, discourse defines music entirely. Discourse can only be displaced or supplemented by other discourse. Music has no reality beyond a particular discursive practice.

A similar question is posed by Tarasti only in his later theory, and also largely inexplicitly. It will be discussed below when the idea of the "transcendence" of musical-discursive relations at a particular musical moment is introduced. In a sense, Foucault's theory also does not presuppose an explicit thematisation of this problem, which is why Tarasti's move can be read as going beyond the discursive (in Foucault's sense) and the generally beyond semiotic analysis.

Music and musical semiotics as discourse

Both the traditional semiotic and the expanded post-structuralist use of the term "discourse" has been used widely in musical semiotics. Tarasti very often implicitly

uses notions of musical discourse that have been introduced or discussed by other authors in musical semiotics. Therefore, in order to better understand the context in which he appropriates the idea of discourse, it is necessary to briefly introduce some significant musical semiotic theories of discourse and music.

In Kofi Agawu's semiotics, for example, the term "discourse" has at least three meanings. Firstly, discourse can simply be a series of events. For Agawu (2014: 7), these events can be anything:

> gesture, an idea, a motive, a progression, or, more neutrally, a building block, phrase, segment, or unit, including the 'intonational units' introduced by Boris Asafyev... To understand a Beethoven sonata or a Liszt tone poem as discourse, therefore, is to understand it as constituted by a set of events which succeed and relate to each other, the whole making a meaningful impression on the listener.

The second meaning that Agawu invests in the term "discourse" is a linguistic level larger than the sentence, which unites sentences within itself. Musical discourse unifies musical sentences. Through the notion of discourse, Agawu wants to emphasise the "processual" character of music, viewing it as a series of events organised into a whole: "Placing the emphasis on events promotes a processual and phenomenological view of the work; it recognizes moment-by-moment succession but worries not at all about an overall or resultant profile that can be named and held up as an archetype" (Agawu 2014: 8). Thus, through the second meaning of the term "discourse", the emphasis is placed more on the auditory experience than

on the analysis of the score as a "static" carrier of semiotic facts. The third meaning of discourse as used by Agawu is that established by poststructuralist thought. Any treatment of music involves a metacritique that relates both to the musical text and to the semiotician analysing with it. The text as discourse puts the semiotician in the position of accepting his own ideas as a constructs, which are subject to continuous reassessment: "To analyse in this sense is necessarily to reflect simultaneously upon the process of analysis" (Agawu 2014: 9). It is in this threefold sense of the term that Agawu carries out his research on music as the study of musical discourses.

All three meanings of the term that Agawu introduces are used by Tarasti at one point or another in his research work. The first is so closely related to the linguistic idea of discourse that it is practically always assumed when speaking of musical discourse. The second view becomes a factor for Tarasti when he considers the temporal character of music. For Tarasti, musical discourse is a fundamentally temporal, processual phenomenon with causal connections between successive musical moments, conditioned by the mind of the listener (1994: 18–19). Agawu's third use of the term considers not music but musical analysis as discourse, an idea related to Jean-Jacques Nattiez's work. This idea directly influenced Tarasti, who, like Nattiez, insisted on a clear definition of the methodological foundations of musical semiotic discourse.

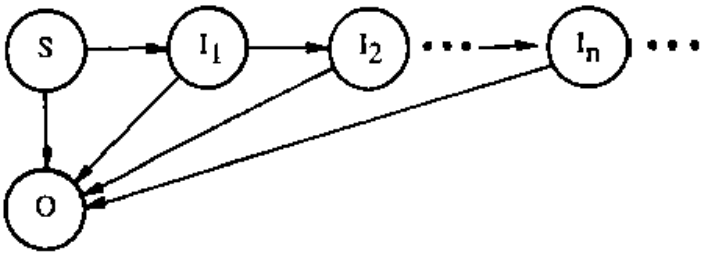
Musical discourse and discourse about music in Nattiez

As has become clear, Tarasti engages closely with Nattiez's idea of musical discourse and discourse *about* music. On the one hand, he makes explicit (though often negative) comments on some of the more rigid scientific procedures that Nattiez incorporates into musical analysis (in the form of paradigmatic analysis). On the other hand, he finds Nattiez's comparative analyses of discourses on music very useful, and uses them himself.

Nattiez (1990) presents a detailed theory of the relation between discourse and music in semiotic terms. He discusses both "musical discourse", i.e. music *as* discourse, and discourse *about* music, which can encompass all possible statements about music – musicological, analytical, critical, historical, etc. (and even those that remain outside a particular scholarly field) These various forms of discourse are unified by Nattiez's semiotic theory – that is, his theory of the *sign* in a narrow sense – which he has appropriated from the semiotics of Charles Peirce, Gilles-Gaston Granger, and Jean Molino.

Drawing on Peirce's theory of signs, Granger defines a sign or "representamen" as

> something that is related in a certain way to a second sign, its 'object', in such a way that it brings a third sign, its 'interpretant', into relation with that same 'object' and in such a way that it brings a fourth sign into relation with that same 'object' and so on ad infinitum (1968: 114).



Ex. 14 Graphical representation of Granger's definition (Nattiez 1990: 6)

Similarly, for Peirce, the process of signification, semiosis, is infinite. Nattiez argues that Peirce defines the object of the sign as a "virtual" object that does not exist outside of "the infinite multiplicity of interpretants, by means of which the person *using* the sign seeks to *allude to* the object" (Nattiez 1990: 7). Nattiez's entire theory is based on "Peirce's idea of an infinite and dynamic interpretant" (1990: 8). Thus, meaning is determined by the lived experience of the sign user: "meaning... is the constellation of interpretants drawn from the lived experience of the sign's user—the 'producer' or 'receiver'—in a given situation" (Nattiez 1990: 10). This model of meaning places its user in a unique position. No infinite chain of interpreters can duplicate another chain. Therefore, each reading of a sign is unique. This applies to the individual sign as well as to the text. The sign and the text are "symbolic facts", the consideration of which Nattiez places within the so-called triadic or tripartite model.

At the heart of Nattiez's semiology is the idea of the *tripartiteness*, which he borrows from Jean Molino. The

tripartite model can be applied to any symbolic fact – like a sign or a text. Every symbolic fact has three dimensions or levels: *poietic, esthesic and neutral*. At the *poietic level,* the symbolic fact is seen as a *created* fact. At this level, the whole *process of the* creation of the symbolic fact is described – the qualities of its author, the context of its creation, etc. The *esthesic* level considers the symbolic fact in terms of the process of its perception. According to Molino, in the esthesic process the meaning of the symbolic fact is still being *constructed*[37]. The *neutral* level considers the physical, material and immanent dimension of the symbolic fact, the so-called *trace*. Most important for Nattiez appears to be the third, neutral level. With respect to the other two levels, *the neutral level* has the following definition:

> This is a level of analysis at which one does not decide a priori whether the results generated by a specific analytical proceeding are relevant from the esthesic or poietic point of view... 'Neutral' means both that the poietic and esthesic dimensions of the object have been 'neutralized' and that one proceeds to the end of a given procedure regardless of the results obtained (Nattiez 1990: 13).

The distinction between different levels of musical discourse (as a symbolic fact) becomes the guiding principle

[37] Both concepts have their own origins. Poetics is a concept introduced by Étienne Gilson (1963), who unites in it all the characteristics of the creator of an artistic work in the capacity of its creator – historical and cultural preconditions, procedures of the creative act itself, etc. Aesthetics is a concept introduced by Paul Valéry (1945). He uses it to designate each separate perception of the work as an independent active process, distinguishing it from its creation.

for Nattiez's musical semiotic research. It is one thing to talk about a musical work from the position of the composer, in terms of their biography, style and socio-cultural context. It is another to speak from the position of the listener with their musical taste, competence and aural experience. These two kinds of discourse about music, poietic and esthesic, proceed from quite different premises. The neutral level is seen as a "material trace" that can be explored without presuppositions – or with as few as possible.

Tarasti uses the poietic, esthesic analysis and neutral level analysis in various places in his writings. Because the tripartite model can potentially be applied to any, and not just musical discourse, Tarasti analyses, for example, *La prisonnière*, the fifth volume of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, using this model (Tarasti 2012: 339–347). The analysis looks at the "implicit" musical semiotic features in the literary text. This is both an example of an interdiscursive analysis – in this case between a musical, a literary and a musical semiotic discourse – and an application of the tripartite model in Tarasti's theory.

Tarasti applies the tripartite model also in analyses of specific musical works. In his study of Schumann's Fantasia in C Major, Op. 17, he addresses the "poietic" aspect of the work, revealing biographical details surrounding Schumann's compositional process. In 1836, Tarasti explains, Schumann wrote a one-movement Fantasia for piano, reflecting the tendency in classical-romantic music toward the genre's one-movement character (2012: 133). Later that year, he added two movements to it and titled it "a sonata for Beethoven". Like Liszt and the Schlegel

brothers, Schumann decided to contribute to the *Bonner Verein für Beethovens Monument* (Bonn Club for Beethoven's Monument) by "publishing the piece and giving a hundred complimentary copies of it to the committee to sell. He now entitled the piece: 'Ruins. Trophies. Palms. Grand Piano Sonata. For Beethoven's Monument'" (2012: 133). The following year he offered the work to Breitkopf & Härtel under the title "Fantasies". Several more name changes followed in correspondence with the publisher.

In addition to this interesting story, Tarasti relates the earliest performance history of the work, about which Schumann personally expressed himself. When Liszt, to whom Schumann dedicated the Fantasia, played the work before Schumann, Schumann wrote to Clara Schumann:

> I wish you could have heard Liszt this morning. He really is quite extraordinary. He played from my *Noveletten*, the Fantasy, and the Sonata in a way that affected me deeply. Much of it was different from what I had expected, but all of it was full of genius, and had a tenderness and a sense of daring which is no doubt not an everyday occurrence with him (Marston 1992: 93; Tarasti 2012: 134).

Tarasti (2012: 134) assumes it was probably about the same event that Liszt reported that after playing the second movement for Schumann, Schumann went over, hugged him in tears and said, "Göttlich!" ("Divine!").

Discourses *about* music are also semiotic facts and are also tripartite. For example, an analysis of the poietics of a discourse about music considers all aspects of the creation of the analysis from the position of the author. The esthesics of discourse about music covers the possible ways

an analysis can be read. The neutral level of discourse about music refers to the immanent givens of analysis – the musical material, the analytic method, etc.

The tripartite model can serve as a basis for a *comparative analysis* of already existing discourses about music. It can reveal the rules guiding the construction of an analysis or discourse about music. A comparative analysis of a discourse about music – the so-called *metaanalysis* – should reveal the methodological presuppositions that guide it. From a semiotic perspective, each analysis is a consequence of a different selection of interpretants by the music analyst. Metaanalysis aims only to describe the different chains of interpreters playing a role in the analyses of different music analysts. One main problem in Nattiez's work is the investigation of the *neutral level of discourse about music*, the level of immanent textual structures.

Tarasti develops his general methodological view of musical semiotic analysis based on ideas embedded in some structuralist authors. What the neutral level of discourse about music reveals are the immanent conditions for this discourse, and with this, whether the conditions for a clear and transparent musical analytic procedure are met. It is precisely these criteria that prove crucial for Tarasti as he begins to define the framework of his musical semiotic theories and to modify them according to different methodological foundations and the research approaches.

In Nattiez's meta-analysis from the position of the neutral level, it becomes clear that many concepts that are often used in discourses about music do not have a

strict definition and are not clearly distinguished from each other. Referring to Ruwet (1972: 100–134), Nattiez reviews the *Encyclopédie Larousse*, *New Grove, Encyclopédie Fasquelle*, and other dictionaries, where the definitions of some musical analytic concepts (e.g., *motive, figure*, and *cell*) often overlap. For Nattiez, the problem is methodological: "We are obviously dealing with units, with a beginning and an end, but what exactly are the criteria that allow us to articulate these musical units?" (1990: 157). Here Nattiez is talking specifically about defining separate terms. There is a big difference between analytic language being vague, even if it is intuitive, and being precise:

> If I criticize the metalanguage of melodic analysis, this is because so many writers have behaved as if the *idea* that *they* might have about phrase or cell were sufficient to determine (for each particular musical text) this phrase or that cell. But the *word* "phrase," the *word* "cell," are both semiological units. They are linked to interpretants that (in a very general, very rough way) set in opposition the phrase as a longer unit and the cell as the shortest unit—and who is to say that this is wrong?... What I object to here is substituting some intuitive, vague feeling about the nature of a phrase for a precise methodology that would delimit and define "phrase" (Nattiez 1990: 160).

The problem of accuracy in analytical language concerns the communicability of musical analysis. An objectively valid terminological system cannot accept the overlap or vagueness of certain definitions in the language of analysis. The difficulty, for Nattiez, is that the analyst masks his musical intuitions and perceptions in a vague or idiosyncratic terminology and communicates them with the assumption that the reader can

understand what he means. Viewed in semiotic terms, the musical analyst takes a musical sign-representamen (a sound signal, a musical text), fills it with certain meaning, having particular interpretants in mind, and assumes that the reader will understand the same sign-representamen in the same way through the same interpretants. From the point of view of Nattiez and Granger, a process of communication such as this is unrealistic. The interpretants that give a sign its meaning are always unique, and the identity of such analytic utterances cannot be guaranteed unless all musical analytic terms are defined completely explicitly in terms of their immanent musical characteristics. Only in this case can their presence or absence in a musical text be established with certainty.

Tarasti takes into account and sometimes explicitly engages in this methodological problematics. He is committed to making explicit the conceptual and methodological apparatus he will be working with before undertaking an analysis: "it is essential for all semiotical study that research make explicit its implicit biases and presuppositions, as Nattiez has correctly emphasised. This is necessary so that the way in which the research forms its own referential illusion is not concealed, thereby acquiring ideological and dogmatic features" (Tarasti 1994: 70). In fact, both Nattiez and Tarasti are working in the tradition of structuralism insofar as they assume that any theory is a construct that itself defines the objects it analyses: "Instead, we shall lay the groundwork for a reading model by which we can interpret musical thinkers of various ages. Accordingly, our hypothetically universal music model is not an empirical (lived-in) model but a theoretical

construct, with a metalanguage and discourse of its own" (Tarasti 1994: 70). Tarasti writes that he bases his ideas on Greimas' epistemology. Hence, for him (1994: 70), "the reference of the study is not the relation to a reality conceived as being outside the discourse, but the relation to the model which the study has of its object".

It seems, in other words, that in Tarasti's early theory discourse has no clearly defined relation to non-discursive reality. This idea of discourse is closely associated with Nattiez's work. Musical discourse – music itself as discourse – is different from discourse *about* music. Both discourses define in their own way the objects they deal with. At the same time, they are subject to analogous analyses based on their common symbolic form.

Musical semiotics and musicology – discourses with a common research object?

Given this methodological stance, the question of the nature of the musical object, or the nature of music in general, immediately arises. To what extent and in what ways does music lend itself to become an object of academic investigation? If we accept Tarasti's position that musical semiotics – and any other discourse *about* music – defines its object by itself and each time anew, in what sense can we claim that this semiotics or discourse is "musical"? If there is no methodologically discernible relation between discourse *about* music and musical discourse, i.e. music itself, then how is a discourse *about* music musically

"relevant" at all? The dismissal of these questions as inadequate – or the dismissal of the methodological premises from which they proceed – also raises questions, this time in the opposite direction. If discourse *about* music has a direct, methodologically clear relationship to musical discourse, what exactly is it? If, on the other hand, one rejects the notion of "discourse" as principally inadequate, then the question can be reduced to the relation of *musicology* to music: what makes the musicological view relevant to "music itself"? It is along these lines that Tarasti outlines a principled position of musical semiotics vis-à-vis traditional musicology, to which I now turn.

Like many musical semioticians, Tarasti worked within the scholarly context of the undeveloped field of musical semiotics, which, at least on first reading, is thematically tied to the already established field of musicology. Rightly or wrongly, it is assumed in advance that musical semiotics and traditional musicology refer to the same object of inquiry: music. For this reason, what stands out in Tarasti's writings is the special significance that musical semiotics attains in relation to the traditional disciplines concerned with musical analysis – which is the overall field of musicology. Musicology plays the role of a dialogical partner of musical semiotics because it can provide critical guidance as to the direction of musical studies. In turn, musical semiotics is constructed as an extension, response, or critique of musicology. Thus, a musical semiotic analysis is usually presented against the background of traditional musical analysis, a musical semiotic "historiography" is built against the background of certain prototypical

narratives of music history, etc. Conversely, certain musicological disciplines – for example, ethnomusicology in the English-speaking world – would be unimaginable without the methodological referent of musical semiotics.[38] Thus,

[38] The connection was perhaps established by Bruno Nettl (1958). Nettl emphasises the analytical possibilities if traditional semiotic and linguistic methods are applied to music. The aim is to seek sufficiently rigourous criteria for the definition of a musical corpus in the study of an unfamiliar musical culture, and for the study of a musical "language" or "idiom." It is here that Nettl applies the traditional linguistic distinction between "phonetics" (concerned with phones) and "phonemics" (concerned with phonemes) to music: "we should, like the linguists, distinguish between phonetics, the study of all auditory features in language or music, and phonemics, the study of only the significant features of the given style or language" (1958: 38). By "significant features" Nettl here means those that have structural significance for the linguistic (or musical) system in question. A musical "phonetics" is concerned with describing the purely acoustic characteristics of a musical sound; conversely, phonemics must determine which sounds are structurally loaded and what varieties there are of the same feature. For example, the tonic in root position and its first inversion can, in certain contexts, be read as varieties of the phoneme "tonic". Such varieties are called "allophones" in Saussurean linguistics. Nettl applies the term "allophone" to music. Four years earlier, in 1954, linguist Kenneth Pike (1954) had derived from the words "phonetics" and "phonemics" the conceptual opposition "etic-emic" that became central to the social sciences, anthropology, and cultural studies; Pike applies the opposition to various aspects of social life. The etic features of a social behaviour are its immanent characteristics, which a scientist outside the relevant community observes and describes. Emic characteristics are those that are stable within social structures and that have concrete meaning for those who practice them. This probably influenced Nettl, who makes a similar move with regard to music. (The relationship between ethnomusicology and musical semiotics is bidirectional. As Monelle (1992: 162) writes, "[e]thnomusicologists were the midwives of musical semiotics".

the relationship of the two disciplinary fields – musical semiotics and musicology – turns out to be interdependent at many points.

In a positive sense, it can be noted that in almost all of its branches, musical semiotics continues to use the entire arsenal of musicological concepts traditionally employed by music analysis.[39] References to Schenker's methodological presuppositions and analytical tools, for example, have been on the agenda in musical semiotics for decades.[40] The reasons for this are both historical and contextual: musical semiotics is largely a product of the English-speaking and, in particular, American academic world, where Schenker's theories have been *de facto* hegemonic in musicology throughout the twentieth century.[41] Insofar as it draws on Schenker and other

Nettl, for example, played such a dual role, on the one hand introducing semiotic concepts into an ethnomusicological context, and on the other hand developing musical semiotics itself towards defining a field of its own.)

39 The only exceptions are perhaps Ruwet's (1987) and Nattiez's (1990) attempts at paradigmatic analysis.

40 For Schenker's most influential theories in English-language musicology, see e.g., Schenker 1935, Schenker 1910, Schenker 2004. Schenker stands at the center of the musical semiotic theory developed by Agawu (2014: 111) and Lerdahl and Jackendoff's (1996) linguistic theory of musical structure and is taken into account whenever analysis of "immanent" structures in music is at hand.

41 Schenker's influence is enormous and almost all-encompassing. Because his analyses deal primarily with immanent musical structures, he is considered a major culprit (in both the positive and the negative sense) for the rise of formalism in mid-twentieth century American music analyses. Joseph Kerman's seminal essay for American musicology, "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out," (1980) which criticises the focus on

musicologists, musical semiotics can, in a certain sense, be seen as an offshoot of musicology. In any case, in English-language musicology today semiotics is considered a source of methodological solutions that are in no way inferior to the traditional musicological ones. It is rare to encounter a musicological essay that does not refer directly to some semiotic author.[42]

In strictly methodological terms, musical semiotics implies a reformulation of traditional musicological approaches. On the one hand, this is done along the lines of the entire conceptual apparatus of semiotics, which has almost nothing to do with the terminology of traditional musicology. On the other hand, musical semioticians such as Tarasti explicitly define the critical course of semiotics with regard to musicology. Most often this boils down to the claim that, in contrast to traditional musicology, musical semiotics seeks a more rigorous scientific foundation. Tarasti writes: "Musical semiotics would meet the challenge of an entire tradition of musicology whose problems can be reinterpreted and illuminated by an approach that is extremely aware of its concepts and meta-language, and

intramusical, formal features of music in analysis, draws primarily on Schenker's influence on American musicology, but in a highly critical vein.

[42] Cf. e.g., the work of Nicholas Cook (2001) and his reviews of musical semiotic books (e.g. Cook 1996). Musical semiotics sometimes exerts an influence on postmodern compositional practice. Boulez and Nattiez, for example, are close friends – Nattiez edited Boulez's (1990) collected works, and a letter of recommendation by Boulez for a reward that Nattiez received in 2002 was used as a preface to a collection dedicated to Nattiez (Nattiez et al. 2017; Boulez expressed a desire to write a preface, but died prematurely).

whose basic premises are perhaps more explicit than they often are in more traditional approaches" (Tarasti 1994: 55). With this comment, Tarasti approaches the position held by Ruwet and Nattiez that traditional musicology suffers from a lack of systematicity in the construction of its conceptual apparatus. However, this critique rests on a premise we have already introduced, namely that of the discursive character of musicology in general. It is only when musicology is conceived as a discourse, and music as an object *constructed* by that discourse, that musicology can be conceived of as needing explicit and/or rigorously scientific methodological premises.

Tarasti's critique of the methodological foundations of musicology becomes explicit when he thematises the methodological problem of music history. He constructs a possible methodological basis for the treatment of music history. According to him, any history of music is "a thought-of model, an interpretative scheme by which we organize the events of our musical past according to certain criteria" (1994: 67)[43]. In reality, these criteria may be very different. For this reason, there is no history of music "in an objective sense" (Tarasti 1994: 67). Each music historian views the history of music through their own perspective. A widespread model is the *developmental* model, according to which music – primarily Western music – develops, in some discourses even teleologically, over time. However, any such model inevitably remains only a particular attempt to rationalise music history (1994: 68).

[43] For the idea that history is a "a thought-of model", Tarasti refers to Lévi-Strauss (1958: 347–348).

According to Tarasti, every music history follows in one way or another a narrative pattern, i.e., a structure that defines the limits of historical discourse. This applies even to that part of science which declares itself objective and claims to deal only with "facts": "By these mechanisms science creates an illusion of realism, the fiction of a language telling us about reality, 'just as it is'" (Tarasti 1994: 68). Dealing with the vast amount of possible and actual historical discourses about music presupposes "a universal model for all music, a model for what music ultimately is" (1994: 69). The construction of such a model is, of course, extremely problematic. Tarasti resolves the issue by defining such a model as "a theoretical construct, with a meta-language and discourse of its own" (1994: 70), modelled on Greimasian semiotics:

> This kind of discourse cannot appear, like empirical discourse, as an objective discourse, as a 'pure' description of facts, since the aim is to form a model of the object of study, to project this model onto its object and again back to the discourse of the research. This procedure is based upon the idea that the reference of the study is not the relation to a reality conceived as being outside the discourse, but the relation to the model which the study has of its object. (Ahonen 1984; Tarasti 1994: 70).

Thus, from Tarasti's position – and the position of structuralism – the history of music, like any discourse *about* music, constructs its object. Any claim that it deals with historical reality "exactly as it is (or was)" is misplaced.

It is important to note that some musicologists today may still be unprepared to give a proper answer to such

arguments. It is clear that if traditional musicology would want to avoid such a critique, it should clarify its methodological approach to music as a research object. In other words, musicology should interrogate its own discursive character. Of course, this problem is not immanent to musicology *per se*. But it affects it no less, albeit externally, insofar as it has to define itself as a discipline among other disciplines. Such a self-definition would make possible to answer the questions: what makes a musicological statement about music – analytical, historical, ethnomusicological or aesthetic – legitimate? What is musicology's *access* to music, and how does it understand the nature of the object "music"? In the structuralist framework, in which Tarasti is working, no such problem exists, because music *as* an object is assumed to be a constructed, practically virtual one. Thus, in a musical semiotic perspective, it can be argued that the nature of the object "music" is derived from the methodological presuppositions of the discipline that deals with it – namely, musical semiotics. Traditional musicology cannot invoke the same argument, at least insofar as it claims (or has claimed) privileged access to music, having to deal not with a constructed object called "music", but with music *as such*. If, on the other hand, it accepts the structuralist view, then it is subject to the critique implied by Tarasti, according to which it must explicitly define all its concepts and analytical methods, as long as it accepts this as a condition for an academic discourse (and conceives of itself as a scientific discipline). In both cases, musical semiotics asks questions of musicology

that require an interdisciplinary reading and a methodologically adequate response.

Within musical semiotics itself these problems also exist and have no clear-cut solution. Here, however, the question is usually posed differently. Inasmuch as Ruwet's and Nattiez's critique of the vague use of terminology in musical analysis finds support in musical semiotics, it is a provocation for a debate on the nature of analytic "interpretation" in general. How should the musical sign be interpreted? To answer this question, musical semiotics first distinguishes the signifier from the signified. Musical signifiers are immanent characteristics of music – sounds or notes – and musical signifieds are all possible meanings of these sounds or notes – natural objects (cuckoo), symbols (spring), social contexts (court music, rural music), topoi (pastoral, hunting, military), etc. However, the analysis of the immanent characteristics of music is already quite developed in traditional musicology. Thus, the core of the methodological problematics of musical semiotics is, in my opinion, mostly rooted in the field of the musical signified or musical meaning.

Discourse in Tarasti's musical semiotics

In Tarasti's theory, musical discourse encompasses both the musical text and its aural realisation. Musical discourse, in his view (1994: 16), is regulated by two models: ideological and technical. Ideological models consist of

"conceptions and norms that evaluate music according to the norms and tastes of [a] society", while technical models encompass "rules that regulate and guide the production of musical discourse". Ideological models in Western musical culture include, among others, Edward Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful* and Richard Wagner's *Opera and Drama*. They evaluate different musical forms according to aesthetic or other criteria. Hanslick, for example, expands on the idea of the musically beautiful as "tonally moving forms" (*tönend bewegte Formen*), developing an aesthetic view linked to the idea of "absolute music" – music that, without the intervention of text or other forms of representation, carries a definite (musical) meaning. His essay thus appears as an ideological treatise in favour of certain musical genres and forms and against others. Similarly to Hanslick, Wagner also developed his own aesthetics, focusing on the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "total work of art", emphasising the need for a synthesis of different arts – musical, pictorial and verbal – that would give the composer all possible means of expression to achieve "maximum" aesthetic effect. *Opera and Drama* argues for a different aesthetic, one that is not concerned with the absolute but rather with programmatic music combined with other aesthetic means. The ideological model regulates musical discourse by providing criteria for successful or unsuccessful musical works.

Technological models in Western musical culture most often appear in the form of manuals or textbooks on polyphony, harmony, composition, etc. Such are, for example, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* by Johann Mattheson or

Grundriss der Kompositionslehre by Hugo Riemann. Every theory of music is a technological model. Such models serve as a guide for learners and are the result of the accumulated experience and theoretical convictions of the author – whether a composer, a performer or a music theorist. Technological models have strong influence on the technical process of composition because they set the framework for the expressive means available to the composer. This is why Nattiez, for example, emphasises that such literature "intervenes in the *evolution of music itself*... A theorist explicitly forbids parallel fifths; a composer transgresses this interdiction of his own free will; Brahms writes sonatas in a form that had been explicitly theorized: this is what reorients musical language" (1990: 181). Every change in musical code takes this code as a frame of reference. At the same time, technological patterns are reflections of the musical code of an age.

The two models, the ideological and the technological, can develop together or separately from each other. Thus, Tarasti notes that the technological aspect of strict counterpoint can develop into an ideological pietism toward church music. On the other hand, ideological relations such as the disputes over absolute and programmatic music in the nineteenth century can be distinguished from the technological models, with which they are associated: in the music of Brahms, who stands on one side of the dispute, one finds elements of Wagner's music, who stands on the other side.

In musical discourse, ideological and technological patterns form what are called *structures of communication*,

encompassing "all those musical mechanisms that a composer uses to communicate musical ideas" (Tarasti 1994: 17). They consist of "stylistic norms". They impose constraints on musical discourse related to previously accepted ideological and technological models. In the structures of communication, these models acquire a normative character for the musical text itself. In early Tarastian musical semiotics, the structures of communication form a kind of musical *langue* or code – a musical language as a system of rules regulating every musical utterance from the level of the phrase to the whole work. These structures are communicative because they are presumed to be culturally and socially conditioned, i.e., they are linked to social conventions. Sonata form, *Lied*-thematicism, chamber orchestration – these are all structures of musical communication in the Classical era. They are musical-cultural norms ensuring the intelligibility of musical messages in communication between composer, performer and listener.

Beyond structures of communication, the composer introduces so-called *structures of signification*, where "the composer's fantasy can move in a relatively free manner and thereby produce some unique signification" (Tarasti 1994: 18). It is within the structures of signification that musical discourse finds itself outside the framework of the musical code, depending on the interpretive position of the subject working with it. Therefore, the true aesthetic contribution of the composer is imprinted on the structures of signification. They constitute, broadly speaking, the composer's *style*. Structures of signification may involve leaving the rules of the musical code, i.e., the

structures of communication. In other words, the structures of communication and the structures of signification may contradict each other. Their origins are in a sense different – the former are socio-culturally set musical norms, while the latter are expressions of the composer's creative impulse.

Musical discourse can be seen as a series of events reflecting either structures of communication or structures of signification: "From the preceding discussions we may conclude that there are points in the musical discourse in which structures of communication dominate, and points where structures of signification come into the foreground. This statement almost coincides with the structuralist thesis, according to which discourse balances between *langue* and *parole*" (Tarasti 1994: 30). When a musical work is analysed from this position, it is divided into excerpts that reflect musical norms and those that are manifestations of a unique compositional style. This idea is at the heart of Tarasti's musical semiotic theory. However, it should immediately be noted that Tarasti draws a parallel between the relation of the two types of structures and the *langue-parole* relation in structural semiotics. This parallel is somewhat imprecise, however, because, according to the structuralist view, language as a system (langue) regulates *all* its uses, i.e., speech (parole). A discourse is always *parole*, regulated and guided by a *langue*. Already on the basis of *langue,* speech may have its own idiosyncrasies, different from or unrelated to linguistic norms – biological (timbre of voice, breath-taking), dialectal, etc. In Tarasti, *langue* is seen rather as *part of parole*. Every musical utterance

contains parts conforming to musical language and parts not conforming to it. Thus, the very idea of *langue* loses the character it bears in Saussure, namely as an *ideal* system of rules, and becomes simply a mode of expression that is sometimes realised and sometimes not. Indeed, Saussure himself notes that *parole* never conforms to *langue* completely, insofar as every act of speaking is in some way idiosyncratic and unique, due to the particularities of each speaker. But in his system of thought, it is rather a question of the degree of coincidence between the rules of *langue* and the expression of *parole*, i.e., one can always determine to what extent an utterance does or does not abide by the rules. He is far from dividing an utterance into utterances, which "conform" or do not conform to the rules of *langue*. Therefore, the division that Tarasti introduces does not fully coincide with the structural division of *langue* and *parole*.

Musical discourse is a fundamentally temporal, processual phenomenon (Tarasti 1994: 18). Musical semiotics must devise tools to analyse music precisely in its processual nature, which would mean exploring the causal connections between successive musical moments. For this purpose, the mind of the listener must be taken into account (Tarasti 1994: 19). In Tarasti's work, however, this move towards a phenomenal description of musical consciousness remains within the boundaries of semiotics. It consists in the discovery of those structures of consciousness that allow for the competent listening of music; and these are the structures of communication that bear the normative criterion of musical discourse. The structures of

communication can be expressed in a typology of events in the musical process: "possible" or "allowed", "recommended" or "necessary", and the excluded alternatives "forbidden" and "not recommended" (Tarasti 1994: 19). These structures also set the composer's frame of reference. He may conform to them to such an extent that his works qualify as "banal"; or he may disregard them to such an extent that his works become incomprehensible.

Here Tarasti poses an important problem that defines his entire work and beyond. It has already become clear that structures of communication are pre-given, culturally and socially conditioned norms of musical discourse or, in short, aspects of a musical code. According to Tarasti, if the composer's work was limited to these structures, it would remain insignificant: "a composer's production would be redundant, too socialized a speech (*parole*), with mannerisms and clichés unable to serve an aesthetic function" (1994: 18). But the interesting point here is not so much the observation that mere compliance to rules has no aesthetic value. Rather, what is interesting is the claim that, if the characteristics of communication structures include not only the positive ones, such as "allowed" or "recommended", but also the negative ones, such as "forbidden" and "not recommended", then restricting oneself *to either of these characteristics* results in music which sounds "un-aesthetic". According to such an interpretation, any self-serving reference to structures of communication – whether in their observance or their rejection – renders the composer's work superfluous.

If we proceed from such an understanding, the structures of signification turn out to be not just a reflection of the composer's style, but the active force, the "dynamics" of the work. They are precisely what make something a (musical) work of art – both in the literal sense as an object "produced" by someone, and in the figurative sense as an object of aesthetic value. By complying entirely with the structures of communication, the work remains lifeless, empty of aesthetic content and the tangible "presence" of the composer. Such a work can both respect and violate all musical norms – in both cases it is equally superfluous. However, such a view leads to the question: what does a structure of signification actually consist of? What is it in music that defines the position of the composer and his style? How is it recognised within musical discourse?

These are precisely the questions that Tarasti attempts to answer in his later, existential semiotics of music. There, structures of signification are linked to a particular existential position or "situation" of the composer, communicated in musical discourse.

Text and intertextuality in musical discourse

The idea of intertextuality became widespread in musical semiotics under the influence of poststructuralism. If discourse is, in the first place, text, then in the context

of discourse theory, intertextuality reflects various relations existing within discourse, between concepts, ideas, objects, institutions, practices, etc., as well as the relations of a discourse with other discourses.

The concept of "intertextuality" was inaugurated into poststructuralist thought by Julia Kristeva, who introduced the French-speaking scientific world to the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. The concept has acquired great significance in poststructuralist thought in the fields of literary studies, semiotics and philosophy. In her early article "Word, Dialogue, Novel", Kristeva (2014) introduced Bakhtin's ideas about the nature of the word. According to Bakhtin, every structure in a text exists only in relation to another structure. This gives the text a dynamic character: "What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his [Bakhtin's] conception of the 'literary word' as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (Kristeva 1986: 36). The *word* is polyvalent and exists in a process of dialogue (or *polylogue*?) between writer, reader and contexts. The same applies to the text: "each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read.... any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity..." (Kristeva 1986: 37). The text appears as a network in which the discourses of writer, reader and other texts

intersect.[44] The word/text is thus situated beyond any "codified discourse": "The poetic word, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture. Bakhtin was the first to study this logic, and he looked for its roots in *carnival*. Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics…" (Kristeva 1986: 36). Intertextuality is based on a logic that transcends linguistic codes. It testifies to the plurality of meanings and positions in the text.

The idea of intertextuality is developed from a variety of positions in postmodern thought. It is in an already developed form that it appears in the works of musical semioticians such as Monelle and Agawu. For Monelle, the leading motive is Jacques Derrida's statement, «Il n'y a pas de hors-texte» (lit. «There is no outside-the-text"). Every text locates itself in the space of intertextuality. The text is defined by what it is not, i.e., by what is absent. At the same time, it is the text that defines what is outside of it, and it is in this sense that Derrida's statement holds: there is nothing outside the text. According to Monelle, the musical text is "*whatever criticism observes*, whatever analysis expounds" (2000: 151–152). Thus, methodologically, Monelle accepts the thesis, introduced already by Nattiez

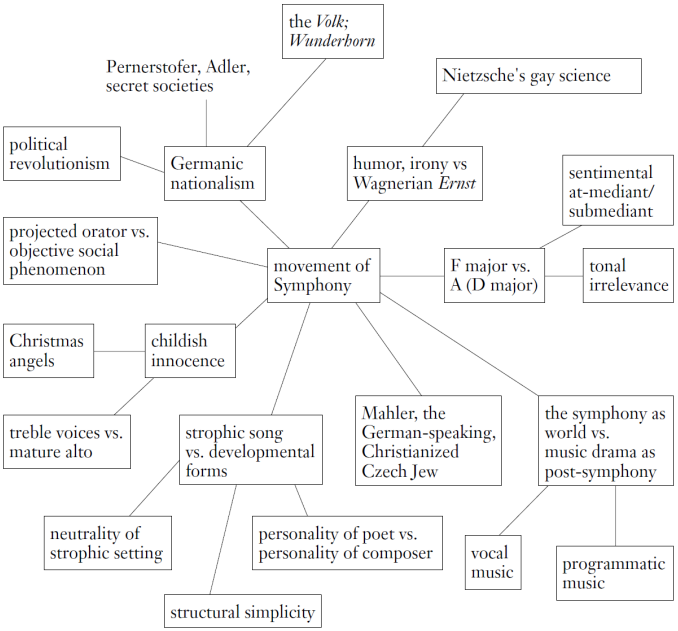
[44] At the time when Kristeva's article appeared, Jacques Derrida (1974/1967: 158) wrote that there is no outside-the-text (Il n'y a pas de hors-texte). If the text is a network of quotations, if even the writer and the reader are always its functions, then textual space has no real "outside" (as well as "inside") – everything is text.

and Tarasti, that what is recognised as musical discourse is largely determined by the discourse *about* music. There are endless possibilities for analytical elaborations of the musical text. The emergence of inappropriate interpretations or inadequate analyses cannot be prevented. The dialectic of the opposition appropriate/inappropriate in relation to discourse about music is at odds with its intertextual character. Monelle provides a brief intertextual analysis of the last movement of Mahler's *Third Symphony*, the results of which are depicted in a diagram (Ex. 15). He directly applies Derrida's idea of *différance* to music: "there is nothing in the Symphony which is simply itself, unrelated to other texts, intelligible without reference to what is outside it, for such a thing would not be intelligible at all" (2000: 155).

Similarly, for Agawu, musical intertextuality is associated not only with the score, but also with the "textual" or discursive space around it:

> I treat music as text or as a textual field, that is, as something woven by the composer and represented in a score. Reading the score as text is not a hermetic activity, however; it entails tapping into a huge and necessary supplement made possible by, but not represented directly in, the score. Regular reference to the score should thus be understood as a pragmatic move designed to ensure that my readers and I are on the same material page. Naturally, the score does not exhaust the dimensions of a work's textuality or, for that matter, its ontology. (Agawu 2014: 30)

This circumtextual space around the score should be understood through the idea of the open text: "The



Ex. 15 Monelle's analysis of the last movement of Mahler's Third symphony (Monelle 2000: 152–157)

work of interpretation demands... [that] compositions be reconfigured as open texts, conceptually boundless fields, texts whose necessary but in a sense mundane temporal boundaries are not necessarily coterminous with their 'sense' boundaries." (Agawu 2014: 24)[45] The score has only

[45] The idea of the open text was conceived by Umberto Eco, who first introduced the idea of the "open work" on the basis of musical examples: Klavierstück XI by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Sequenza I by Luciano Berio, Scambi by Henri Pusser and the Third Piano Sonata by Pierre Boulez. According to Eco, in contrast to works in the tradition of Western music up to that point, which were presented using "conventional symbols"

the pragmatic function of being a reference point for analysis. It is "not a simple and stable object, but a nexus of possibilities" (2014: 38). The musical text can be related to other texts, to styles, to epochs and even to non-musical phenomena – historical events, cultural circumstances, etc. The intertextual character of musical discourse allows the interpretive process to extend to all the phenomena that semiotics can deal with. The intertextual form of musical discourse thus makes possible the interdisciplinarity of discourse *about* music.

Tarasti also considers each musical text in an intertextual field (Tarasti 2002: 82). He emphasises the use of intra-musical forms of intertextuality – for example, musical quotations. Musical intertextuality can be implicit when it consists primarily in the "assumed musical competence" of the listener, "upon which the narrative

that obliged the performer to "reproduce" the form set by the composer, the works mentioned "reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of the distribution of their elements" (Eco 1989: 3). These are not "finite works which prescribe specific repetition along given structural coordinates but... 'open' works, which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane" (1989: 3). In *The Role of the Reader* (1979), Eco unfolded his theory of the open text. According to him, a text does not have a "crystalline" structure at first, but is subject to interpretation from many different positions, which ultimately depend on the reader. The idea of the open text rests on the idea of a multiplicity of codes, sociocultural circumstances, and readerly "strategies" – premises that play a role in the creation and interpretation of a text. For Eco, every text is fundamentally open: "So-called open texts are only the extreme and most provocative exploitation – for poetic purposes – of a principle which rules both the generation and the interpretation of texts in general" (1979: 4–5).

program of the musical work can be built" (2002: 83). The symphonies of the Romantic composers, for example, refer through this kind of intertextuality to the symphonies of Beethoven. In postmodern music, intertexts lead to "textual irruptions, outbreaks of individual significations in the form of musical acts... The borrowing techniques in Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* consist not only of separate motivic citations but also the overlapping of entire situations, thus representing a kind of explicitly synchronic intertextuality (Mahler versus the Swingle Singers)" (2002: 85). Musical quotations (intertexts) within the musical text can realise (especially in their postmodern version) bursts of new meanings and reconfigurations of the musical code. These are parts of musical discourse in which the code (or structures of communication) is overcome in favour of the composer's free creative expression (or structures of signification).

Discourse in the New Musicology and McClary's Ninth Symphony

A detailed analysis of Tarasti's methodological orientations cannot omit the phenomenon of the so-called *New* or *Critical Musicology*. Much musical semiotic theorising about discourse and intertextuality is directly or indirectly associated with this movement, either in positive or negative terms. In the context of American musicology, New Musicology insists primarily on the analysis of the discursive

(cultural, social, political) significance of music. Joseph Kerman, whose article, *How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get out* (1980), turned out to be a manifesto of the *New Musicology* movement, criticised the state of a musicology, in which there is no room for "critical interpretation" (Kramer 1992: 7). In the words of Lawrence Kramer, one of the main representatives of the New Musicology, the movement brings together musicological theories based on

> postmodernist strategies of understanding. The theories that ground these strategies are radically anti-foundationalist, antiessentialist, and anti-totalizing. They emphasize the constructedness, both linguistic and ideological, of all human identities and institutions. They insist on the relativity of all knowledge to the disciplines-not just the conceptual presuppositions but the material, discursive, and social practices-that produce and circulate knowledge (1992: 5).

Tarasti is often critical of attempts at critical musicology[46], but at the same time, as we shall see, he makes use of many of its methodological tools. In semiotic terms, this usage is connected with poststructuralist semiotic theories of meaning and discourse. In a strict sense, these theories are not semiotic, but, as Tarasti notes, they would be impossible outside the context of poststructuralist semiotics (Tarasti 2002: 63).

Research in the field of New Musicology presents some unusual and often controversial interpretive attempts. Here we can consider one such attempt and try to see it from the position of its own means of legitimation. An appropriate, if radical, example is Susan McClary's analysis

[46] Cf. Tarasti 2012: 109, 458.

of Beethoven's Ninth through the key of gender theory. In a controversial article, McClary concludes that the first movement of the Ninth Symphony can be interpreted as a narrative of a rapist:

> The point of recapitulation in the first movement of the Ninth is one of the most horrifying moments in music, as the carefully prepared cadence is frustrated, damming up energy which finally explodes in the throttling murderous rage of a rapist incapable of attaining release. (McClary 1987; Abramo 2015: 586)

This comment provoked serious criticism and outrage in English-language musicology, and was eventually retracted by McClary herself in an edited edition of the analysis (McClary 2002: 128). Nevertheless, McClary still stands behind her first analysis. For her (2002: 129), Beethoven's work reflects the patriarchal values of the Enlightenment, ultimately associated with social and cultural male hegemony (values which, presumably, allow for the rape interpretation). In the second, edited version of her analysis, McClary develops a psychoanalytic interpretation of the symphony: the static beginning of the Ninth is a sign of the subject's genesis from a "womblike void", and the persistence of its individuation depends on the absence of genuine reprise:

> we witness the emergence of the initial theme and its key out of a womblike void, and we hear it collapse back twice more into that void. It is only by virtue of the subject's constant violent self-assertion that the void can be kept at bay: cadence in the context of this movement spells instant death – or at least loss of subjective identity (2002: 128).

The reprise to the symphony's amorphous beginning would signify the subject's collapse back into the abyss of the womb, i.e., to the subject's destruction. This is precisely what provokes the pathetic recapitulation, which is a sign of the subject's violent resistance to its own dissolution: "The desire for cadential arrival that has built up over the course of the development finally erupts, as the subject necessarily… finds itself in the throes of the initial void while refusing to relent: the entire first key area in the recapitulation is pockmarked with explosions" (2002: 128). In this analysis, the image of the rapist is replaced by an image of a subject fiercely resisting its own destruction.

Both of McClary's interpretations are based on certain immanent characteristics of Beethoven's musical expression. However, the semantic interpretations of these immanent characteristics may be quite different. Robert Fink (2004) has examined the interpretive history of the first movement of the Ninth Symphony in order to compare McClary's analysis with analyses by previous, and often historically significant, music analysts. Along with the purely formal, immanent features, many theorists have addressed the meaning of this excerpt. A. B. Marx, for example, speaks of the opening D major chord thus: "immovable like a terrifying specter, like the gloomily flaming Earth-Spirit that stood before Faust" (Marx 1859: 272). Wagner wrote of the first movement's main theme in a programme for a performance of the Ninth Symphony: "The great chief theme, which steps before us at one stride, naked and powerful, as if from behind an uncanny and spectral shroud…" (Wagner 1887: 56; Fink 2004: 117),

and applied a quotation from Goethe's *Faust*. Hermann Kretschmar wrote: "the means of musical art hardly seem to suffice to carry out Beethoven's demonic intentions" (Kretzschmar 1913: 244; Fink 2004: 118). Fink also cites examples from Riemann, who speaks of the "demonic power" of this movement, and Donald Tovey, who hears in it "the heavens on fire", something "catastrophic" and "very terrible" (Fink 2004: 118–119). The image of something hidden, terrible and powerful seems to stand out in all interpretations mentioned. Fink also draws attention to other aspects of these interpretations. Marx stresses the impossibility of completion and wholeness in the passage: "Conclude? – that is not within the power of this troubled Giant-Spirit" (Marx 1859: 272). In Wagner, a similar interpretive framework can be found: the expressions "almost achieving" (*Fast-Erreichen*) and "disappearing anew" *(neues Verschwinden)* are both present in the emotional description of the movement (Fink 2004: 117). According to Fink, both the general spirit of these interpretations and the specific definitions of the passage – reflecting an inability to reach completion – are reminiscent of McClary's idea of the rapist who cannot achieve satisfaction.

Thus, in Fink's view, McClary's interpretation is by no means exceptional:

> This image of "Beethoven, the rapist" is, of course, painful in the extreme – and scandalizing to many readers. But if we examine the rape image in light of the descriptions of earlier sublimating critics, we can see its origin: McClary makes exactly the same imaginative cathexis as Marx, Kretzschmar, et al. – but she reinterprets the violent, confusing, overpowering physicality of the experience from

> her female subject position. The inherent sado-masochism of the sublime now takes on a new, threatening aspect. When Beethoven's "demonic intentions" (Kretzschmar) and his "overwhelming demonic fantasies" (Riemann) are redirected, when the relation between the masculine composer and the masculine critic is replaced by that between a masculine composer and a *feminine* critic – what other gendered image carries as much force as rape? (Fink 2004: 122)

According to Fink, the violence, horror, and demonism captured in the reprise of the first movement of the Ninth Symphony are common to all analysts. The only difference lies in the "gender" of the analyst – when he is male, it is "demonic"; when she is female, or more precisely, McClary, it is "rape". The demonic in the interpretations of Marx, Riemann, and Wagner – exalted and absolutised, having achieved expressive depth in the hands of Beethoven – becomes for McClary a terrible, traumatic event.

This example is indicative of some basic dimensions of postmodern discursive analysis in the way it has been introduced into musicology and echoed in musical semiotics. On the one hand, in McClary's own analysis, the Ninth Symphony is associated with a particular discourse: ideologically, it is described as "Enlightenment" and oriented towards the dominance of the "masculine" (in the perspective of gender theory). Irrational forces – ideologically linked to women – try to wrest man from his subjective individuation, either by not allowing him satisfaction (in the rape interpretation) or by trying to push him back into the pre-subjective phase of development or the "womb void". The man's aggressive resistance to these feminine

forces is embodied in the reprise of the first movement of the Ninth Symphony.

From a semiotic point of view, such an interpretation is methodologically possible. A signifier – the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, taken as an acoustic image or a musical text – is interpreted through certain codes – that of psychoanalysis, gender theory or critical musicology – thus revealing a signified: rape. Fink explicitly reveals the framework of this type of analysis: "The thrusting drive of tonal music, the intertwining of harmonic and formal necessity, is physical, and gives rise to a physical desire – analogous to sexual desire" (Fink 2004: 130). The harmony and form that traditional musical analysis reveals as the driving force of the work – and which Fink discusses at length in his article – *signify*, i.e., carry the *signification* of sexual impulse.

Such analytical attempts are relevant when the post-structuralist concept of discourse enters musical semiotics. Some of them have been criticised, but their methodological presuppositions, as has become clear, have, in general, been accepted. Tarasti has acknowledged that the "new musicology" opens up "hitherto unexplored avenues of interpretation for music theory and analysis" (Tarasti 2002: v), but remains critical of many of them. According to him, examples such as McClary's analysis demonstrate a general problem that transcends music theory: the reduction of a person to sexuality. Attempts of this kind aim to reverse the assumed "established" order by reversing power roles: "If women have been oppressed, then now it is their turn to oppress men and to banish all the quasi-universal masterworks of patriarchal

culture (such as Beethoven's Ninth)" (Tarasti 2002: 117). Tarasti's position relates to a problem, which he has called "the emancipation of the sign": "The problem is that, once the emancipation of the sign has taken place, semiotics can be used to 'prove' almost any thesis whatsoever, so long as one's reasoning gives the overall impression of a cogent and scholarly discourse, and provided some social motivation makes people pay attention to this so-called 'semiotician'" (Tarasti 2002: 119–120). This comment reflects on the problem which is at the heart of the musical semiotic debate about musical meaning and its interpretation. The risk of a poststructuralist understanding of (musical) discourse is the loss of criteria for relevance and adequacy of discourse *about* music, a loss that semioticians such as Monelle have even considered necessary. Tarasti is aware of this and builds his theory in explicit dialogue with discourse theory.

Part 2

Tarasti's Narrative Musical Semiotics

Overview

One of the key concepts in Tarastian semiotics is the notion of *narrative*. The development of the idea of narrative can be traced in several stages. Methodologically, the first stage is most strongly influenced by Greimas' narrative grammar. In the monograph *Theory of Musical Semiotics*, representative of this stage, Tarasti situates a wide range of traditional musicological topics within a structuralist musical semiotics. In *Myth and Music* from the same period, he applies Jaspers' and Lévi-Strauss' theories of myth to music with the tools of Greimasian semiotics. Here myth is understood essentially as a narrative. Later, in *Signs of Music*, Tarasti constructs a similar but conceptually lighter semiotics of musical narrative and expands the scope of the themes he addresses in the key of psychoanalysis (Kristeva) by defining the field of existential semiotics. In *Semiotics of Classical Music,* he makes additions to the methodological foundations of his existential semiotics and explores musical narrative from this position.

Some methodological decisions and analytical principles remain relevant throughout Tarasti's work. Such are, for example, the ideas of musical narrative and musical actor, as well as the analytical tools of Greimas' semiotic square and modalities. Nevertheless, in Tarasti's interpretation, they all undergo changes over time. The idea of musical subjectivity in his early writings is related to

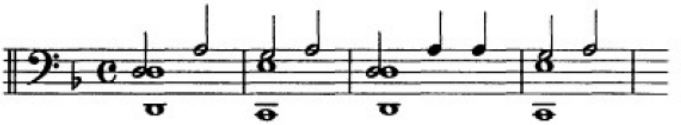
musical narrative – to the possibility of tracing within music the path of a musical "subject" that goes through a certain development and is "modalised" in a particular way. In his later works, musical subjectivity is associated with the existential valence of the subject in music, which is considered in psychoanalytical light. In the early Tarasti, Greimas' modalities play an enormous role as analytical tools, whereas in his later theories they occupy a rather lesser role.

Greimas' Narrative Grammar

Tarasti understands music as narrative, drawing on Greimas' narrative grammar. For Greimas, narrative is seen not just as a story, but as a set of structural relations that can be manifested in any sign system: "We first must admit that narrative structures can be found elsewhere than in manifestations of meaning effected through the natural languages. They can be found in cinematographic and oniric languages, in figurative painting, and so forth" (Greimas 1987: 64). In a similar vein, Tarasti considers narrative as a structural model for the construction of any musical work. According to Greimas, every narrative can be divided into two fundamental levels: an *apparent* level and an *immanent* level. The apparent level works with different manifestations of the narrative, which are subject to "the specific requirements of the linguistic substances through which it is expressed" (Greimas 1987: 64). "Linguistic substances" are all sign systems that can be called a "language", one of which is music, in Tarasti's view. In music, the apparent level is associated with all means of musical expression – rhythm, metre, melody, timbre, etc. The immanent level is associated with a "common structural trunk where narrativity is located and organized at the stage preceding its manifestation" (Greimas 1987: 64). This level has, broadly speaking, a logical character. It is universal and applies to any "language" through which a

narrative can be expressed – verbal, musical, cinematic, etc. It is the immanent level that unifies all possible manifestations of a narrative and provides an analytical basis for treating it as a fundamental semiotic phenomenon. From this point of view, musical semiotic analysis is concerned precisely with the disclosure of immanent narrative structures in music: "narrativity in music is based on an immanent process of signification, that is, on modal structures which are tensions hidden in the syntactical structures" (Tarasti 1994: 30).

Narrative structure on the immanent level is revealed most clearly when something in the musical text does not conform to conventional musical language: "Narrative structures can emerge particularly when, as a stylistic device, syntactical structures are deliberately broken" (Tarasti 1994: 31). Tarasti references an analysis by Louis Laloy of the prelude to *Pelléas et Mélisande* to show how a narrative structure can remain undetected by an analysis which, because of its own methodological presuppositions, does not perceive it.



Ex. 16 Prelude to *Pelléas et Mélisande* by C. Debussy, opening chords.

From the example above it is clear that between the first and second bar of the beginning of the prelude there are parallel fifths to be found. Laloy, however, seeks to

avoid parallelism as an explanation for this harmonic progression: he "considers it necessary to explain away this parallelism by depicting the latter chord as an inversion of a minor dominant triad. What is involved is a movement from the D minor tonic to the dominant" (Tarasti 1994: 31). But we know – and this is emphasised by Tarasti – that parallelisms are a fundamental feature of Debussy's music, who uses them boldly and deliberately. In this case, Laloy departs from certain conventions of voicing, which is why he ignores the presence of parallelisms in order to be able to justify Debussy's compositional decision. The narrative structure of signification that expresses the composer's own stylistic intentions is thus ignored in favour of conventionally accepted structures of communication that make his music (analytically) intelligible: "In this case, the analyst considers it his task to reduce the new structure of signification of music into structures of communication, that is, into familiar and accepted tonal figures. Debussy's narrative device, the parallel fifths, escapes his attention." (Tarasti 1994: 31). Laloy simply projects his own narrative structure onto the musical text, while drawing on the premises of a particular harmonic theory. Omitting parallel fifths as a narrative device, Laloy replaces them with one of his own.

Greimas divides his theory of semiotics into *fundamental semantics* and *grammar* (Greimas 1987: 65). Fundamental semantics is concerned with "the conditions under which sense can be grasped, and it is also directly linked to the *elementary structure of signification* that can be deduced from it and that ultimately shows itself to be an

axiomatics" (Greimas 1987: 65). Fundamental semantics deals with the most elementary forms of already signified sense. Thus *sense* in itself, i.e. before or beyond signification, remains outside the field of semiotics: "Although it is a property common to all the different semiotic systems, the concept of **sense** is indefinable [translation modified]" (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 187) Sense is something phenomenal that is experienced, and can therefore only be understood as a *sense effect* (*effet de sens*): "The sense effect is the impression of 'reality' produced by our senses in contact with sense [translation modified]" (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 187). For Greimas, sense is a given prior to all signification – a starting point for semiotics – but this givenness cannot be semiotically thematised. Fundamental semantics thus defines one of the fundamental methodological problems of musical semiotics in general, the problem of musical sense (*sens*). This theme is also noticeable in Tarasti, but already in a completely different key – namely that of existential philosophy – and without explicitly referring to *sense* as such.

In Greimas' theory, *grammar* is concerned with the elementary structure of meaning in formal-logical terms: "If, however, the elementary structure thus serves as a model for the articulation of contents that are semantic substances, if it can make sense signify, it is still no less a semiotic form that can be considered independently of any investment [translation modified]" (Greimas 1987: 67) Grammar considers the structure of sense in its purely logical form,

emptied of any concrete content.[47] Grammar that can be applied to any semiotic system, including music.

Tarasti's main point is that any musical discourse or discourse about music can be viewed with the use of fundamental narrative structures: "Musical narration can be seen as a musicohistorical problem if one assumes that, particularly in the Classical and Romantic periods, a strong cognitive model organized, and still organizes, not only musical discourse itself (musical works) but discourse *about* music as well" (Tarasti 1994: 22). Here, Tarasti is drawing on Greimas' idea of the narrativity of discourse. Greimas sees narrativity as the structuring principle of a discourse:

> In the semiotical project that is ours, generalized narrativity – freed from its restricted sense which was bound with the figurative forms of narration – is to be considered as the organizing principle of the whole discourse. All semiotics can be treated either as system or process, and hence the narrative structures can be defined as constituents of the deep level of the semiotical process (Greimas 1979: 249–250; Tarasti 1994: 27).

A narrative is not necessarily a story, a tale. It is a means of describing the structural relations of any possible discourse.

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[47] Here, Greimas is probably drawing on Hjelmslev, who first explicitly defined the possibility of language as a logical system independent of real meanings (signifieds) or sounds (signifiers). Language can be described abstractly, and its usages can be deduced thereof. According to Hjelmslev, linguistics should not be concerned with scientific fields "transcendent" to itself – such as anthropology, sociology and psychology – but with problems "immanent" to itself – namely language as a logical system. See Hjelmslev 1961.

Insofar as it is discourse, music can be a narrative. In this formulation, musical narrative does not coincide with the idea of musical "programme". It is not simply the narrative function of musical discourse, but its organising principle.

In order for the structural analysis of the musical narrative to unfold, certain methodological tools must be introduced. Greimas' grammar divides narrative into different levels. The *deep* level of narrative is its most abstract level – here grammar is reduced to its elementary minimum. It consists of logical elements arranged in the schema of the so-called "semiotic square". The semiotic square is a model for the "elementary structure of signification" (Ricoeur 1989: 583). The structure expressed in the semiotic square determines every signification and sign function, forming an elementary semantic microuniverse (Greimas 1979: 161–162). The *figurative* level of the grammar is the narrative itself, in which "human or personified actors would accomplish tasks, undergo tests, reach goals" (Greimas 1987: 70). We hear and tell the figurative level of the narrative. Between these levels lies the surface level of narrative grammar, whose elements are not yet figurative but are already "anthropomorphic".

Tarasti draws a parallel between Greimas' theory and Schenker's:

> as both Greimas and Schenker assume, there is often some entirely achronic structure in the background of the linear unfolding of a work: with the former, the semiotic square and its logical interrelations; with the latter, a tonic triad. According to these theorists, the narrative-generative process is revealed through a gradual expansion or 'composing

> out' of this achronic fundamental structure. (Tarasti 1994: 24)

He is referring to Schenker's idea that musical fragments or entire works are compositionally derived from a fundamental structure or *Ursatz* by harmonic, contrapuntal, and other means. In Schenker, the harmonic movement in various segments of a musical work can be seen as the fundamental line or *Urlinie* in the melody with a corresponding movement between the tonic and the dominant in the bass:

> The Urlinie offers the unfurling of a basic triad, it presents tonality on horizontal paths. The tonal system, too, flows into these as well, a system intended to bring purposeful order into the world of chords through its selection of the harmonic degrees. The mediator between the horizontal formulation of tonality presented by the Urlinie and the vertical formulation presented by the harmonic degrees is voice-leading. (Schenker 2004: 53)

Music is "unfurled" (i.e., composed) from a fundamental line and a fundamental structure. The fundamental line usually descends in motion and may consist of various tones, but almost always contains the movement through the second to the first degree (Schenker 1977: 13). The fundamental line may span hundreds of bars as a structural foundation for the unfolding of the work. At the same time, in shorter excerpts it can also be partially realised. Schenker uses a structure analogous to the Greimasian narrative structure – the division into deep, surface and figurative levels – when writing of background, middleground and foreground (*Hinter-, Mittel-, Vordergrund*). For Schenker, the foreground is the work as written, and

the middle and background are successive reductions of it, bringing out its most important structural elements (Schenker 1977: xxi–xxii). These three levels form the "spatial depth of the musical work" (Schenker 1977: 5). Thus, different transformations of the same fundamental structure can be found in the back-, middle- and foreground of a work. In this context, Tarasti refers to Lerdahl and Jackendoff – themselves Schenkerians – and their generative grammar of music (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1996).[48]

The semiotic square is a way to express the "logical articulation of any semantic category" (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 308). The structure of the semiotic square is

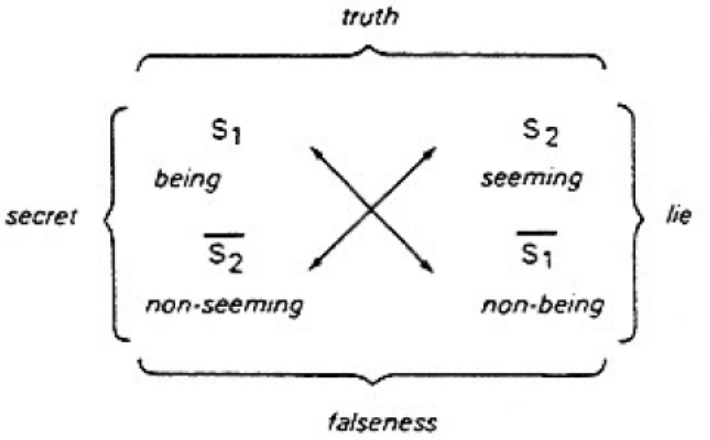
[48] Musician Fred Lerdahl and linguist Ray Jackendoff collaborated to write a generative grammar of tonal music. They used the methodology and some of the basic analytical tools of Noam Chomsky's generative grammar as the basis for their investigation. Chomsky's generative linguistics is based on the idea that there is a grammar that explains all possible combinations of words in a language. Language is a multi-layered grammatical construction that is subject to various transformations. The sentences "The boy hit the ball" and "The ball was hit by the boy" mean the same thing and appear to be transformations of the same fundamental linguistic structure. This is the so-called deep structure. By means of different transformations of this structure different sentences or so-called surface structures are born. The three sentences given above have different surface structures but the same deep structure. In this respect, Chomsky's grammar and Greimas' grammar are similar. Lerdahl and Jackendoff explore how an experienced (competent) listener perceives a work through a musical structural organisation: "In our view a theory of a musical idiom should characterise such organization in terms of an explicit formal musical grammar that models the listener's connection between the presented musical surface of a piece and the structure he attributes to the piece. Such a grammar comprises a system of rules that assigns analyses to pieces" (1996: 3).

based on, although not limited to, so-called binary oppositions, defined by classical structuralists such as Jakobson:

> In an oppositive duality, if one of the terms is given, then the other, though not present, is evoked in thought. To the idea of white there is opposed only that of black, to the idea of beauty that of ugliness, to the idea of large that of small, to the idea of closed that of open, and so on. Opposites are so intimately interconnected that the appearance of one of them inevitably elicits the other. (Jakobson 1990: 235)

Going beyond the idea of binarity, Greimas establishes that there are other possible relations: the idea of white is opposed not only to the idea of black, but also to the idea of non-white. Thus, two other terms intervene in the black-white opposition: non-black and non-white. Together the four terms form a semiotic square.

The semiotic square can be considered in its 'achronic' stasis. This reveals the *morphological* structure of the square, in which the *relations* between terms are considered. However, it can also be considered in its *syntactic* structure, in which established relations are treated as dynamic *operations*. The morphological structure of the semiotic square reflects the static relations between the terms derived in two generations of categorial terms. The first generation reveals the relations of the four terms to each other. If we take the square of the terms black and white (resp. non-black and non-white), black and white are in a relation of *opposition*, and black and non-black (resp. white and non-white) in a relation of *contradiction*. Black and non-white are in a relation of *complementarity*.



Ex. 17 A paradigmatic semiotic square with the terms being and seeming.

The second categorial generation rests on the idea that the relations of the first generation produce higher-level *metaterms* with relations between them. For example, if the opposition being-seeming (non-being and non-seeming respectively) is put in place of the opposition black-white, the term *secret* is formed between being and non-seeming, *truth* between being and seeming, *lie* between seeming and non-being, and *falseness* between non-seeming and non-being. The relations between these metaterms are as follows: between truth and falseness there is a *contradiction*, and between secret and lie there is an *opposition*. Of course,

these examples also have a symbolic expression (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 308).[49]

The deep structure of the semiotic square unfolds to a narrative when all abstract terms and symbols are replaced by subjects and objects that play a role in it. What is seen at the deep level as an operation is particularised to actions of specific "subjects" or "actors" at the figurative level.

The semiotic square is used many times in Tarasti's work. As an example, we can take his analysis of "internal

[49] Already in binary oppositions the terms (being; seeming/appearance) are supposed to refer to each other and only as referring to each other do they have meaning. The presence of one is always recognised as the absence of the other; one is inferred from the other. Greimas constructs the semiotic square between the four terms by deriving each term from the previous one. In the terms of the syntactic structure, one basic term (e.g., being) can lead to the others through a series of operations. The relation of contradiction (being – non-being) is identical to the operation of negation applied to the first term (being), which derives the second term (non-being). The relation of contradiction is identical to the operation of assertion applied to the second term (non-being), which derives the third term (seeming/appearance). In this case, the term "non-being" is an implication for the term "seeming/appearance". In other words, only if non-being implies (is an implication for) seeming/appearance can we say that the terms being and seeming/appearance are part of the same semantic category. Being is subject to negation, which entails non-being; non-being is subject to assertion, which entails seeming/appearance. (Finally, a negation is applied to seeming/appearance which infers a non-seeming/non-appearance). In sum, static relations are relations of opposition, contradiction and complementarity; dynamic relations are the operations of implication (between elements in a relation of opposition), negation (between elements in a relation of contradiction) and assertion (between elements in a relation of complementarity) (Grabócz 1998: 3).

musical time" or "micro-time" in music. Tarasti bases his theory of musical time on Vladimir Jankélévitch's philosophy of music. According to Jankélévitch, music is a temporal phenomenon *par excellence*. A fundamental characteristic of music in temporal terms is "becoming" and its *when* is fundamental (Tarasti 1994: 60). On the basis of the qualitative "becoming" that accompanies all music, musical time is modalised first by "being" and "doing" – being brings about static and slowing down, while doing brings about dynamism and speeding up.

Musical time has several basic characteristics. Tarasti presents the first two – irreversibility and unpredictability, from the listener's point of view. The *irreversibility* of musical time consists in the unidirectional temporal flow of music. Although different musical segments may repeat, virtually every moment of musical discourse is unique and "unrepeatable". The recapitulation in sonata form is not, strictly speaking, a "repetition" of the exposition; even when the exposition itself is repeated, it is still not a repetition because it takes place in an already different, later moment of musical discourse. As a principle, irreversibility is only realised in the work to a certain degree. *Unpredictability* in musical time consists in unexpected musical events.

Tarasti situates irreversibility and unpredictability in a semiotic square. Each end of the square represents possible relations to musical time. In universe 1, irreversibility and unpredictability, musical time is made up of a series of unrelated moments in a "punctual" consciousness. Here musical memory is cancelled and nothing expected

happens (Tarasti 1994: 62). In universe 2, irreversibility and predictability, there is no musical memory and each moment is completely unique. At the same time, however, it is predictable. Tarasti acknowledges that it is "hard to imagine this (admittedly hypothetical) musical universe" (Tarasti 1994: 62). In universe 3, reversibility and unpredictability, the listener hears each moment as something new and unexpected (e.g., the first time listening to a symphony), but remembers each moment and has a clear idea of the form at the end of the piece. In situation 4, reversibility and predictability, the listener faces both the past and the future. Every moment is remembered and there is nothing unexpected.

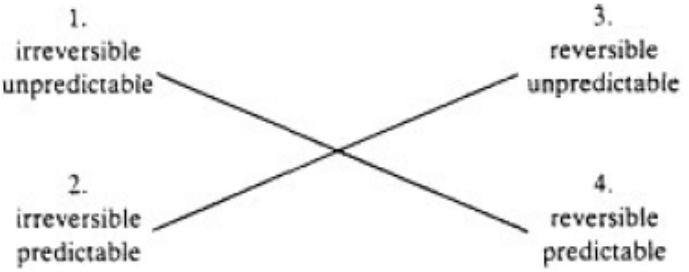


Figure 2.2.
Irreversibility and unpredictability
as projected on the semiotic square.

Ex. 18 A semiotic square of irreversibility and unpredicatbility in music.

The psychoanalytic structure of the text in Kristeva

Tarasti's later theories are deeply linked with certain terminological paradigms originating in psychoanalysis. One major source in his writings is Julia Kristeva's theory, which links psychoanalysis to literary theory. For Kristeva, the structure of the literary text is analogous to the structure of the psyche. Examining musical text and narrative in his later work, Tarasti works with various concepts related to Kristeva's theory.

Kristeva's theory deals with the idea of text and intertextuality in philosophical, semiotic and literary discourse. She traces the origins of the text to the categories of the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*[50], drawing on psychoanalysis (mainly Freud and Lacan)[51]. On the one hand, she considers the process in which the capacity for signification emerges in the child. On the other hand, the stepwise emergence of signification, which can be traced diachronically in early childhood, can be observed synchronically in later processes of signification, i.e., as layers of each act of

[50] The terms "semiotic" and "symbolic" are used by Kristeva in a very idiosyncratic way. Her "semiotic" does not refer to the field of semiotics, but is a (actually pre-linguistic) stage of the formation of the subject.

[51] Kristeva's ideas do differ in some ways from those of Freud and Lacan. These differences, however, cannot be commented on here.

signification (Kristeva 1984: 29). It is in this second sense that the semiotic and the symbolic play a role in Tarasti's analyses, according to whom musical narrative is the realisation of a mechanism in the subject that can be explained psychoanalytically (Tarasti 2002: 135).

Some of Kristeva's ideas cannot be called "semiotic" in a strict sense, because they refer the *possibility* of signification itself. In her writings, the problem is discussed on a philosophical and psychoanalytical level and is associated with the genesis of the subject as such. Broadly speaking, Kristeva poses the question of *where* the subject comes from and *how* it emerges in assuming the role of receiver and participant in linguistic processes. She finds that Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and its "semiological or semantic derivatives" (Kristeva 1984: 40) do not answer this question[52] and therefore turns to Freud. Freud's drives, according to Kristeva, provide clues in this direction insofar as they "produce and/or destroy the semiotic and *precede* the distinction between 'subject' and 'object'" (Kristeva 1984: 34).

Before stating the main tenets of Kristeva's theory, a detailed and valuable summary by Tarasti of some of her main ideas deserve to be quoted:

> Concerning the body, Kristeva speaks of the "semiotic sphere" of prelinguistic kinetic rhythms, gestures, expressions, and fluctuating pulsations, which for her constitute the field of "significance",

[52] Whether this is indeed the case cannot be resolved here. The point is that this is a key step in Kristeva's study of meaning and text.

> a feminine space which she calls, following Plato, the *khora*. The latter represents the archaic level of consciousness, which is our prevailing state in early childhood but which is present even in later developments of our psyche, after we have entered the social sphere of the *symbolic order*. This order represents the penetration of language and all its social norms into our existence. In gendered terms, it is also the patriarchal moment, since, according to Kristeva, it is through the father that this symbolic order is attained in a child's development. In this scheme, the "semiotic" is the vast area of indefinite, non-verbal meanings in their purely kinetic form (...) The superimposition of the symbolic order thus represents a denial of pure corporeal reality, by the social norms and constraints set upon it. For Kristeva, the khoratic realm, not the symbolic order, is the essential one. The symbolic order is merely the tip of the iceberg. "Real" meaning emerges only when the khoratic, unsocialized body breaks with social conventions. (Tarasti 2002: 135)

All individual elements of this summary will be explained in more detail further down.

At an early stage of development, the child does not yet have the ability to signify – it does not work with signs at all and has not yet established the ability to think in the signifier-signified distinction. Kristeva calls this phase the *semiotic*. In the semiotic phase the child is not yet constituted as a subject that can signify. An energy of charges moves through its body by virtue of the drives. The mother and the maternal body impose constraints upon this blind energy – constraints on the satisfaction of the drives, various types of restraints and channelling of their energy. The mother has or has not the ability to satisfy the urges of the child. At first the child does not understand the mother

as something external to itself, and seems to discover that something in its own self limits its spontaneous energy. Kristeva relates the energy of urges and its limitation by the mother to the notion of *khora*:

> Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body—always already involved in a semiotic process—by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are "energy" charges as well as "psychical" marks, articulate what we call a *chora* – a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. (Kristeva 1984: 25)

The *khora* itself arises in resistance to "objective ordering" coming from the outside: "natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure" (Kristeva 1984: 27). At this stage, social constraints are not yet articulated in "laws" that have verbal expression ("you are a boy", "you are my son") – this stage precedes any cognitive process. What mediates the social constraints and orders the kinetic explosions of *khora* is the mother's body. The points in time, at which constraints are imposed, are called *stases* (Kristeva 1984: 28). The disruption of the semiotic continuum of the drives into stases gives rise to the child's first vocal, kinetic, and somatic expressions: "Drive facilitation, temporarily arrested, marks *discontinuities*... Phonic (later phonemic), kinetic, or chromatic units and differences are the marks of these stases in the drives" (Kristeva 1984: 28). *Khora* is the kinetic charge of the drives, their indeterminate articulation analogous to vocal and

kinetic rhythm (Kristeva 1984: 26). It is the rhythm underlying semiotic *khora* that makes it inherently musical, as will be discussed further.

For Tarasti, *khora* in music has specific dimensions related to the idea of the body:

> For our purposes, the *khora* in music is the sphere of the body, and the symbolic order is the realm of stylistic norms and constraints. The *khora* would represent the acceptance and affirmation of the body, in a certain sense, and symbolic order the repression of the body in favour of the patriarchal order, which feminists identify with the musical canon. (Tarasti 2002: 137)

In other words, a psychoanalytic structure can be found in music itself, as structure, divided into drives and symbolic order, which determines, as we shall see, the movement of music. What is essential in music is not the symbolic order constructed by musical conventions and rules, but precisely the bursts of musical *khora,* which release the kinetic energy of the drives and of the body.

But in order for the distinction between *khora* and symbolic order to be made, the child must have developed the ability to make symbolic sense of the world. In the *thetic* phase (from the Greek *thésis* – assertion, placement) the child gradually begins to take up "positions". The thetic phase is associated with the distinction between the subject and the object as a condition for every statement: "All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects" (Kristeva 1984: 63). The thetic phase

begins with the child's "holophrastic" utterances – gestures and sounds, but also the presence of an object onto which certain *attributes* are projected.

The thesis phase consists of two main stages (Kristeva 1984: 43). First comes the "mirror stage". At this stage, the child first recognises itself in a mirror in which it sees its body objectified: "From that point on, in order to capture his image unified in a mirror, the child must remain separate from it, his body agitated by the semiotic motility we discussed above, which fragments him more than it unifies him in a representation" (Kristeva 1984: 46). According to Lacan, this image is the "prototype" of the "world of objects" (Lacan 2001: 319). If, in the semiotic phase, the child is still a set of pure impulses of drives that are immediately satisfied or not, in the mirror stage of the thetic phase this impulsivity is confronted – literally and allegorically – with its own image. The excited body (*khora*) of the child, its pure kineticity, suddenly meets its objectification in the mirror image. The mirror image never matches the one who is looking at himself. The child perceives the difference between itself as energy and itself as object, image. This moment is the *genesis of subjectivity* and marks the original trauma of each subject. In the mirror stage, the subject's world is refracted and fragmented. This refraction marks the emergence of its linguistic faculty, for the child perceives signification for the first time – the image in the mirror is the *signifier* that postulates the subject as *signified*. The child becomes aware of itself as subject, as signified, which has an image (*imago*), a signifier. By making sounds, the child perceives itself as their origin, but

simultaneously projects them onto its image in the mirror (Kristeva 1984: 46). Thus, the child makes its first attempt at signification.

The second stage of the thetic phase is the "castration stage". Up to this point, the mother's body has been everything to the child – a "container" and fulfiller of every desire. In this respect, expressed in terms of psychoanalysis, the mother is the phallus (Kristeva 1984: 47). The term "phallus" here does not mean the male sexual organ, as in Freud's theory. In Lacan, as in Kristeva, the phallus is a signifier that signifies (symbolises) *satisfaction* (Lacan 1982: 79). Until the thetic phase the mother is the bearer of all satisfaction. The castration stage is associated with fear of castration, but not in a literal sense[53] – castration is, metaphorically speaking, the "weaning" from the mother who brings all satisfaction. The possibility of castration reveals to the child the otherness of the mother: "The discovery of castration, however, detaches the subject from his dependence on the mother, and the perception of this lack [manque] makes the phallic function a symbolic function—*the* symbolic function" (Kristeva 1984: 47). The symbolic function comes with the separation of the phallus, i.e. satisfaction, from the subject:

> For there to be enunciation, the *ego* must be posited in the signified, but it must do so as a function of the *subject* lacking in the signifier; a system of finite positions (signification) can only function when it is supported by a subject and on the condition that

[53] Girls are also said to have a fear of castration in this psychoanalytic sense.

> this subject is a want-to-be [*manque à* être] (Kristeva 1984: 48).[54]

When the child is separated from the mother, the phallus (satisfaction), which is already lacking, becomes the signifier of the subject whose being *is* lack. The lack of satisfaction, the empty space once occupied by the phallus, becomes signifier, and the subject whose being is the lack becomes its signified. The subject is characterised by not finding satisfaction: "Signification exists precisely because there is no subject in signification. The gap between the imaged ego and drive motility, between the mother and the demand made on her, is precisely the break that establishes what Lacan calls the place of the Other as the place of the 'signifier'" (Kristeva 1984: 48). Henceforth, in Kristeva's psychoanalytic model, the subject is what its lack of satisfaction "signifies". The place, once occupied by satisfaction or the phallus, is now occupied by the Other.

The emergence of the symbolic imposes on the subject a "first social censorship":

> Ultimately, this signifier/signified transformation, constitutive of language, is seen as being indebted to, induced, and imposed by the social realm. Dependence on the mother is severed, and transformed into a symbolic relation to an other; the constitution of the Other is indispensable for communicating with an other. (Kristeva 1984: 48)

The structure of the sign is socially imposed. The subject is now defined by the Other in language. Language appears as

[54] The notion of want-to-be is a translation of the French manque à être. In Russian, for example, the term is translated "lack of being" (нехватки бытия). It concerns "lack" or "want-of" as a mode of being (See Lacan 1988)

a "defensive construction" that "protects the body from the attack of drives" (Kristeva 1984: 49). It is a frame of reference for communication and a straitjacket for behaviour. But this construct can be shattered in a fit of semiotic *khora* expressed in fantasies. In such situations, urges can "erupt" into the symbolic. But here the *khora* already operates in "second-degree theticity", i.e., *through* rather than *in spite of* meaning and language. This is what characterises artistic practices.

Only the completed subject, which encompasses both the semiotic and the symbolic, can create art. The artistic text is born when the semiotic receives symbolic expression, although this is always an act of breaking the established symbolic "rules". Every creative impulse comes from the semiotic and "dissolves" the symbolic, breaking through it by remodelling it (Kristeva 1984: 62). Kristeva calls this the "transgression" of the symbolic (1984: 69).

In Tarasti's theory, this position becomes fundamental: "But if we consider the most important moment in music to be its unique message, which transgresses the norms of *langue,* then those moments in which the Kristevan khoratic body is affirmed are also those moments in which the logic of the symbolic body disappears and is replaced by the logic of kinetic energy and tension" (Tarasti 2002: 137). The musical text unfolds as a dialectic between bursts of pure kinetic energy of urges and the normativity of the symbolic musical order (form, harmonic rules, etc.):

> Thus, when the primary, archaic body (...) is affirmed, the normal syntactic-logical discursive order of the music is disrupted and an individual moment of creation enters, transcending the social norms. When this body is denied then music

> remains on the level of *langue,* genre and style norms. Still, these acts are in mutual need of each other in the dialectics of enunciation. (Tarasti 2002: 138)

It is this dialectic between *khora* and symbolic order that is theoretically developed in Kristeva's theory in the opposition between genotext and phenotext.

Genotext and phenotext

Kristeva's theory of the text is analogous to her psychoanalytic theory – the text is structured like the human psyche (Lacan 1982: 48). She considers the artistic text through two main concepts – *genotext* and *phenotext*. Genotext refers to both the semiotic *khora* and the origin of the symbolic:

> The former [semiotic processes - CV] includes drives, their disposition, and their division of the body, plus the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects and pre-Oedipal relations with parents. The latter [the symbolic - CV] encompasses the emergence of object and subject, and the constitution of nuclei of meaning involving categories: semantic and categorial fields. (Kristeva 1984: 86)

At first, the genotext is an expression of the drives forming the pre-symbolic space, where the subject is yet to be "generated", and at the same time articulated in terms of biological and social constraints. In the psychoanalytic model described, this is the phase, in which the child has not yet

formed its own subjectivity and is in immediate and absolute dependence on the mother. Although the genotext is always observed in language, it is not linguistic in nature, but is "a *process,* which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral (...) and nonsignifying" (Kristeva 1984: 86). The structures of the genotext derive both from the pulsation of drives and from the biological and social structures that constrain them. Yet the unstable and ephemeral nature of these structures allow the genotext as "process" and "pathway" to become an expression of semiotic *khora*.

The phenotext forms the socially accepted codes that determine the communicative nature of a text. Kristeva explains that the phenotext is what linguists classify as "competence" and "performance" (referring to Chomsky's generative grammar). The phenotext is the set of normatively regulated formations of signification. On the basis of the formal rules of the phenotext, the signifying process can be constrained "at one or another of the theses that it traverses; they [the constraints – CV] knot it and lock it into a given surface or structure; they discard *practice* under fixed, fragmentary, symbolic *matrices,* the tracings of various social constraints that obliterate the infinity of the process: the phenotext is what conveys these obliterations" (Kristeva 1984: 88). The rules at the level of the phenotext appear analogous to the symbolic constraint in the child's psyche. Seen from the artwork's perspective, the phenotext can only serve as a matrix, in which the genotext appears – of course, only through gaps and eruptions. Without a genotext, the phenotext is only a symbolic matrix without "energetic" content. On the other hand, without a

phenotext, the genotext cannot take the form necessary for communication.

If for Kristeva the literary text is structured like the human psyche, in Tarasti the same applies to the musical score. For this reason, the idea of genotext and phenotext also plays an important role in Tarastian semiotics. For example, he explains some major tendencies in Wagner's operas through this opposition. What is interesting here, however, is that Tarasti seems to push the whole realm of language entirely into the realm of the phenotext, while placing music (along with gesture) solely in the realm of the genotext:

> In Wagner the verbal discourse, libretto and literary program correspond to the 'symbolic' order (phenotext), whereas music and gestural language describe the libidinal, 'semiotic' level of the *khora* (genotext). In this view, the genotext dominates overwhelmingly in Wagnerian semiosis. Postfacto commentaries and literary explanations invented by himself and others do not change the matter. In other words, if one conceives of music as having two sides, *signifier* (the heard sounds) and *signified* (the conceptual or emotional content of the sounds), then it would be misleading to imagine that Wagner's writings or any other literary programs could take the place of the musical *signified*. Rather, the content (signified) is constituted precisely by the kinetico-rhythmic *khora* (genotext), which appears as the phenotext of song and symphonic music within the scenic reality. (Tarasti 2012: 193)

For Tarasti, the verbal aspect of a Wagner opera is at the level of the phenotext, i.e., at the level of socially accepted conventions or codes. Music, by contrast, delineates the realm of genotext with its inherent *khora*, i.e., the kinetic

energy of drives. But then, is the verbal language in Wagnerian opera denied its own genotext, which has nothing to do with the music – say, if one reads the libretto by itself? Isn't this libretto a "genotext" without the music? Tarasti doesn't seem to point in this direction. Perhaps it is essential to the genotext-phenotext distinction that one contemplates the whole work (as *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Wagner's case), analysing therein the roles which its different elements (e.g. verbal discourse, music, etc.) assume. Could we imagine that within Wagner's musical drama it is generally music that plays the role of genotext, but that, if the libretto is read in silence, it would also reveal certain characteristics of the genotext? I am inclined to think so. According to Tarasti, however, in Wagner's (total) music drama, the verbal elements are stripped of their kinetic impulse of *khora*, which is now entirely determined by the music. Does this mean, on the other hand, that in Wagner the music is devoid of its own phenotext? Apparently not, as Tarasti speaks of the "phenotext of song and symphonic music". In other words, what is at stake here is an essential asymmetry that gives music full semiotic-symbolic expression, and deprives speech of the semiotic plane in favour of the symbolic.

Tarasti's comment is important for another reason. No explanations given "postfacto" can produce the musical signified that only the work, such as it is, carries and can communicate. In other words, only in the asserted and unabandoned relation of genotext and phenotext can the semiotic fact of the musical work be fully realised. Any compensatory reading – even if it is part of the

intertextual network of the work – cannot produce precisely the signified content that the work itself carries.

The final definition of Tarasti's existential musical semiotics is based on an analytical distinction within the text, to which Kristeva pays particular attention. Kristeva considers four types of signifying practices: narrative, meta-narrative, contemplation, and text-practice. The first three are different ways of limiting the semiotic *khora* (genotext) to a symbolic matrix (phenotext). In terms of what Tarasti later develops as a model for musical narrative, we are interested in the last signifying practice, namely text-practice:

> The text's semiotic distribution is set out in the following manner: when instinctual rhythm passes through ephemeral but specific theses, meaning is constituted but is then immediately exceeded by what seems outside meaning: materiality, the discontinuity of real objects. The process' matrix of enunciation is in fact *anaphoric* since it designates an elsewhere: the *chora* that generates what signifies. To have access to the process would therefore be to break through any given *sign* for the subject, and reconstitute the heterogeneous space of its formation. This practice, a continuous passing beyond the limit, which does not close off significance into a system but instead assumes the infinity of its process, can only come about when, simultaneously, it assumes the laws of this process: the biological-physiological and social laws which allow, first, for the discovery of their precedents and then for their free realization. That this practice assumes laws implies that it safeguards boundaries, that it seeks out theses, and that in the process of this search it transforms the law, boundaries, and constraints it meets (Kristeva 1984: 100–101).

The text is a place where the semiotic meets the symbolic in three stages: the semiotic meets the symbolic, moves through it, and transforms it. The limits of the theses that the symbolic postulates are "guaranteed", though they are overcome and rearranged. The semiotic passes with an "instinctive rhythm" through all theses of the symbolic.

The "representation and language" of art are the equivalent of this practice: "it is only in their performance that the dynamic of drive charges bursts, pierces, deforms, reforms, and transforms the boundaries the subject and society set for themselves" (Kristeva 1984: 103). The process of the drives can only be embodied in "text" – in particular, the text of *art*. Reading (the text) is "giving up the lexical, syntactic, and semantic operation of deciphering, and instead retracing the path of their production" (Kristeva 1984: 103). Production here is the opposite of "ciphering" and encoding; production is the movement of genotext. In order to arrive at the genotext, a reading of the text must look beyond its coded aspects, i.e., its phenotext. Reading into the genotext has nothing to do with a lexical, syntactic and semantic decoding of meaning, but rather with tracing the process of textual production (we might say "genesis") or "practice".

The juxtaposition of genotext and phenotext has great significance for the semiotic study of any text (including the musical text). From Kristeva's position, the phenotext is a set of rules and implementations of the rules of language, i.e., the code and the message that the code produces. Social conventions also appear in the genotext, but there they are a function of the dynamic process of drives.

In the genotext, the kinetic energy of *khora* passes through the stases of social codes, making sense of them and transforming them always anew. Conversely, the phenotext is restricted to particular stases and presents the code and message as a closed system. This system appears "irreducible" to the genotext (Kristeva 1984: 87), even though the latter is more fundamental, because the phenotext poses the problem of meaning at a completely different level – the level of closed matrices, of linguistic rules. The phenotext does not postulate a genotext at all, it can exist peacefully on the basis of a discontinuous and restrained genotext. Thus, any message can exist on the basis of a code as a symbolic matrix that does not admit the process of the *semiotic* into itself. In this case it cannot be a (geno) text, and thus, a proper artistic (or, in particular, musical) text as well.

In Tarasti's musical semiotics this idea has been developed in different contexts. Summarily, Tarasti begins to trace which parts of a musical text are realisations of the genotext and which parts are realisations of the phenotext. Such is, for example, his early theory of musical "structures of signification" and "structures of communication". In Kristeva's terms, structures of signification are the genotext and structures of communication are the phenotext. The former reflect the composer's creative impulse – which Tarasti would later relate to the kinetic energy of his *khora* – and the latter relate to musical language, i.e., the accepted conventions of musical code that make a work communicable. But because in his later theories Tarasti always has the narrative in mind as the starting

point for the structural analysis of a musical work, the genotext and the phenotext are interpreted in the light of certain "roles" in the work that are purely musical in nature. These roles (so-called musical *subjects* or *actors*) will be discussed in detail shortly. But their theoretical roots can be found already here, in Kristeva's psychoanalytic literary theory.

The role of music in Kristeva's theory

Kristeva repeatedly defines music as a primarily "semiotic" art:

> On the other hand, there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But, as we shall see, this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic. (Kristeva 1984: 24)

Thus music appears, on the one hand, entirely grounded in the semiotic – in the *khora*, the kinetic energy of drives – but, at the same time, always operating through and in the symbolic. Insofar as it is part of the semiotic, music is "pure articulation" and in a sense pre-linguistic:

> Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but

> restrained by a single guarantee: syntax. (Kristeva 1984: 29)

The musical is metonymically associated with rhythm. The *khora* is expressed in kinetic and vocal rhythm, and semiotic space is defined as a "rhythmic space" (Kristeva 1984: 26). In the early life of the child the mother's actions in relation to it are rhythmically separated – and these actions, in turn, regulate the child's semiotic impulses (drives). This testifies to the protomusicality of the human psyche – from his birth man senses the world "musically". The pulsation of the drives, which are met by the resistive force of the maternal body, forms a rhythmic figure. These points in the dynamics of the *khora* lead to the child's first individual "articulations".

In musical and poetic art, rhythm has the same origin as it has in the pre-oedipal phase of the development of the child. In this respect, Tarasti's position overlaps entirely with Kristeva's. Like Kristeva, he sees the origin of music in the *khora* of kinetic impulses. Moreover, when he turns to Wagner's musical dramas, he leaves to music the realm of genotext, of *khora*, thereby showing the advantage of the musical over the verbal in accessing these pre-symbolic phenomena of the human psyche.

In addition, Kristeva sees every text as musical in some way. As a genotext, the text is necessarily associated with the energy of the semiotic, which is always musically articulated. But in the text it meets the symbolic stases and passes through them: "No text, no matter how 'musicalized,' is devoid of meaning or signification; on the contrary, musicalization pluralizes meanings [or *senses* - CV]"

(Kristeva 1984: 65). Every text is musically dynamic. The ability of the text to pass through different stases, to reformulate symbolic matrices, to "pulverise" the signified, is a *musical* ability.

Tarasti's theory of musical narrative

The concept of musical narrative underlies Tarasti's thought throughout its development, but undergoes some significant changes. In his early writings, Tarasti pays particular attention to one particular type of narrative, the mythical narrative. He considers the various ways in which a myth can be expressed in music. The mythical in music always appears as a narrative, understood in the most general sense of the term as a mythical message that can be expressed in different media – speech, image, music (Tarasti 1978: 55). Mythical signs in music (in a semiotic sense) have specific characteristics. Each mythical/musical sign is divided into signifier, consisting of certain musical expressive techniques, and signified, carrying a certain mythical message.

Beyond the mythical narrative, Tarasti elaborates various models for analysing musical narratives, which will be discussed below. What they all have in common is the desire to define the notion of musical narrative on a sufficiently abstract methodological level so that different musical works can be analysed from this position. Here, narrative is understood in an existential and psychoanalytic sense – that is, as the narrative of a subjectivity embodied in music.

Myth and music: the mythical narrative in music

In his early work, Tarasti reflected on the capacity of music to express mythical meanings through its narrative structure. Narrative structure makes it possible to apply mythical meanings to music. There, the relationship between myth and music is examined in light of semiotics, structural anthropology and philosophy.

By Tarasti's own admission, "the whole premise of this investigation [on myth and music - CV] alludes to Lévi-Straussian structuralism" (Tarasti 1978: 28). Mythology plays a central role in Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology. Lévi-Strauss examines the structure of myth in mythical thinking, by studying specific mythological systems in various primitive peoples.[55] According to Lévi-Strauss, myth functions as a structure of relations in the mind of the mythically oriented person: "Mythology has no obvious practical function: unlike the phenomena previously studied, it is not directly linked with a different kind of reality, which is endowed with a higher degree of objectivity than its own and whose injunctions it might therefore transmit to minds which seem perfectly free to indulge their creative spontaneity. And so (...) when the mind is left to commune with itself and no longer has to come to term with objects, *it is in a sense reduced to imitating itself as an object*" (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 12). The mind communicates with itself in myth and finds its reflections

[55] Cf. Lévi-Strauss 1962.

in mythically conceived objects. In a sense, however, this fact remains hidden to the bearers of the myth themselves: "In the particular example we are dealing with here, it is at least doubtful whether the indigenous people of Central Brazil, beyond the fact that they are amazed by mythological stories, have any understanding of the systems of interrelations to which we reduce them (...) I claim, therefore, to show not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in the minds of men without their being aware of the fact" (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 12). When he speaks of the way "myths operate in the minds of men", Lévi-Strauss is referring to unconscious but real structures in the mind that organise the mythical worldview and life according to myth. According to Lévi-Strauss, each individual in a myth-driven society reproduces the myth in some part of it that is culturally and historically conditioned, without knowing or remembering it fully. The narrator of the myth is like a player in the orchestra, who plays only his part as if it were the whole work, without knowing the parts of the others. At the same time, a myth, like a musical work, is fully realised, but this fullness is visible only by those outside the orchestra.

Tarasti sees the relation of music to myth based on Lévi-Strauss's understanding of these two phenomena. According to Lévi-Strauss, music is "a language without meaning" (*La musique, c'est le langage moins le sens*) (Lévi-Strauss 1971b: 579), i.e., it has only a signifier but no signified. Myth, on the other hand, is "meaning", which can be expressed by many different means. From this position, Tarasti puts forward the thesis that the meaning of myth

can be expressed with the help of music. Music is sound without meaning, and myth is meaning without sound (Tarasti 1978: 29–30). Thus the combination of myth and music forms a semiological system, where myth as signified is expressed in music as signifier. An example of this can be found in the ritual dances of various primitive peoples, in which melodies and rhythms are associated with specific meanings of a mythical nature. Tarasti sets out to find analogous semiotic relations in Western music.

He explores how Western music serves as a signifier for certain mythical signifieds. To this end, he suggests a general musical semiotic schema (Tarasti 1978: 31). Western musical culture defines the "substance" of musical expression – chords, timbres, rhythms, etc. The composer gives this substance "form" in the musical work. Culture gives the listener the form of his musical perceptions in that it provides him with the musical codes, with which to interpret the work. Here, myth plays a role as cultural content embedded in music. The substance of the listener's perceptions lies in his reaction to the composition.

At first, myth and music can be seen as phenomena with analogous structures. According to Lévi-Strauss, as a result the breakdown of mythology under the pressure of science in Western culture, music inherits the structural principles of myth. Music in Western culture occupies the place in social life formerly occupied by myth (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 46). The detachment from time that primitive man achieved by listening to or telling a myth is achieved by Western man through music (Lévi-Strauss 1971b: 583–590). The other major structural characteristic

that unites myth and music is the drive to resolve contradictions (Lévi-Strauss 1971b: 590). Both myth and music can be viewed as a spiralling movement – similar to a dialectic – that moves through various contradictions and contrasts and reaches resolution (Lévi-Strauss 1971a). This isomorphism helps unite myth as signified and music as signifier in a sign.

Tarasti refers to so-called "primitive music", i.e., the music of primitive tribes with mythical consciousness. In those cultures, myth, like music, is organised on the principle of variations and combinations (Tarasti 1978: 41). In some cases musical variations and combinations are oriented towards mythical structures and reflect them (1978: 42). Thus, music serves as the signifier of myth. In other cases, however, the musical inventions and elaborations of motives are self-contained and are not necessarily related to the mythical structure – they are used because, by their very invention, they bring pleasure (1978: 42). In these, music ceases to serve as signifier for myth and becomes self-sufficient. There are also separate mythical units – "mythemes" – which can be freely combined in a mythical narrative (1978: 44). A musical discourse can be constructed with analogous, musical units. Tarasti (1978: 44–51) gives various examples. The mention of primitive music and its relation to myth serves only as a reference for the study of Western music, which can be considered as a similar manifestation of myth.

The mythical signifier

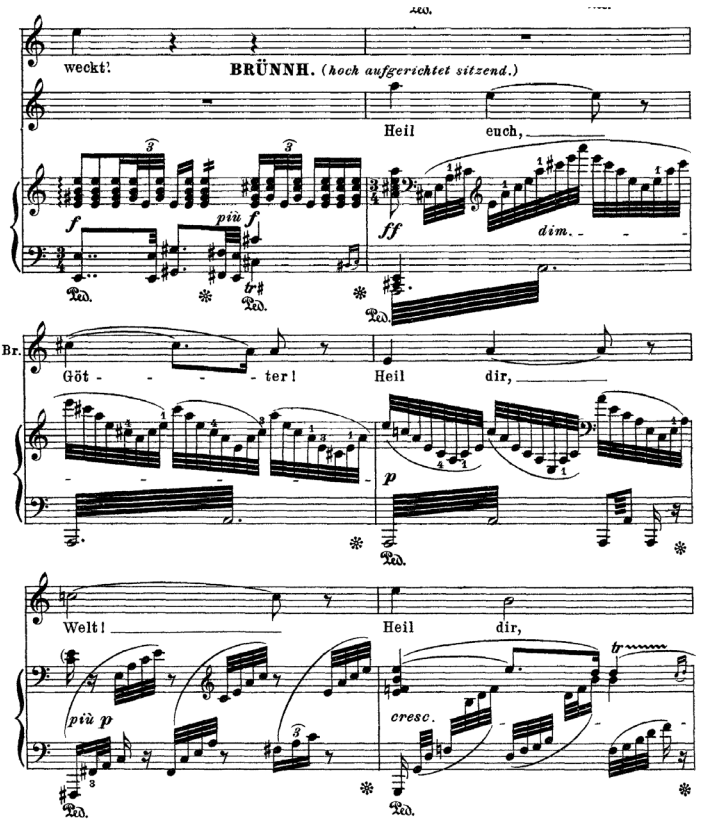
The mythical signifier refers to those means of musical expression that serve to express mythical meanings in music. At the level of the signifier, musical discourse can use various parameters to suggest different mythical signifieds. In terms of melody, a characteristic of the mythical signifier is the use of old sonorities: "The use of modal scales, in particular, along with other devices, often expresses in the context of Western art music something 'mythical,' but there are also cases where the chromaticism of exotic scales and augmented intervals may assume this function" (Tarasti 1978: 75). Tarasti cites Rimsky-Korsakov's operas and Borodin's *Prince Igor* as examples.

Timbre is also a characteristic means of expressing mythical meanings. The harp in Liszt's orchestral works, for example, often serves as a solo instrument, giving them a "limpid" character (Tarasti 1978: 77). Tarasti links this to the association the harp evokes as the instrument of Apollo and Orpheus (their instrument is the lyre, but he seems to consider the harp as an analogue of the lyre). The connection with Apollo has a mythical character associated with sublimity and perfection. Sometimes the same effect is achieved with arpeggiated chords on the piano (e.g., the second movement of Schumann's Fantasia in C major). The use of the harp as a mythical signifier also extends to "Slavonic" music such as Smetana's *Má vlast* or Glinka's *Russlan and Lyudmila*. Tarasti defines their music as Slavic precisely because he connects the mythical references in their works to their Slavic roots.

Other tools can also be used to suggest mythical meanings. Berlioz, for example, notes that the English horn is well suited for such suggestions: "Its tones are low-spirited, dreaming, noble, slightly hesitant, coming from a distance; no other instrument is so apt to evoke images and feelings of past times, when the composer wants to allow the concealed strings of sweet memories to resound" (Berlioz 1904: 199). Tarasti discovers such use of the English horn in Berlioz's Marguerite aria from *La Damnation de Faust* (Tarasti 1978: 79).

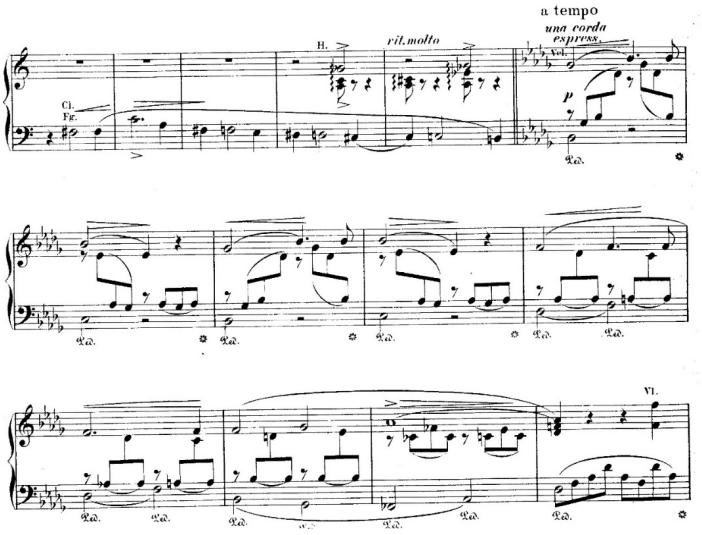
Harmony also plays an important role in signifying the mythical in music. Tarasti points out that, according to Ernst Kurth, the change from major to minor, for example, can be elevated to a "mythical greatness", as, for example, in Act III of Wagner's *Siegfried*, when Brünnhilde wakes up and greets the light. In this excerpt, Kurth discovers "the collective sinking from the broad A major chord, which shines at the sight of the bright sky of the gods, to the A minor chord in the infinitely dark look back to earth" (Kurth 1920: 154). The change in the harmony thus reflects the mythical difference between the world of the gods and the world of men. Harmony as a musical signifier signifies the relation of the divine and earthly worlds in the mythical signified.

In the second theme of Liszt's symphonic poem *Prometheus*, Tarasti finds another example of signifying the mythical through harmony: "The impression of ambiguity is created there by altered mediant chords which give the melody itself an archaic flavor as if it were detached from the ordinary stream and course of tones and chords"



Ex. 19 Excerpt from Act III of *Siegfried* by R. Wagner (Klindworth 1908: 318).

(Tarasti 1978: 82). Many such examples can be found in Romantic music: on the one hand, because of the presence of mythical meanings that are expressed through the music, and on the other hand, because of the development of harmonic language, which becomes the main means of musical expression.



Ex. 20 Second theme of *Prometheus* by F. Liszt (Stark 1880: 106).

The mythical seme in music: the mythical signified

Tarasti describes the semiotic structure of mythical signs in music using the concepts of "seme" and "lexeme". Drawing on Greimas, he defines semes as "the minimal significant units of linguistic communication" (Tarasti 1978: 72). In verbal language, each seme is made of binary oppositions between two terms: hot/cold, beautiful/ugly, good/evil, life/death, etc. Musical semes have a similar structure: "semes are such categories as size, length, speed, intensity, density, continuity, tension etc. and they can characterize musical lexemes by organizing themselves into oppositions like long/short, slow/fast, soft/loud, thick/thin,

continuous/discontinuous, tensed/relaxed etc." (Tarasti 1978: 73). They are dependent on cultural and historical circumstances, i.e., particular codes. In verbal language semes can be words, fragments or whole texts; in music their size is also variable.

In structuralist semiotics, the position of the seme and the lexeme coincides with that of the signified in Saussure and content plane in Hjelmslev. Therefore, the mythical seme in music has to do with mythical meanings that music carries. On the other hand, each seme corresponds to a particular expression in music, the signified or the expression plane. This expression is made up of specific musical parameters: melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, etc. Thus, the consideration of mythical semes and lexemes in music constitutes both an analysis of them as signifieds and an analysis of their signifiers in musical discourse.

As a starting point for the definition of mythical semes, Tarasti takes the idea of mythical images of the world from Jaspers' Psychologie der Weltanschauungen (1960). Drawing on Jaspers, he divides the mythical seme into three main sub-semes: the nature-mythical, the hero-mythical and the magical (Tarasti 1978: 74). He further adds more sub-sects of the mythical seme: fabulous, balladic, legendary, sacred, demonic, fantastic, mystic, exotic, primitivistic, national-musical, pastoral, gestural, sublime and tragic. Here we will look at just a few of them as examples.

For Jaspers, in the field of sensory-spatial images of the world, the representative of myth is the *nature-mythical* image. This image of the world is contrasted with the nature-historical and the nature-mechanical, each of which

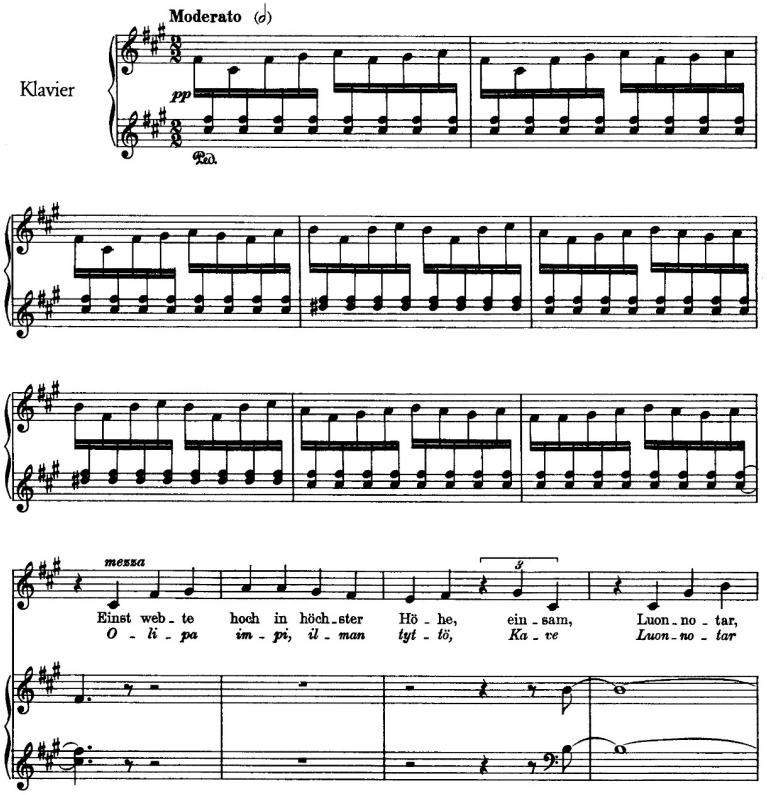
represents nature in a different way. The nature-mythical is the most primal of the three images (Jaspers 1960: 158). From the standpoint of the nature-mythical, the world is a totality of relations and analogies that connect every aspect of human life and nature:

> Objectively, phenomenologically formulated, man finds infinite relationships and analogies in this world, as they are known to us throughout history, beginning with the Babylonian teachings of the relationship between the course of the stars and human destiny: In nature, everything stands in inner connectedness to everything else: human beings, stars, animals, plants, organs, minerals, metals (Jaspers 1960: 161).

In the nature-mythical world, the inner experiences of the subject are objectified in nature: "The mood of the landscape in the experience itself is phenomenologically not merely the mood of the subject, rather, the subject sees the mood in the objectness [Gegenständlichen] of the landscape" (Jaspers 1960: 161). In other words, the whole of the mythical encompasses both the subjective and the objective realm.

In Tarasti, the nature-mythical seme refers to the mythical interpretation of the elements of nature and their origin: the birth of the sun, the creation of the world, the appearance of the elements. These became the subjects of various compositions in Western music, especially during the Romantic period, when the mythical became a major philosophical theme. Tarasti exemplifies this with Sibelius's *Luonnotar*, a work for soprano and orchestra, which tells a Finnish myth about the birth of the world. He sees

in this work "tonal structures expressing the most archaic strata of the human mind" (Tarasti 1978: 87). The figuration in F-sharp minor at the beginning, which depicts the "primal chaos", and the appearance of the narrative voice in the soprano, which remains unaccompanied, are both examples of such devices (Ex. 21).



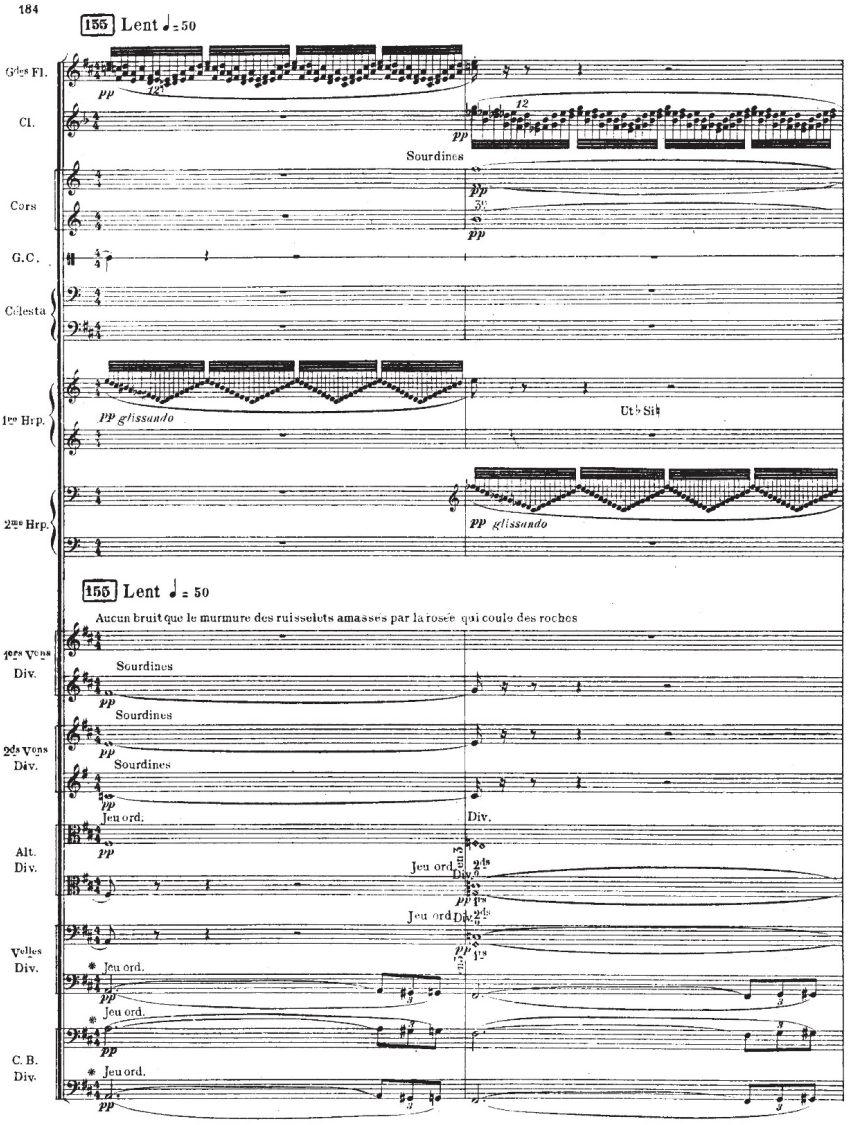
Ex. 21 Beginning of *Luonnotar* by J. Sibelius.

A characteristic image of the nature-mythical seme in Western music is the sunrise. Tarasti refers to the prelude to the first act of Wagner's Lohengrin, as well as the sunrise from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* ('Lever du jour' from the third movement, Ex. 22). The opening of both uses the high register of the strings and winds in a static that gradually builds to the full register of the orchestra.

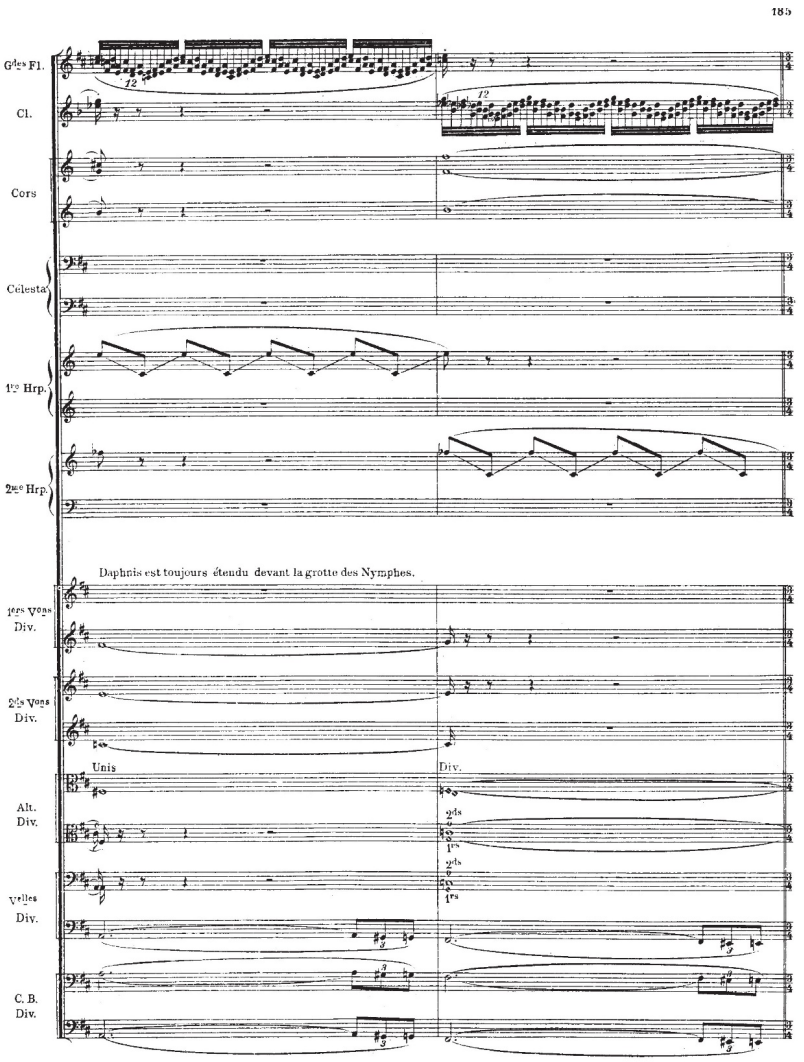
According to Jaspers, in the field of psychic-cultural images of the world, the mythical is embodied in the *soul-mythical* (*seelenmythisch*) image of the world (Jaspers 1960: 180). From the point of view of this image, the soul has mythical representations, through which it interprets its life, such as demons, gods, heroes, angels, saints, etc. These constructed "forms" are "clear and transparent" (1960: 180) – more so than people in reality. Thus, they give the soul a criterion for its attitude towards the world. The nature-mythical world is just a "stage" towards the soul-mythical world (Jaspers 1960: 180).

As a special case of the soul-mythical image of the world, Tarasti considers the *hero-mythical* seme, which is associated with the life and image of the mythical hero. The mythical hero in music appears as distinguished from other possible images:

> A mythical hero is a person who by his courage, wisdom, power or some other quality differs from other people and who, because of this quality, is able to resolve a mythical problem. Similarly in music the theme portraying him must be distinguishable from other themes and uplift the music listener to the level of the greatness and clarity of the mythical action (Tarasti 1978: 91).



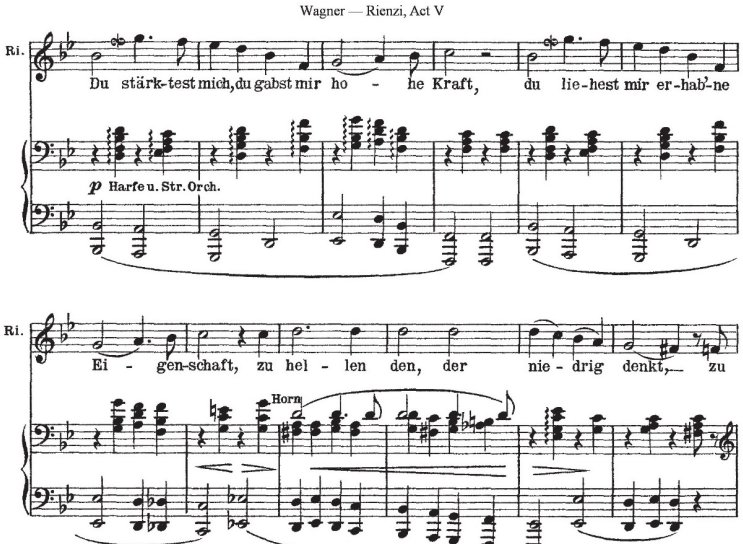
* *Otez les sourdines une à une en commençant par les chefs de pupitres. Toutes doivent être enlevées à* 156
Remove the mutes one by one beginning with the first stands. All should have been removed by 156.



Ex. 22 *Daphnis et Chloé*, M. Ravel, 'Lever du jour' from the third movement (Ravel 1913: 184-185).

He points to Beethoven as the originator of the heroic-mythical in music. The Third Symphony, the *Eroica*, expresses the heroic through "E flat major, the timbre of the French horn, the funeral march and the description of the mythical hero's struggles by the relationships among various movements and their musicopsychological development" (Tarasti 1978: 91). Later, Wagner and Liszt appropriated and elaborated on Beethoven's heroic-mythical style. In Liszt, this can be seen, for example, in the symphonic poems *Prometheus* and *Tasso*, where Tarasti finds direct references to Beethoven (Tarasti 1978: 92). The same applies to Wagner, for example in Siegfried's funeral march, which is interpreted as a reference to Beethoven's Third. In Wagner, Tarasti finds a different type of heroism, distinct from the "elemental" and "military" heroism of Beethoven. This typically Wagnerian heroicity is associated with a "more Apollonian" heroic-mythical stylistics, which is already found in Rienzi's prayer from the opera of the same name (Ex. 23). Here, one finds an ornamented ascending sixth, characteristic of many heroic leitmotivs in Wagner's later work. Tarasti gives a number of examples (Ex. 24). In all of them the ascending sixth carries a heroic suggestion.

Jaspers also reflects on various possible metaphysical images of the world. According to him, the mythical is expressed in the *mythological-demonic* image of the world (Jaspers 1960: 191). The mythological image of the world precedes all others and is distinguished by its immediacy and self-evidency. In the mythological world, everything that would later be called "reality" and "absolute", but without the cultural and philosophical overtones of these

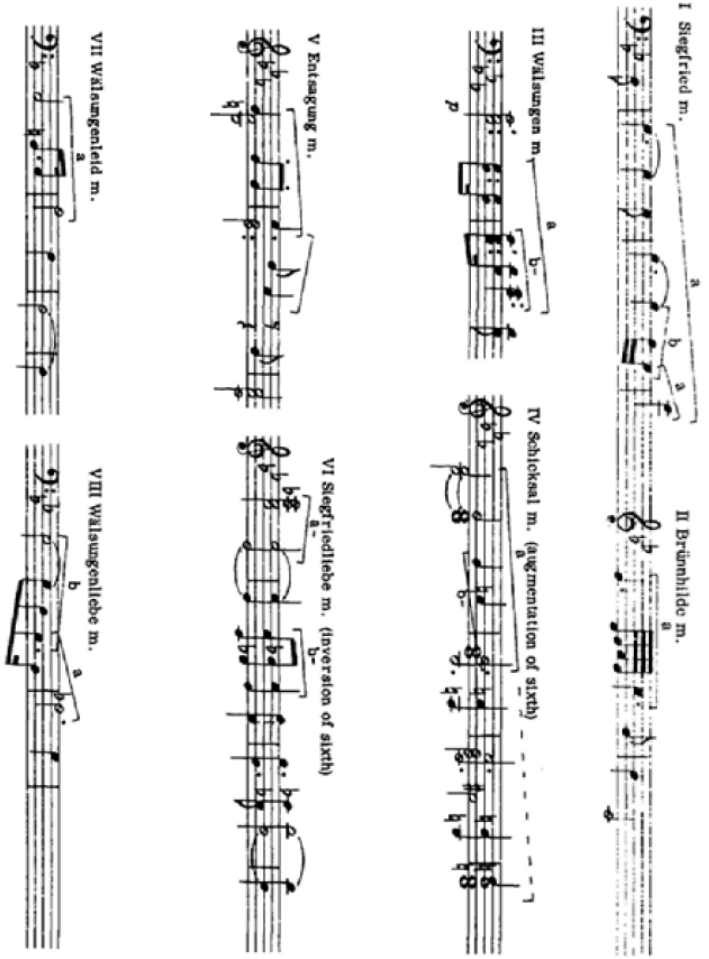


Ex. 23 *Rienzi*, R. Wagner, 'Rienzi's prayer' from Act 5 (Kogel 1910).

concepts, can be attributed to demonic forces. The mythological world is basically a "narrative", which does not require justification:

> The characteristic of the mythological image of the world is: there is no observation and development of a thought, there is no grounding of a concept in mental and visual relations, but, rather, a story is told (a story, which is inherited through tradition or revealed as self-evident, which in any case does not admit or even require any justification; the question of justification is not raised at all to begin with) (Jaspers 1960: 191).

In relation to this image of the world, Tarasti discusses the *magical-mythical* seme in music. The magical seme is associated



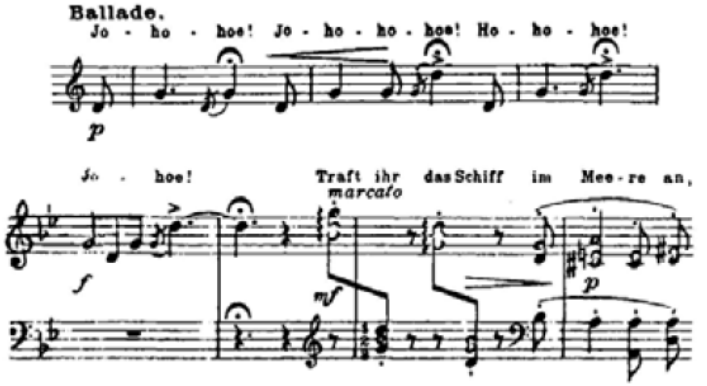
Ex. 24 Tarasti's (1978: 93–94) examples of the heroic in Wagner.

with mythical knowledge that "is used to act and influence: one endeavours to affect natural phenomena by means of an incantation or some fetish" (Tarasti 1978: 97–98). Music can express a similar magical technique for influencing the world. In Romanticism, for example, magical suggestion is achieved through the use of the augmented triad (e.g., the beginning of the *Faust* Symphony by Liszt, *The Golden Cockerel* by Rimsky-Korsakov) (Tarasti 1978: 99). Occasionally the magical seme is also expressed by chromatically altered chords (Wagner's *Valkyrie* and *Siegfried*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*) (Tarasti 1978: 99–100).

In the *fabulous* seme, the universality of the mythical is reduced to a "mere miracle, the narration of a small-scale, sentimental story" (Tarasti 1978: 101). In musical terms, this means a concentration on small forms and sentimental expression. The prototype for the fabulous-musical seme is Mozart's *The Magic Flute*: "Mozart's whole opera, in fact, forms a repertory of fabulous effects beginning not the least with its gallery of musical characters, from Papageno's amusing songs to the colorature brilliance of the arias by the Queen of the Night and the exotic flavor brought by Monostatos" (Tarasti 1978: 101). *The Magic Flute* presents the original use of the glockenspiel to express the fabulous seme – as in Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* or R. Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (Tarasti 1978: 101).

The *balladic* seme usually refers to communal relationships of the pre-modern period – succession to the throne, revenge and clan controversies. According to Tarasti, however, in the perspective of the romantic ballad as a musical genre, this seme is not visible – Chopin's

and Brahms's ballads, for example, are highly psychological (Tarasti 1978: 104). He finds the balladic seme in Senta's ballad from Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* (Ex. 25), which uses "open and bleak figures of fifths and fourths in melodic line along with the simple strophic form" (1978: 104). The balladic seme is characterised by "a rugged narrative quality in the music as a whole, along with certain archaic features indicating that the story alludes to the distant past" (1978: 105).



Ex. 25 *The Flying Dutchman*, R. Wagner, Senta's ballad.

Summary: The Semiotic Relation of Myth and Music

As we have seen, Tarasti considers the relation of myth and music, in semiotic terms, as a relation between signified and signifier. He describes different varieties of the mythical that carry different meanings and are expressed

in different ways. The myth as signified is a mythical seme or lexeme. Music serves as the signifier or acoustic carrier of the sign. All means of musical expression – rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, etc. – serve the construction of musical signifiers for particular mythical signifieds. Thus, Tarasti's musical discourse is made up of musical-mythical signs of various forms, expressing mythical signifieds by expressive musical means.

Musical narrative as existential narrative

In later elaborations on this topic, Tarasti treats musical narrative as an *existential narrative*. Every musical work is an existential narrative that contains a series of existential *situations*. A situation is a "place" within musical discourse, where a particular existential position stands out. The existential situation is what gives sense to what is happening in the music.

As an initial hint as to what the existential situation in music might be, Tarasti suggests that it must be viewed as persisting in a state of motion, not as a static object:

> My own efforts to go beyond the narrow communication model have drawn inspiration from Marcel Proust's conception of music in his *A la recherche du temps perdu* (...) Essential to the Proustian scheme is the disruption of the unidirectional, linear-chain model, since in real communication our exchanges dart back and forth and do not proceed in just one direction. In such an analysis, music already

> appears as a certain *situation* rather than as a fixed object. (Tarasti 2002: 69)

In saying this, Tarasti distances himself from the concept that the semiotic object can be interpreted without taking into account the lived human relation to it. The existential modality of man thus becomes a factor in semiotics.

Tarasti speaks of a "new musical semiotics", distinguished by "the effort to discover the individuality of the work" (2002: 70). Situation is the key to the whole of musical semiosis: "only by using the notion of *situation* can we analyse musical semiosis in all its complexity and uniqueness" (2002: 71). What is the situation? "The situation is that part of the world with which one enters into a relationship. One relates to the world via his/her situation. Situation is the whole of all those phenomena, objects and states of affairs under which and by which a person's organic and conscious existence is realized" (2002: 71–72). In this version of Tarasti's theory, each musical narrative is enacted between subjects or actors who find themselves in different existential situations.

Musical subjects (actors)

A narrative needs "actors", actors who serve as driving forces of the narrative. In Tarasti, these actors are also called subjects. At first, the very definition of

actors in music appears to be a problem – purely instrumental music, for one, does not necessarily suggest the presence of actors in musical discourse. According to Tarasti, however, the majority of Western music is guided by musical actors, i.e., by acting forces with specific identities, which drive musical discourse and guide its development and direction.

In his early works, Tarasti found the musicological justification for his theory of musical actors in the ideas of Ernst Kurth. Kurth developed an "energetic" theory of musical melody. According to Kurth, melody is not simply a sum of tones or even "a whole greater than its parts" (von Ehrenfels), but an energetic complex, an impulse that exists only in immediate listening:

> The melodic is felt fully in its musical sense [*Das Melodische ist musikalisch erst voll empfunden*] when one senses in it not something present at hand [*Vorhandenes*], but something always happening, a development set in motion. Rather than proceeding from the static, simultaneous image of the written thing as the eye sees it, one must proceed from the current of force that acts as a particular psychic urge on the whole path of the [melodic] line (Kurth 1922: 2).

Kurth emphasises the claim that melody is based on the kinetic force *between* and *above* the tones, not in the tones themselves. Moreover, this energy can only be experienced directly in listening. It lies at the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious:

> We do not merely "hear" a melodic line, we experience the movement of the driving force within it

> as a most intrinsic and profound melodic impulse. And even if the sensation of movement remains hidden to us through the immediate effect and intensity of the sensuous aural stimulus of melodic tones, and even if it is pushed into the unconscious, it should not therefore be concluded that it should be valued less in technical musical terms and in its significance as a component of the complex sensation of "musical listening"; on the contrary, in the melodic it functions even more elementally, as the most significant part of psychological events remains in principle always in the unconscious. (Kurth 1922: 3)

Tarasti applies Kurth's theory of the kinetic energy between tones to his own actorial theory. A musical actor can be any melody or theme and, once identified as such, it is subject to analysis according to Kurth's system: "If we identify melody or theme with a musical actor, then the actorial analysis of music is the analysis of the motives constituting a theme, and the reduction of those motives to their energizing, kinetic tensions" (Tarasti 1994: 101). Tarasti finds in Kurth a prototype of his own theory of actoriality (1994: 104).

Musical actoriality is most clearly embodied in the two-bar musical segment. It is associated with the Classical era and the enhanced individuality, intimacy and emotionality of the musical material. For Kurth, this is associated with the embodiment of subjectivity in music:

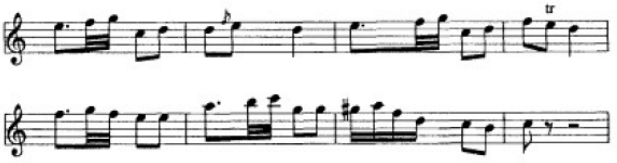
> Just as the polyphonic line hitherto concealed a mystical movement towards the horizon, so the classical melody conceals a insideness of sensation [*Innigkeit des Empfindens*] which struggles for expression within it. Every melodic language of classical art connects with the character of the

> *Lied*, immediately as well as in a more distant connection. Melodic expression (which does not mean only vocal music) is always a "singing", a "speaking" sensation of a subjectivity, whether in joy or lament (...) So too in the sense of a melody of feeling does classical music distinguish itself as an art proceeding from the sensuous. In the classical work of art the subjective expression, the passion and the mood, the personal, is that which most immediately – characterized by a certain peculiarity – already enters the surface of expression (Kurth 1922: 184–185)

For Tarasti, this may serve as a definition of the actoriality, embodied in the symmetrical two-bar periods, as seen in this example based on Mozart's Sonata in C major, K. 330:

He understands the musical subject to be a methodologically convenient concept. The musical subject as a methodological tool is, however, a consequence of a prior analytical choice:

> On such reasoning we would establish the existence of musical subjects by first assuming that there must be certain mechanisms functioning in music (such as spatial-temporal-actorial shifters, isotopies, modalities). We would infer that these mechanisms cannot operate without a musical subject that launches them. (Tarasti 1994: 110)



Example 4.1.

Ex. 26 Ernst Kurth's illustration of two-bar groups in Mozart. Piano Sonata in C major. K. 330. nun. 9-16.

Thus, even in this existential framework, we cannot assume necessarily that musical subjects correlate with actual, living subjects (e.g., the subject of the composer). Such correlations are, however, implied in the theory of transcendence, which will be discussed further down.

In his later theory, Tarasti attempts to existentially define musical subjects. But the very notion of "existentiality" includes not only the subjects of the musical narrative, but also the "real" composer, performer and listener, who are related to this narrative. Each narrative plays out between existential subjects with defined roles. At this point, Tarasti sees in the musical work the traces of a "physical" (real) composer and an "implied" composer. The real composer is the one who actually creates the work. The implied composer is the one who, in terms of musical discourse, is *recognised* as the composer. In addition to the implied composer, there is also an implied narrator: "in the work itself there is a (musical) narrator who organizes the musical events according to a certain kind of logic, while taking into account a possible audience" (Tarasti 2002: 73). The musical process is thus seen as a narration by an implied narrator to an implied audience; and by an implied composer to an implied listener.

The semiosis of the musical narrative can be investigated on three levels. At the first level are the real composer and the real listener, who find themselves in different existential situations. Research at this level is limited to the study of the socio-cultural context of the composer and the listener and their biographies. At the second level, musical semiosis moves to the implied listener and implied

composer, where "elements of outer reality are internalized to form factors that wield influence inside the musical discourse. For example, the implied composer is someone with a certain competence who gives his musical message with signs that the implied listener can presumably receive and decode correctly" (Tarasti 2002: 75). The third level is the level of the message itself, which can be considered with the help of the other levels as well as independently. At this level lies the narrative itself.

After introducing the existential situation as a major factor in musical narrative, Tarasti develops different versions of the theory of musical subjects within it. In his later studies, he proposes various conceptual apparatuses for the treating of musical narrative. Regardless of the conceptual differences between them, however, the same idea emerges. Each situation is given significance according to the relation of the existential position highlighted in it. Musical discourse is a series of situations, which either reflect the passive observance of musical, social and other norms, i.e., codes or *langue*-s, or the violation of these norms.

In Tarasti's *Signs of Music,* the idea of musical situation is understood through one basic model:

> In music, situation always implies an actor; no situation can exist without an actor somehow pertaining to it. Therefore, what is crucial for a musical work is the way it draws listeners into the situation and forces them to participate in it. Situation is thus an *act* (i.e., an *active* situation) or an *event* (i.e., a *passive* situation) on the part of a musical subject. (Tarasti 2002: 76)

An event is an occurrence and a change in circumstances, which is not dependent on the actor. The act is an active change of circumstances by the actor himself. One and the same phenomenon can be considered as both an act and an event:

> In the first movement of a classical symphony the subordinate theme usually emerges when the dominant key is reached – that is a general event. But when it happens in a particular case, say, as in Sibelius's Second Symphony, then it is an individual act of the composer. When a given composer does it – Sibelius or Bruckner or whoever – it reflects something existential, because the composer could also have chosen to do otherwise. When the case of this subordinate theme is seen as a rule or norm, then its realization is an event. This explains why a sign as an individual act never blends with what the sign is as an individual event. Classical semiotics treats signs as individual or general events, whereas existential semiotics deals with them as individual acts. (Tarasti 2002: 78)

Events are always *normative*. An individual event is an event in that it is seen as a manifestation of a particular rule. Conversely, acts are always a matter of choice. In musical discourse, acts are evidence of an existential departure from musical norms, and events are evidence of compliance with them.

Later, Tarasti reinterprets the act-event opposition within the *Moi-Soi* opposition. The notions of *Moi* (Me) and *Soi* (Self) were first introduced by the semiotician Jacques Fontanille (1995). For Fontanille, the physical body is the centre of all semiotic interaction: "The body is the sensory-motor fulcrum of semiotic experience"

(Tarasti 2012: 16). In the background, the "body" appears to "constitute the identity and directional principle of the physical, fleshly body. This body is the bearer of 'Me' (*Moi*)" (Tarasti 2012: 16).[56] This initial, motor principle meets the "Self" (*Soi*). *Soi*, on the other hand, constructs itself in discursive activity. The *Soi* is that part of us which *Moi* (Me) projects out of Itself, in order to create itself through its activity. The *Moi* is that part of us to which the *Soi* refers when establishing itself. The *Moi* provides the *Soi* with the impulse and resistance whereby it can become something. In turn, the *Soi* furnishes the *Moi* with reflexivity, which it needs in order to keep within its proper limits as it changes. The *Moi* resists, forcing the *Soi* to encounter its own alterity. Hence, the two are inseparable (Tarasti 2012: 17). The *Moi* is the subject's primary state as a "bundle of sensations"; the *Soi* presents the subject as "observed by others, that is, as socially determined" (Tarasti 2012: 17). The *Soi* preserves, and guarantees to the *Moi*, its identity.[57]

The musical narrative is a series of acts and events, reflections of *Moi* and *Soi*. They can be seen as positions of the real, as well as the implied, composer. At this point, in

[56] Here Tarasti distinguishes between these two "bodies" - the physical and the "identical". In a later work, however, he writes that the physical body and the "identical" body are two forms of *Moi* – namely, according to the modalities "want" and "can" (Tarasti 2015: 185).

[57] Tarasti introduces this distinction on the basis of a specific use of terms by Hegel: "an-und-für-mich-sein" and "an-und-für-sich-sein". The former corresponds to *Moi* and the latter to *Soi*. The reason I do not introduce them, even though they belong to Tarasti's methodological orientations, is that they are developed vaguely with regard to Hegel's systematic thought.

Semiotics of Classical Music, Tarasti seems to refuse to speak of multiple musical subjects and leaves only one, which passes through different states of *Moi* and *Soi*. The subject is one – and Tarasti often associates it directly with the actual composer.

In the relation between *Moi* and *Soi,* the *Moi* is primary, bodily, kinetic energy. *Soi* is what it resists – the social norms that constrain it. The expression of *Moi* is a "rupture in the musical text" (Tarasti 2002: 80), because it dissolves the relations predefined by the musical code or *Soi*. *Moi* gives the text a creative charge that overcomes the limits of social norms. In this respect, the musical subject takes on a rather clear psychoanalytic contour. *Moi* and *Soi* are united by the so-called *Ich-Ton*, a concept Tarasti borrows from von Uexküll: "All living organisms, in relating to their Umwelt, are guided by the principle of the *Ich-Ton* (Me-Tone), as theorized by Jakob von Uexküll. This musical term, as he used it, serves as a metaphor for the manner or code, whereby a living organism selects from its surroundings those signs to which it will react, while rejecting or overlooking others" (Tarasti 2012: 37; Uexküll 1940). Every composer has an *Ich-Ton*, which "filters the signs" appearing in a piece of music. Some signs from the surrounding musical environment are accepted and assimilated, while others are rejected. The environment may be made up of musical conventions, styles, genres, particular musical patterns. Through his *Ich-Ton* the composer determines the direction of his compositional activity. Some signs spring "from within" the composer – from his *Moi* – and are realised in the work, while others come from the

environment and are filtered through his *Ich-Ton*. Thus, the expressions of *Moi* and *Soi* in the musical text are regulated by the core of the composer's identity – his *Ich-Ton*, which sometimes gives expression to the *Moi*, and at other times appropriates and uses certain conventions of the *Soi*.

The composer's *Ich-Ton* defines the characterology of the main musical subject in the narrative. The subject moves through modes of *Moi* and *Soi* depending on the composer's general *Ich-Ton*. Thus, it seems that the distinction between the musical subject and the composer is practically suspended. The musical subject is its composer, and the composer is an existential-semiotic being made up of *Moi* and *Soi*. The *Ich-Ton* of the composer sets the parameters of the musical narrative that traces the development of the musical subject. This, however, is not a conclusion that Tarasti himself unequivocally draws. In a purely semiotic perspective – whether philosophically informed, or not – such a position is not entirely articulable, and yet it does concern the methodological foundation of Tarasti's theory. In fact, one might argue that the idea of musical understanding is ultimately based on a theory of how the actual composer, performer and listener relate to the work in experiential terms. But since this is not an explicit question that Tarasti has systematically dealt with, I will leave it open.[58]

[58] I would suggest, however, that the answer to this question must be sought in a philosophical inquiry endowed with the tools to tackle the problem of lived experience and which, in my opinion, is realised best in the tradition of phenomenology. For some first steps in this direction, cf. Vassilev 2022.

Musical narrative is built on the basis of a dynamic between *Moi* and *Soi*, which can be observed in the syntagmatic series of musical signs: "in Classical Viennese sonata form, the theme-actors (essential motives and melodies) of the exposition usually appear in their 'correct' order, according to the rules of *Soi*. But in the development they may roam freely, making this a place of struggle where the *Moi* comes to the fore" (Tarasti 2012: 19–20). The *act-signs*, the signs of a situation as a free act, make a "rupture in the musical text". *Event-signs*, by contrast, are associated with "a more passive following of stylistic constraints and *langue*, a submission to the 'rules' of communication" (Tarasti 2002: 80). The distinction between *Moi* and *Soi* is clearly asserted and not subject to change, but the interaction between *Moi* and *Soi* in the musical narrative can take place in various modes, as, for example, Beethoven's works illustrate:

> The encounter of *Moi* and *Soi* is always an unpredictable event – we cannot know in advance what might come about as its consequence. It may be that in some work the *Soi* seems to repress totally the *Moi*; as, for example, the fugues in Beethoven's late sonatas. Notice, however, that even in Op. 110 in A flat major, the liberation of the subject from the straitjacket of the fugue at the end represents trans-ascendance – also a liberation from the desires of *Moi* towards transcendence. Sometimes *Moi* and *Soi* live in peaceful cohabitation; sometimes they blend into each other (i.e., they mutually accept each other and are at peace). Sometimes the *Soi* masks itself as *Moi*; e.g., the lied theme of the last movement of the E major Sonata Op. 109 is a sarabande; or the opening motive of Op. 111, which is a baroque French overture. Sometimes the *Moi*

> does the same thing, appearing as a pseudo-*Soi*, as in the telescoping techniques in the transition from development to recapitulation in the first movement of the F major Sonata Op. 10 no. 2. (Tarasti 2012: 101–102)

The narrative is constructed by the two faces, *Moi* and *Soi*, of the musical subject. An existential-semiotic analysis of a musical discourse reveals the sequence of musical situations in the narrative constructed from different modalities of *Moi* and *Soi*.

Musical Modalities

In Tarasti's theory, modalities – as derived from Greimas' theory – are modes of being of musical entities. They describe the way in which entities are situated in the narrative. There, every musical event is a modalisation of a (musical) subject: "The subject brings 'sense' to abstract, moving sound forms only in the process of listening to music, by modalizing a musical structure in the same way that a speaker modalizes speech with wishes, will, belief, and emotions" (Tarasti 1994: 27). Musical narrative is driven by the desires, wills, beliefs and emotions of the musical subjects, which take the form of intra-musical syntactic structures (1994: 30). Every "melody, theme and motive is an act" (1994: 38) in the sense of an action undertaken by a narrative subject.

In early Tarastian theory, modalities are divided into "exotaxic" and "endotaxic". According to Greimas, the

former require at least two subjects and the latter only one. The exotaxic modalities are "to be obliged to", "to be able to", "to do", and the endotaxic modalities are "to want", "to know", "to be". They are divided into three groups: virtualising, actualising and realising. Briefly, Tarasti addresses them with the names: "must", "can", "do"; "will", "know", "be".

	Modalities *virtualizing*	*actualizing*	*realizing*
exotaxic	to be obliged to	to be able to	to do
endotaxic	to want	to know	to be

Ex. 27 Greimas' categories of modality.

In terms of music, one can speak of modalities in two different senses. On the one hand, these are the modalities in music itself, whose carriers are musical subjects or actors. On the other hand, these are the modalities of the "living" participants in musical life – composers, performers, listeners.

The modalities in music itself (the "musical organism") have the following meaning. Musical "will" is the internal kinetic energy of a musical theme or motive, an idea based on Kurth's theory. The "know" of a theme is the information it carries: "a theme's (sounding) rhythmic, melodic and harmonic elements" (Tarasti 1994: 41). "Know" is the musical substance of a musical unit (e.g., a theme) that exists independently of its function in the work. The "must" of a theme is related to its relation to something

else. The "must" of the second theme in sonata form, for example, is determined by the first – the second theme is always in some way influenced by the first. The "can" of a theme is its potential to influence the material that follows it. The first theme *can* influence the second, and the second *must* be influenced by the first. *Being* and *doing* in music are associated with static and dynamic respectively. Repetition is based on the modality of being and development is based on the modality of doing. In addition to these basic modalities, there is one other: "believe". "Believe" consists of "the epistemic values of music, its persuasiveness in reception, the distribution of epistemic values like truth/untruth, lie/secret, in various phases of the text according to its narrative program(s)" (1994: 49). Tarasti develops a symbolic language, by means of which the modalities in a piece of music can be expressed (1994: 42).

In his early theory, Tarasti did not introduce a clear model for analysing the modalities of the participants in musical life – the composer, the performer, and the listener. But he nevertheless introduces such analytical examples. It sometimes happens, for example, that the composer's "will" is great but his "know" and "can" are insufficient (1994: 51). This leads to compositions, in which a strong creative "must" is recognised, but not enough well-developed ideas. In other cases, the composer adheres strictly to musical norms without having much to express, resulting in a "stiff" work with a great deal of "must" but little "will". Thus, in relation to the work, the composer always locates himself in the modalities in one way or another.

The modalities can be applied analogously to individual performances, the analysis of which can reveal different modalisations of the same work.

In the existential elaboration of the musical narrative, *Moi* and *Soi* always appear in the four modalities: "will", "can", "know" and "must". The stronger a modality is in relation to one, the weaker it is in relation to the other. "Will" is the strongest modality of *Moi*, it "conveys the internal pressure that drives and stabilizes the composition" (Tarasti 2012: 22–23); "can" is associated with the technical ability of the composer or performer; "know" is *Moi*'s memory; "must" is *Moi*'s "inner duty", its self-denial[59]. For the *Soi,* "must" is the most important modality as "normative forms and structures of communication which take the shape of musical styles, techniques, and topics" (2012: 23); next comes the modality "know", which reflects the totality of musical intonations, topoi, styles and other conventionally established means of musical expression; "can" is the objective availability of techniques and resources for expression; for the *Soi*, "will" reflects the "collective will", the voice of the community. The content of the modalities with respect to music can be seen in a semiotic square (Ex. 28).

In addition to the semiotic square of the four modalities of *Moi* and *Soi*, in his later theory, Tarasti develops a generative model, reflecting the relation of *Moi* and *Soi* in the musical text (Ex. 29).

[59] However, to what extent this might be a quality of *Moi* remains unclear in Tarasti. *Moi*'s self-denial occurs mainly through *Soi*.

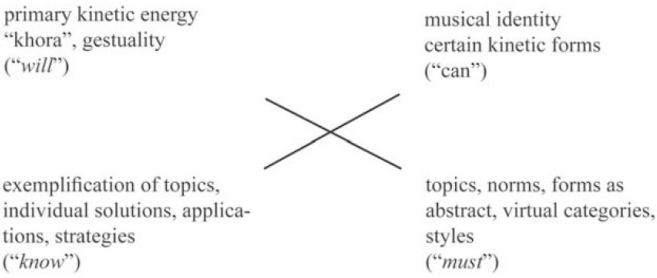
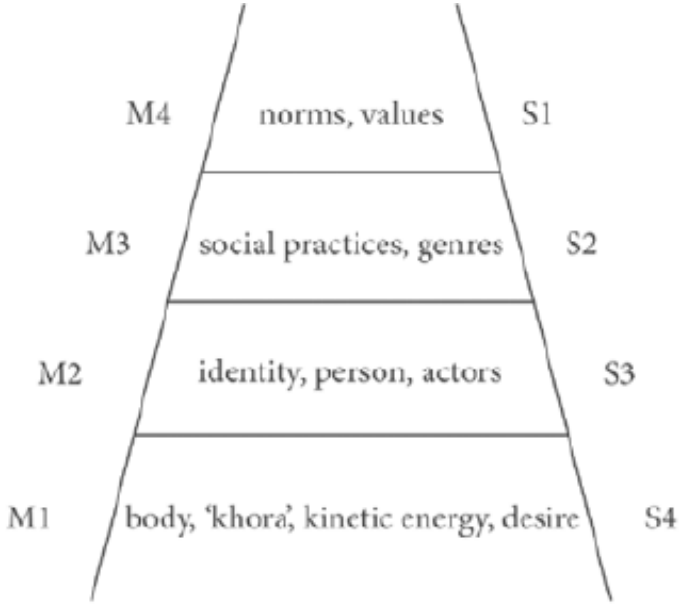


Figure 5: The contents of various modes.

Ex. 28 Musical modalities according to Tarasti (1994).

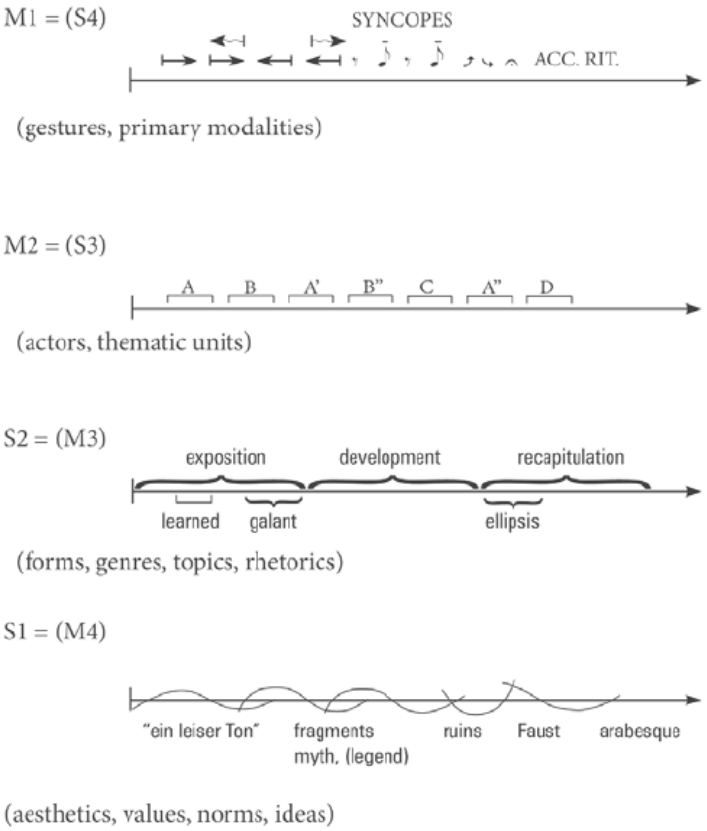


Ex. 29 A generative model of the relation of *Moi* and *Soi* (Tarasti 2012)

This model illustrates the following relationship: "The M1 level consists of musical gestures and their consequences; these flow in 'waves' of organic growth, as more or less chaotic manifestations of our primary will. The M2 level is comprised of units called motives and themes, which already constitute a kind of narrative chain; i.e., they are identifiable and memorable entities of musical discourse, if still conceived in their physical and corporeal aspects. M3 = S2 articulates the musical course according to traditional formal schemes and topics such as sonata form, rondo, fugue, chaconne, concerto, opera, waltz, march, and so on. These may follow a rhetorical logic, as well, in the form of musical 'figures of speech'. Finally, *Soi*1 = M4 represents the aesthetic ideas behind all these musical processes" (Tarasti 2012: 139). Behind all levels of M is the *Moi*, and behind all levels of S is the *Soi*. These levels are intertwined in varying degrees according to their intensity and are complementary. As the first level of *Moi*, M1 reflects the kinetic energy of *khora*, the pure gestural expression of the pre-conscious will. At the M2 level, this will crystallise in musical entities that play a role in the musical narrative. If we consider the table in reverse order, S1 reflects the most abstract form of *Soi*: these are the general cultural and philosophical conventions of an era, which are reflected in the work. S2 now refers more specifically to the musical code expressed in "traditional formal schemes and topics".

Tarasti also offers a model for looking at these relations in their dynamics and processuality (Ex. 30).At the level of M1, rhythmic figures, pulsation, etc. are mostly considered. At the level of M2, thematic units and musical

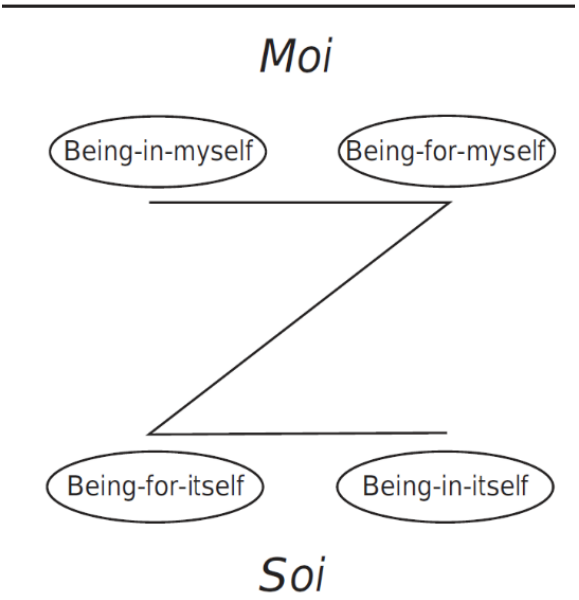
entities are highlighted. At the S2 level, all the formal characteristics of the work are unfolded, as well as its conventional semantic plan (musical topoi, etc.). At the S1 level, aesthetic values and norms that play a role in the work are analysed.



Ex. 30 The Z-model and its levels as temporalized (Tarasti 2012)

In his more recent work, Tarasti has incorporated these four modes into the so-called *Zemic* model (Tarasti 2021). The Zemic model proposes some methodical modifications to the original *Moi-Soi* model, which, however, do not change the overall structure of the analytical schema (Ex. 31).

The two levels of *Moi* and of *Soi* are Being-in-myself and Being-for-myself, and Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself, respectively. Being-in-myself or *Moi*1 represents the pure khoratic, kinetic energy of the *Moi*. Being-for-myself or *Moi*2 is a kind of self-aware *Moi* – this is where the personality and identity of the *Moi* resides. *Moi*2 occurs when



Ex. 31 The Zemic model

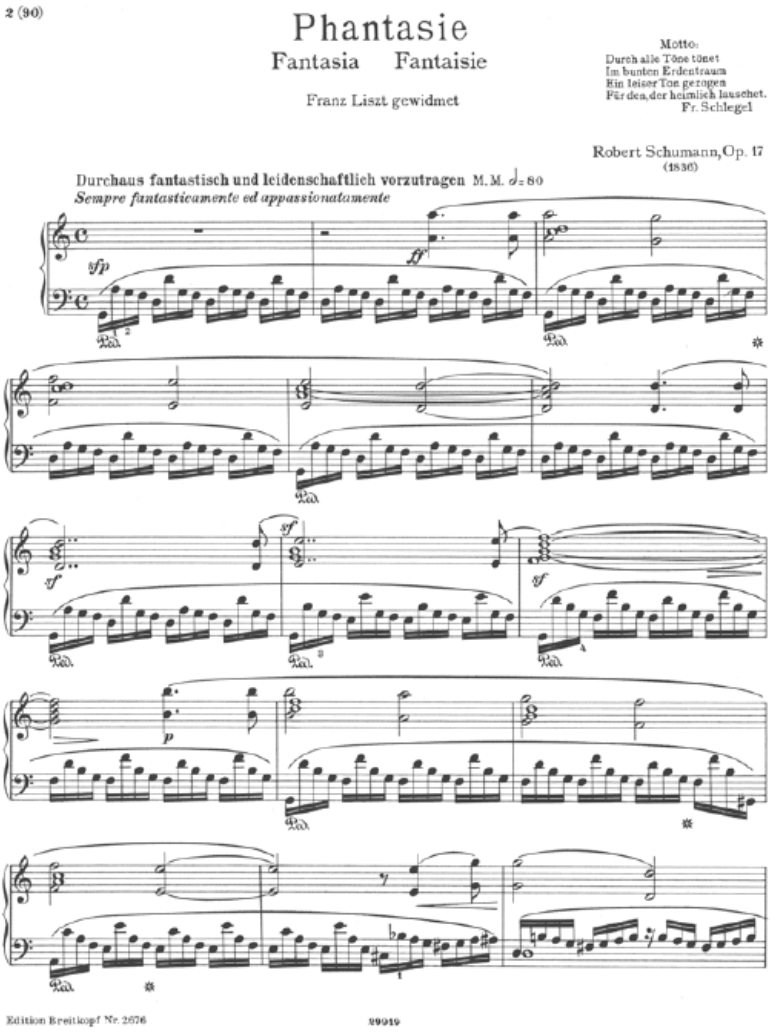
"the not-yet-defined 'being in myself' (être-*en-Moi*) – an amalgam of instinctual energy and urges – transcends itself, gaining self-awareness" (Tarasti 2021: 45). A similar process occurs when Being-in-itself or *Soi*1, consisting of abstract values and norms, becomes Being-for-itself or *Soi*2, which articulates these norms in terms of social roles and practices.

Tarasti describes this model as "an ontological hypothesis about human reality" and a model for the human mind (2021: 45–46). As a methodical tool in musical semiotics, it is supposed to provide a schema for the analysis of musical works. Thus, once again, it supports Tarasti's idea that the musical work is semiotically structured in a way similar to the subject (composer, listener, analyst).

If we take as an example his earlier analysis of Schumann's *Fantasia* in C major, Op. 15 (Ex. 32), we can see how Tarasti envisions the application of the *Moi-Soi* model to musical semiotic analysis. We need only clarify that when, in the analyses that follow, Tarasti uses the term "gesture", he understands it as an immediate expression of the kinetic energy of the semiotic *khora*, which remains pre-symbolic and therefore categorically part of the *Moi*, rather than the *Soi*.

In the first bars of the work at the M1 level, several important points stand out:

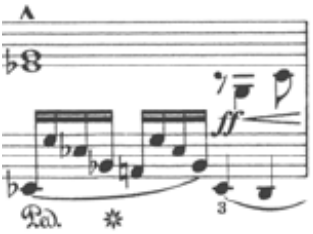
> First we hear a murmuring figuration, vibrating, breathing, radiant, very colorful, in the lower register of the piano, all these notes supported by the resonant low G in the bass. This figuration has an almost quasi-corporeal impact on us, and it lasts a very long time, until bar 49, when its rousing energy



Ex. 32 *Fantasia* in C major, Op. 15, R. Schumann

> mitigates into triplets. But echoes of it occur later, intensified by a trill, until bar 128. (Tarasti 2012: 144–145)

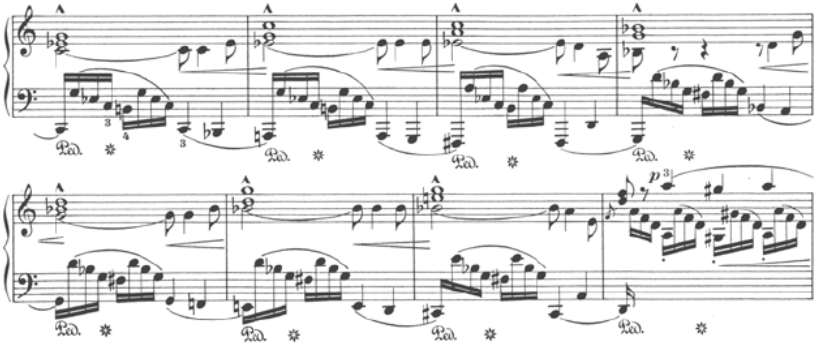
At the same time, however, a second gesture appears as early as bar 2, which stands out above the first and proves to be the leading gesture: "The gesture is a kind of singing, but not syllabic singing as in a chorale, but rather like a primal, inner humming or intoning of a sigh, which bursts out of the preceding, pent-up energy of 'will'" (Tarasti 2012: 147). Tarasti traces the successive variant repetitions of this gesture in the following bars. It is not until bar 33 that a new musical gesture appears:



> In this "almost violent" gesture a sombre melody ascends from the depths, both rhythmically syncopated and accentuated, and now in C minor. It sounds very passionate, something like a forward thrust or penetration, far from the majestic dignity of the first intonation: the descending scale from A to D of the opening. This music is rebellious and challenging, a kind of negation of what happened in the opening. (Tarasti 2012: 147)

Everything described so far can be traced back to the M1 and M2 levels. The rhythmic, purely kinetic properties of musical expression (syncopation, syllabicism, the bodily impact of figuration) belong to M1, while specific gestures such as the second and third, which have particular "actorial" characteristics – majestic dignity, rebellion and defiance – belong to M2. Of course, at the M2 level,

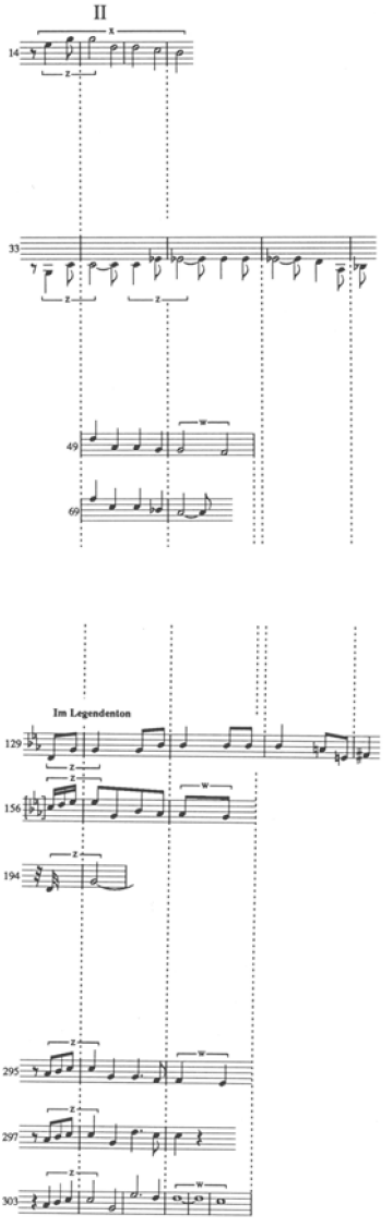
the motive work is treated more extensively, tracing the transformations and development of motives within the first movement (as well as some connections with other movements) (Tarasti 2012: 157–158). A quotation from a Beethoven song, *An die ferne geliebte,* is found at the end of the first movement. According to Tarasti, it is preceded by



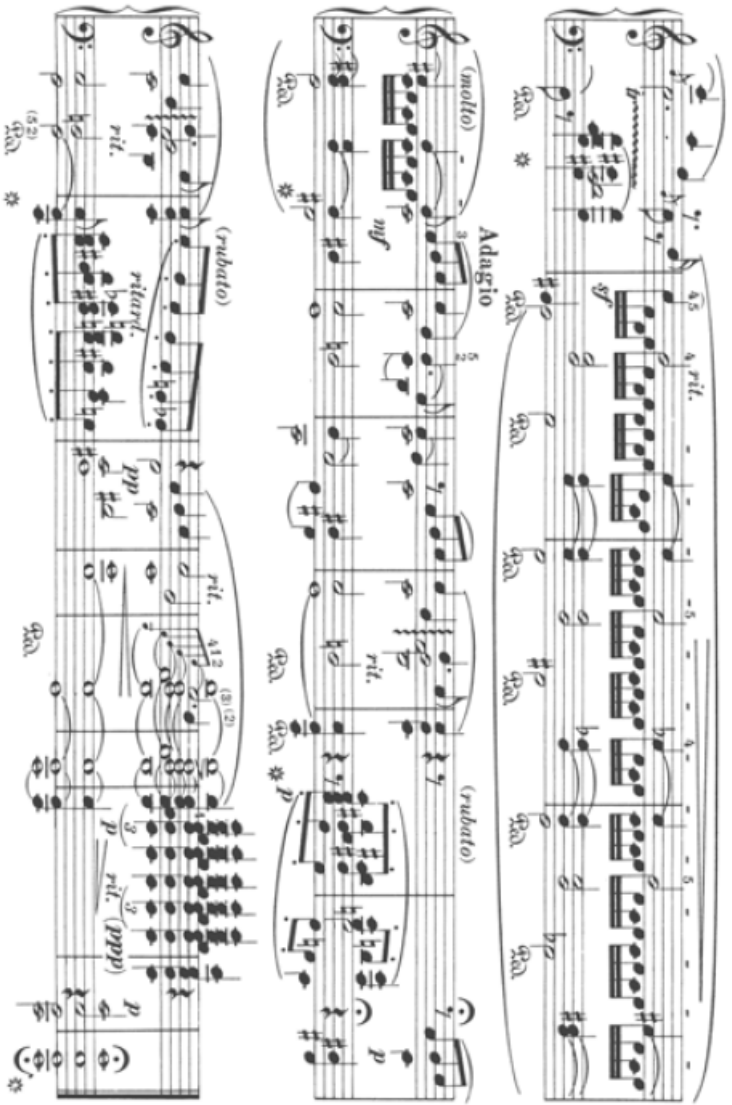
Ex. 33 *Fantasia* in C major, Op. 15, R. Schumann, excerpt

a number of motives, starting with the motive in measure 33. The motive's pre-appearances are its "pre-signs". He refers to Marston's (1992: 64–65) analysis, where he sets out the motivic relationships in the first movement (Ex. 34). At the end of the movement the Beethoven motive occurs as an almost literal quotation (Ex. 35-36).

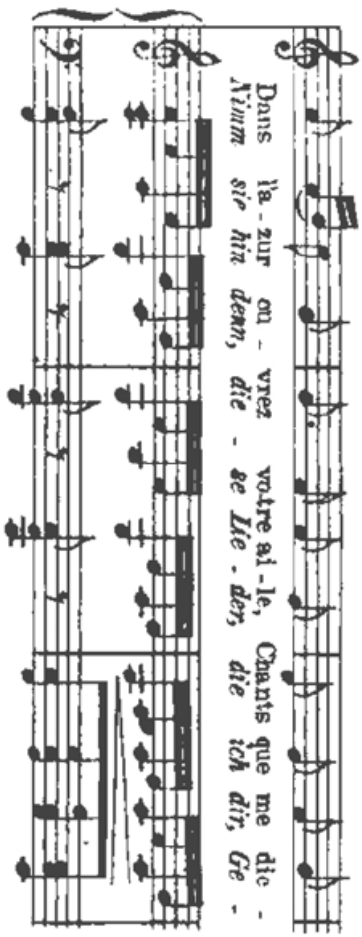
While the actorial gesture described above as resembling the "intoning of a sigh" – i.e. the first theme of the work – is a musical actor or subject with indeterminate features, the motive from Beethoven's *Lied*, which is invoked at several points in the musical text beforehand, has a specific actorial meaning: "Also the 'distant beloved' actor, which this



Ex. 34 Tarasti's analysis of the *Fantasia* in C major, Op. 15, R. Schumann



Ex. 35 *Fantasia* in C major, Op. 15, R. Schumann, end of movement

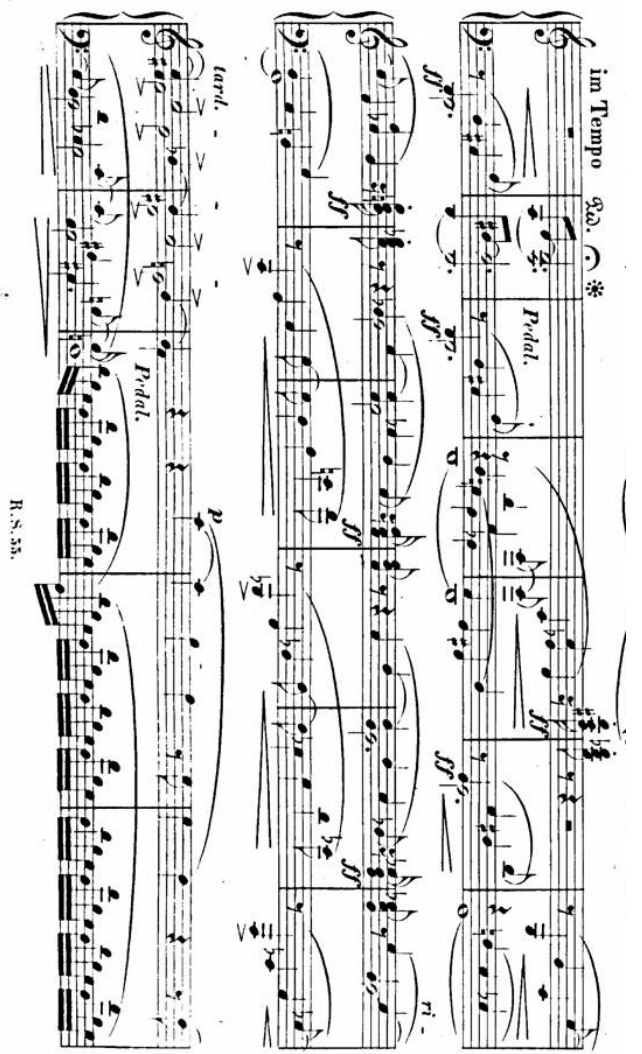


Ex. 36 *An die ferne Geliebte*, L. v Beethoven (Tarasti 2012)

theme represents, always remains distant, transcendental, but internalized as a sign in the *Moi* of the composer" (Tarasti 2012: 158–159). Similarly, the musical subjects of M2 carry the narrative meaning of each musical work. Here, albeit retrospectively, the theme from Beethoven's song is heard as a musical subject with certain characteristics – "distant", "transcendental", "beloved".

Some of the gestures described at the level of the *Moi* in the first movement of the Fantasia are characterised by "anti-metrical impulse, reflecting the insanity and disturbance of the *Moi*" (Tarasti 2012: 151), which can be interpreted as "a particular device of the composer's *Moi*, a kind of existential negation of the basic and normal pulsation. In Schumann's case this becomes his personal device or trademark on level M2. Some even see here a connection to his madness, his *Moi profond*, which in this way manifests in his symbolic constructions" (Tarasti 2012: 148). This is an example of how Tarasti applies psychoanalytic insight to his musical semiotic analyses, in relation to not only the work, but also the composer. Having analysed the psychoanalytic valence of the purely musical *Moi*, i.e., of the blind kinetic energy and of the musical-subjective volitions in the musical text itself, he attempts – albeit cautiously – to hypostatise his findings to the composer's biography and, more precisely, to the composer's psychoanalytic disposition. Schumann's own *Moi* is expressed in the "symbolic constructions" (Kristeva) of the *Fantasia*. In terms of the text itself, this is an outpouring of the genotext into phenotext, and in a psychoanalytic sense, of the semiotic *khora* into symbolic form.

In the same musical work, various elements are also recognised at the S2 and S1 levels. At bar 82, for example, the S2 level introduces "a strongly syncopated fanfare-gesture, on the order of a festive or military topos" (Tarasti 2012: 150). In addition, the "learned topic" is introduced, expressed in a syncopated counterpoint line (Ex. 37):



Ex. 37 The S1 and S2 levels in *Fantasia* in C major, Op. 15, R. Schumann

Topoi play an important role here as conventionally accepted semantic layers of musical gesture. The festive or martial topos emerges in the figure of the first two bars of the gesture. From then on, the gesture unfolds on the basis of the learned topos. Thus, aspects of the meaning of this excerpt emerge within the *Soi* as an accepted musical code. The last level we can touch on is S1, the level of ideas and aesthetic values. At this level, Tarasti considers the motto from the beginning of the work[60], the relation of the work to various aspects of Romantic philosophy, etc. Tarasti details the relationship between Schumann and various Romantic authors, who were sources of inspiration and ideas for the creation of the work (2012: 164–168).

In summary, it can be said that all four levels – M1, M2, S1 and S2 – encompass different aspects of a musical work, both its internal dynamics and its external dependencies. But the whole work – and everyone involved directly or indirectly in its creation or reproduction – is considered in terms of an assumed psychoanalytic structure that reveals precisely a particular type of relationship. In other words, Tarasti is working with an analytical language, the methodological underpinnings of which are entirely transparent, although not purely musical semiotical or musicological. Tarasti's main methodological orientation here remains Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory, as well as all the traditional tools of musical semiotic analysis.

[60] It is part of Friedrich Schlegel's poem *Die Gebüsche* ("The Bushes").

Beyond Narrative and Psychoanalysis: Transcendence

If in the existential semiotics of music the narrative moves between creative impulse and social norms, between freedom and necessity (Tarasti 2012: 36), there is a third situation that can play a role in musical discourse. Tarasti introduces the concepts of "existential tone" and "existential sign" and expresses with them a suspension of the very difference between *Moi* and *Soi,* that is, a complete "liberation" from the very contradiction between the creative impulse and normative codes. It is in the possibility of this liberation that he discovers the existential character of music. In order to reveal this aspect of existential musicality, Tarasti starts from rhetorical questions that are related to negative definitions of existentialism. Which quality characterises an existential tone best:

> Is it the position of the tone in the linear course of the music or in its paradigmatic background? Is it the fact that it distinguishes itself from the rest of the texture, as something particularly salient, as a "rupture"? Is it the deviation of a tone from the "automatization" of the text? (Tarasti 2012: 60)

Beyond these purely negative definitions, Tarasti believes that "one may ask whether a musical moment can, in all its positivity, normality, and even its topicality, be existential,

namely, an affirmation of Being in music" (2012: 60). In terms of musical discourse, the existential can be defined as a "rupture" with the surrounding "signs" and "situations".

Discourse as such can only become a "negative" reference point for the existential. In the musical narrative, disruption is associated with the "liberating" act of the *Moi*, while adherence to the musical code consists in adherence to the *Soi* (2012: 80). But for Tarasti, these relations do not yet define the "existential" of the existential narrative. They are only the internal dynamics of the discourse, which, existentially speaking, is actually determined from the outside. In this respect, the starting point for Tarasti becomes the so-called act of *transcending*. Transcending is expressed by the appearance of a transcendent sign in the series of musical signs. For him, transcending is what gives music its existential character. Existential narrative "as a disengagement from the conventional (...) and the organic" (2012: 60). By "conventional and organic" here Tarasti means respectively the normative codes – *Soi*, and the creative impulses of *khora* – *Moi*. In the existential moment, these are overcome: "In any case, existential narrativity refers to a subject that is somehow separate from conventional and organic narrativity" (2012: 61).

Within a series of situation-signs in music, "not all moments (...) are existential, but only some" (2012: 60). In the sequence of signs, the "transcendent or existential sign" "becomes" a *concept*: "a concept in a very particular, non-universalizing sense, not an abstract concept that is indifferent to a subject and his situation. It is transcendent insofar as it opens a view onto the entire situation of the

subject and the network of his immanence" (Tarasti 2012: 60). The meaning of the term harks back to Hegel: "an idea that draws together all previous experience as well as all expectation of the future" (Tarasti 2012: 61). In other words, the concept is a transcendent position *of* the subject, from which the subject itself can be observed in its entirety. The transcendent view here can encompass all the characteristics of the subject and the musical work. Insofar as it is reduced to a concept, transcendence is "a mental operation that opens the immanence of the subject" (Tarasti 2012: 61). The existential sign leaves horizontal time and goes into the realm of "omnitemporality". From there, the sign, having become a concept, "metamodalises" all other musical signs and extends into the past and the future. The subject discovers his timeless, "lost fatherland" (Proust) (Tarasti 2012: 61)[61].

[61] In his earlier work, Tarasti links transcendence to the prevalence of *Moi* in the struggle of *Moi* and *Soi*. This act is always an eruption of the primal and the driven (khora) and a rejection of the social. Tarasti discusses the relation through the idea of the body in Kristeva: "To affirm or to negate the khoratic, primary body is to commit a transcendental act. The affirmation of the body, in this sense, signifies implicitly the rejection of the 'social body'; the denial of the khoratic body means subjection to the rules of the social body. Thus, when the primary, archaic body – that which is sans sexe – is affirmed, the normal syntactic-logical discursive order of the music is disrupted and an individual moment of creation enters, transcending the social norms. When this body is denied then music remains on the level of langue, genre and style norms. Still, these acts are in mutual need of each other in the dialectics of enunciation" (Tarasti 2002: 138). A slightly different concept of transcendence was introduced in some of Tarasti's most recent work (Tarasti 2021). Here, transcendence is defined as the crossover between levels of *Moi* and *Soi* ("process of self-alienation"), which makes the

Tarasti repeatedly raises the question of how transcending should be understood in terms of his own musical semiotic position. If, at the level of musical signification, all the processes that musical semiotics can observe rest on the unfolding of a surface (or apparent) musical structure or its analytical narrowing down to certain fundamental structures, then what characterises the existential sign in such a way so that it must exist beyond these frameworks? And if, at the level of the musical signified, musical semiotics can only observe actorial actions and situations that are defined in terms of a psychoanalytic frame of reference, how can a "concept" in Tarasti's sense be expressed within the musical text? Tarasti attempts to solve this problem by introducing the idea of "metaphorisation", i.e., "a non-iconic, symbolic sign relation", which cannot easily be portrayed (Tarasti 2012: 65), because the existential

extreme modes of *Moi* and *Soi* semiotically understandable: "Each mode of being is transformed by transcending its own limits, acquiring clearer, more definite, and more applicable shape" (Tarasti 2021: 45). I take as a starting point Tarasti's following position since I believe it is the most interesting in methodological perspective: "If we conceive of existentiality as penetrating into the codes of the *Soi* via an unmitigated flow of corporeal energy coming from the *Moi*, does this not pose the danger of music remaining imprisoned by the Body? Indeed, the existential course can thus blend together with the movement of both *Moi* and *Soi* (...) the existentiality of music appears as something other than the affirmation of the dialectics of *Moi*/*Soi*" (Tarasti 2012: 68). In transcending – when the moment gets united in a transcendent concept – the struggle between *Moi* and *Soi* is entirely suspended. The victory of *Moi* is only a victory of the "organic" over the "social" (Tarasti 2002), whereas the overcoming of *Moi* and *Soi* is, according to Tarasti (2012), the revelation of the immanence of the subject in its fullness.

meaning of music is essentially "*ungegenständlich*" (Tarasti 2012: 68). However, symbolic meanings can also be found in traditional semiotics, and do not at all imply the existential valence that Tarasti invests in them here. Thus, Tarasti's idea of transcendence provokes various questions. With transcendence, Tarasti seems to overcome the limits of his own musical semiotic discourse: musical transcendence takes the "subject" beyond discourse and its internal narrative structure, beyond the limitations of its psychoanalytic constitution, and beyond the elementary conditions of its existence, such as time or the modalities. From the standpoint of the transcendent concept, the subject's revealed immanence bears all these characteristics, of course, but in a different way, as immanent, everlasting:

> The subject is altogether and definitely present, and this presence, paradoxically, detaches him from that place of presence, which is carved out by all those other coordinates (spatiality, actoriality, etc.). This is exactly what transcending means. It is necessary for a subject, in order to find his place within his own immanence. The subject does not drift off into some external void, but rather encounters his own omnitemporal situation and presence (Tarasti 2012: 61).

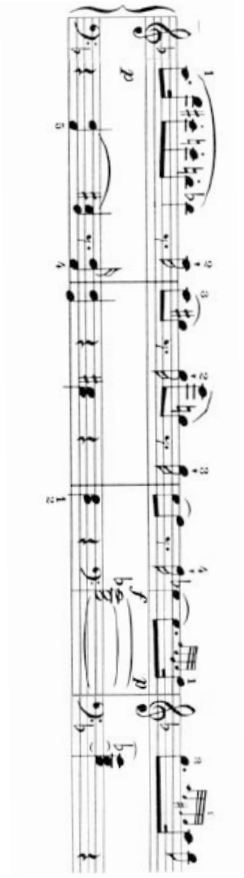
The idea described is essentially *ontological* in that it refers to the very ontology of the musical subject (in the sense of the actual composer, performer or listener) and its relation to music in the immediate musical experience. But apart from existential philosophy, as well as some other loose associations, Tarasti does not offer a unequivocal methodological position, from which this idea can be considered in more

detail. It seems clear that when Tarasti defines the existential as a "sign", he is trying to hypostatise a traditional semiotic term to the state of transcendence and vice versa – to reduce the transcendent to signification.

An example is an excerpt from Fantasia in D minor (K.397) by W. A. Mozart and more precisely a Neapolitan chord in it (Ex. 38). For Tarasti, the E-flat of this chord is an "existential tone", bringing a moment of transcendence into the Fantasia (Tarasti 2012: 53). But can such a thing really be said of a tone?

Here we tackle this problem only in terms of the methodological limits of semiotics. How can a sign make the subject transcend all its actorial and situational circumstances and get a glimpse, from the standpoint of timelessness, of the fullness of its immanence? At first, Tarasti does not distinguish between real subjects, i.e. real people, and virtual (implicit) subjects in the musical text, at least as far as their psychoanalytic constitution is concerned. The idea of existential transcendence, however, raises anew the question of what Tarasti actually means by "subject". *Who* transcends the self in the existential sign or tone – the implicit musical actor in the music or someone who listens to the music in reality? If it is only the implicit musical actor or subject, then his transcending can be seen as a purely semiotic process, albeit transcending his own terms. From this position, the timelessness of transcendence, the presence of the musical subject in the "concept", is nothing more than a negative movement in relation to the stable frame of reference in Tarastian semiotics – the totality of the narrative structure of the musical text

– towards the timelessness of transcendence (the latter, of course, being conceived in a purely allegorical sense, precisely because it is only conceived negatively). The abandoned semiotic conditions of the text liberate a subject, which, however, does not "exist" anyway, because it is only a construct of a structural musical semiotic theory.



Ex. 38 Fantasia in D minor (K.397), W. A. Mozart.

However, if here the real subject – a listener, performer or composer – is also discussed, then the problem of his ontological status is exacerbated enormously: if he leaves his entire semiotic (in the sense of narrative-psychoanalytic) constitution, if he transcends himself, who is "he" after all? Which is the methodologically clear foundation from which such a position can be thematised? Is it possible, as Tarasti suggests, to conceive of it semiotically? What should we mean by "sign" or "signification", if they can carry such an existential-philosophical meaning? Clearly, the ontology of musical signs as we have considered them in the present text – in structuralist and even poststructuralist terms – cannot bear the ontology of the existential sign as Tarasti understands it, should it refer to "actual" and not merely implicit musical subjects. Which sign, or which part of it – the signifier or the signified – must a person "become" in order to contemplate the whole of his own immanence? Is the semiotic position of the "concept" transcendentally attainable? I would suggest that certain aspects of these questions rest on different methodological foundations from those of Tarastian semiotics and therefore remain beyond the scope of the present exposition. However, their solution would appear necessary if, in its existential implications, Tarasti's theory is to gain fundamental methodological ground beyond the limits of traditional semiotics.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to provide an overview of the diverse palette of methodological orientations in Tarasti's musical semiotics. As we have seen, his musical semiotics starts from methodologically diverse premises and combines views intrinsic to different fields: psychoanalysis, semiotics, linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, etc. Along with its embedment in the humanities, Tarasti's theory often refers to other musical semiotic theories utilising similar methodological positions.

In the final analysis, a positive or negative critique of Tarasti's musical semiotics in methodological terms would only be possible on the basis of, on the one hand, a sophisticated reading of the related traditions in the humanities and, on the other hand, a clear methodological (meta-) position from which such a critique could be articulated. The multidisciplinary and intertextuality of Tarasti's work makes critical confrontation with it particularly difficult, because it is not always clear what methodological framework unifies the fields and orientations involved. Does "music" unite these various fields? As Tarasti repeatedly suggests, the way we look at music depends much more on the methodological positions we presume than on "music itself". In this sense, "music" can only unify these various

sources if there is a scholar who can speak on their behalf – in this case, Tarasti himself.

But in order for a researcher to confront these problems critically, he must – at least preliminarily – use the same academic language. The intention underlying the present study has been more modest – to delineate the discursive boundaries, within which Tarastian semiotics is situated, in order to enable an adequate academic dialogue with his thought. As a representative author of the entire musical semiotic tradition, Tarasti can also provide a key to an engagement with the methodological foundations of musical semiotics as a field of academic inquiry in music generally.

This text has hopefully made clear that musical semiotics is interdisciplinary at its very core. Tarasti's ideas, in particular, have been informed by not only general semiotic and linguistic theories, but a vast range of philosophical and psychoanalytical strains of thought as well. This wide breadth of sources and influences is at once an advantage and a challenge for Tarasti. It is an advantage insofar as it opens up his work to a wider audience, while connecting it to a network of works and concepts, which undergird his musical analysis. It is, however, also a challenge, because it necessitates a difficult confrontation with ideas which have a history, context and thus significance of their own in their respective fields. As with other musical semioticians, this confrontation has sometimes proven difficult. While in his early works Tarasti could integrate rather unproblematically, for example, Lévi-Strauss› anthropological idea of myth– by imparting upon music

the role of signifier for the mythical signified – his later appropriation of Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory and, further on, his idea of transcendence leave many questions open regarding both Tarasti's own position and the wider interpretation of his theories. For example, does Tarasti wholeheartedly embrace the psychoanalytic stratification of the subject and, thus, of the text? The *Moi-Soi* paradigm in his latter works would imply so. Tarasti himself has underscored the existential horizon of the musical subject and its struggle between *Moi* and *Soi*. And yet the question of the constitution of the subject (musical or "real", i.e., the subject of the composer, interpreter, etc.) has not been explicitly put forward. Rather, we are left with collecting bits and pieces by ourselves in trying to reconstruct Tarasti's implicit conceptions about these matters.

The concepts of transcendence and transcendent sign pose similar difficulties. The idea of revealing the subject in the totality of its immanence (Tarasti 2012: 60) definitely needs philosophical clarification. In my opinion, such issues will open new horizons for existential musical semiotics, in view of which the question of its methodological foundations will be posed anew. At any rate, Tarasti's infusion into musical semiotics of ideas from a wide variety of sources in the humanities offers a fruitful starting point for further research. It constitutes a fertile ground for the exploration of the nature of musical signs in relation to musical experience and the constitution of musical subjectivity.

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