

A SYSTEMIC-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO MUSIC, MEANING AND MULTIMODAL TRANSPOSITION

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Abstract – The present study aims to make a contribution to multimodal studies adopting a systemic-functional framework to build a theoretical device that allows analysing music in multimodal constructions. Our proposal is based on Kress & van Leeuwen’s model for image analysis (2005). Several categories proposed by these authors have been re-elaborated to fit a musical approach and new categories have been added following McKerrell (2015) and van Leeuwen (1999) perspectives. Our working hypothesis is that meaning in music is socially conventionalised and associated with meaningful constructions in other modes. Thus absolute music conceptualizations access multimodal levels of discourse as part of representations constituted by associated meanings in the different modes.

Keywords: semiotics of music; multimodality; music and discourse; meaning transposition.

1. Music, meaning and multimodality

The study of meaning in music constitutes a complex issue. It has been addressed since ancient times from many different perspectives and there still are but few points of agreement among them. Psychology, anthropology, aesthetics, metaphysics, semiotics, linguistics, musicology, and even epistemology and ethics have taken part in a debate leading to different directions at different times. According to Burkholder (2006, pp. 76), this discussion has brought very valuable insights, but it has not yet resulted in a clear description of a mechanism by which music conveys meanings.

If we consider music as discourse context plays an important role. Music can stand alone – as in absolute music – but is often accompanied by other forms of signifying: lyrics, images, actors that show body language, clothing, etc. Songs merge words with music; opera mixes words, music and visual aids, acting, etc. Audio-visual material presents a complexity that interrelates at least two ways of meaning. Nowadays music goes hand in hand with lyrics or images at least, frequently both, becoming a multimodal phenomenon in which meaning are construed by different modes, and each of them contributes with different features to build a multimodal meaning.

This research aims to make a contribution to multimodal studies adopting a systemic-functional framework for multimodal analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005) introducing music as a significant part of the multimodal construction and, thus, addressing its analysis in a systematic way within multimodal contexts. Our proposal adopts McKerrell (2015) and van Leeuwen (1999) perspectives to construct a theoretical device suitable for music analysis as discourse. Our working hypothesis states that absolute music conceptualizations access multimodal levels of discourse as part of representations constituted by associated meanings in the different modes

2. The place of music in conceptualization

2.1. *Image schema and blending*

A possible approach that can throw light on how and why humans assign meaning to music is the study of cognition. Cognitive processes bond together experience and conceptualization. According to Lakoff (1987), our conceptual systems are organized in idealized mental models that function as pieces or packages of information – image schema—involving not only the verbal dimension. Accordingly, Antonovic points out that conceptualization present certain characteristics across languages that allow thinking about its bond with body experience:

When musical concepts are constructed in different cultural circumstances, as in a scale that goes “up and down” in one language but becomes “thinner and thicker” in another – one might ask if the conceptualization is chiefly motivated by the speaker’s knowledge of the mother tongue or if there might be higher-order, schematic invariants beneath apparently disparate cross-linguistic conceptual choices (Antonovic 2018, pp. 58-59).

Body experience seems to play an important role in our understanding of tonal music. Thus, image schemas mediate between our experience and the meaning assigned by conceptualization (Brower 2000, pp. 326). These schemas reflect basic features of our bodily experience of space, time, force, and motion. We experience space as made up of bounded regions, time as marked off into cycles, our body as centred, balanced, and extending upward from a stable ground and motion as following pathways leading to goals.

Mapping these features of our bodily experience of the physical world (the source domain) onto music (the target domain), yields the music-metaphorical concepts of musical space, musical time, musical force, and musical motion (Brower 2000, pp. 327). We experience bodily tension whenever we extend the body upward in opposition to the force of gravity, and likewise we experience relaxation when we allow the body to fall back

downward. We experience the body as maximally stable when its weight is evenly distributed around its vertical axis. We perceive motion as carried out by an agent who wills the motion to take place. Goal states tend to be maximally or minimally stable within a local context. The approach to a goal tends to be accompanied by an increase in tension and arrival at a goal by relaxation and the slowing and/or stopping of motion (Brower 2000, pp. 331).

Therefore, image schemas can be considered as a sort of multimodal mental representations: they are blocks of meaning containing different features emerging from our experiences with our bodies in movement, space, visual, sound, etc., and musical features can also be part of them. Following these different kinds of experiences, meaning representation can acquire different forms of materialization. It can be constructed through different interrelated semiotic modes.

3. Grammar of Transposition

In a simple way to put it we can say transposition is a social-semiotic operation through which meanings change from one medium to another (Bermúdez 2008, pp. 2). But there is more to it than just that. In the case of books and their transposition to films, the process becomes a little more complicated. In *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Joel and Ethan Cohen's film that constitutes a version of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by Homer, the concept of transposition implies a series of transformations over different elements: time, setting, the journey made by the protagonists, etc., and all these changes have an impact in the narrative.

But in that case, transposition moves from a medium constituted by one mode (written text) to a medium with multiple modes (visual, auditory, written). When considering multimodal texts, situation gets complicated: meaning does not pass from one mode to another untouched but it rather adopts the form of different containers by appropriating them (Lim and Tan-Chia 2023, pp. 89). Different semiotic modes construct different features of meaning, this is, meaning is not just represented by a different "channel" but rather a channel materializes one aspect of a particular meaning. In a politician's words, for example, we can identify verbal constructions of anger or hate towards particular people or groups of people. But in his/her/their face what we can see is a personal emotional reaction. We cannot find a mark of the recipients of those words of hate in the face, just the expressions of the person who is speaking. In this sense we may say that every mode constructs just a part of the global meaning.

Some features are common in certain modes while other features appear in other modes granting different possibilities for the collective construction. In the case of a song, the tone and quality of the voice,

instrumentation, tempo, particularities of the melody and harmony, etc. can provide an emotional frame, an idea of process or movement that frame the words in the lyrics and makes us interpret them in a certain way: as an agitated process in which tension is taking over, or a romantic atmosphere in closeness with a lover, etc. In sum, two meanings are associated to the concept of transposition:

1. Change of medium: from one text to another of a different kind. This may include intertextuality, as in the case of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*
2. From one materiality (mode in terms of Kress & van Leeuwen 2005) to another, in a single multimodal text. In this case, meaning is built through features of different nature: visual, auditory, tactile, etc.).

Note that case 1 includes the possibility of case 2, given that audio-visual material constitutes a kind of multimodal text.

Let's consider the song *Sympathy for the devil*, by the Rolling Stones, included in the 1968 album *Beggars Banquet*. Its lyrics describe a first-person singular narrative in which the devil confesses his role in several historical facts while repeatedly asks the listeners to 'guess my name'; demanding courtesy as he implicitly urges them to accept a collective responsibility in the mentioned crimes. The tension-relaxation pattern created by the syncopated drum groove and the Latin percussion gives the song a kind of Voodoo vibe that contextualizes the words as belonging to the devil. Mick Jagger's voice sings the lyrics as if they were a plea, an appeal for compassion. His voice is tensed and rough and, although this could be interpreted as a construction of irony – the devil pleading – the effect is smooth and we must analyse music and lyrics together to detect it.

In 1994, Guns N' Roses released a new version for the soundtrack of the film *Interview with the Vampire*. In it, instrumentation sounded heavier, and the Latin rhythm is present only during the first half of the song while the remaining half adopts an up tempo form that increases the idea of speed. Axl Rose's voice, contrary to Jagger's, sounds louder and dirtier, almost like a proud scream, intensifying the irony effect and sounding as if the speaker – the devil – were mocking his audience. This construction is reinforced by the screaming laughs added by Rose's voice in a different track and sounding simultaneously to the main voice track. In the context of the film, the song musicalizes the final scene: Lestat, an arrogant vampire – the main character, played by Tom Cruise- reappears after being taken for dead. Showing his arrogance and pride of being alive again he warns his victim: "I'm going to give you the choice I never had" while putting a tape in the player. In this context, the irony in the song is reinforced by the tone in Lestat's voice as he speaks and his laugh is related to the arrogance of the character in the narrative of the film.

This example evidences how modes operate on each other and how

they can modify meanings in context in both the cases of transposition above described. An integrative approach towards meaning-making must be founded on a multimodal grammar rather than a grammar of language or an individual semiotic mode.

4. Systemic-functional analysis for music

As we have introduced it in a previous work (Forte 2023), our proposal aims to analyse music in multimodal contexts. This is pure music in combination with other modes; mainly verbal (lyrics and written text) and visual. For that matter we adopt some of the categories proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen (2005) for their systemic-functional for their image analysis, add the concept of tonal gravity by McKerrell (2015) and develop a model that can be used to work with music in the above mentioned contexts.

We consider the three metafunctions identified by Halliday (1985) for language and describe their possibilities in music analysis for two different contexts: pure music + lyrics and audio-visual material.

Ideational metafunction: the ideational deals with participants, processes and circumstances (Halliday 1985). When music is combined with images or lyrics, participants and processes are defined in a more detailed way. Participants are prototypically defined as actors, possessing agency - *agents*- or being affected by the actions or processes carried out by others. In terms of language, processes are described in terms of their nature: mental, verbal, material, etc. Cross (1999, p. 15) describes agency in music by its 'floating intentionality'. According to this author, music gives us the impression of a process but we cannot find a clear agent neither describes in detail what process is being developed. In this sense, music does not define participants by itself but constructs aspects of them when they are depicted in lyrics or visual material.

In the case of pure music with lyrics pronouns define the place of the participants in the narrative, as we will describe in the next sections. In the case of audio-visual material the case is a little bit more complicated. In the first place we distinguish whether music is part of the diegetic narrative or not. This is if the participants hear that music too then that music is part of their context. If the music is not part of the narrative – non-diegetic music – and only we as viewers can hear it, music is part of our context to interpret what we are watching. Given that sight is our dominant sensory system, visual mode plays a central role in the multimodal construction. If music is part of the diegetic narrative it can signal processes associated with different participants: it can construct a situational context: a participant can run avoiding a shooting while an upbeat music illustrates the rush. It can also

construct features of characters: the imperial march sounds every time Darth Vader enters the scene and is associated with this particular character.

Interpersonal metafunction: This metafunction refers to relations among participants established through the multimodal text. The categories we propose have been adapted from those presented by Kress and van Leeuwen (2005), van Leeuwen (1999, p. 5) and McKerrell (2015, p. 8):

- Act of demand: this category is taken from Kress & van Leeuwen's *gaze act* that states that an image may offer information or ask for involvement of the viewer when the participant looks outside the image. In the case of music, we consider that the tension prototypically created by the cadences keeps the listener in waiting for a resolution and in this sense music asks for involvement of the listener.
- Perspective and social distance: this category deals with the construction of the space made by the sound of the instruments. It can be an intimate situation in which instruments sound smooth and close or a public situation in which we can hear them from the distance.
- Tonal gravity: This is a construction by Griffith and Machin (2014) adapted by McKerrell (2015). It is based in the meaning attributed to the different degrees of a musical scale: tonic (anchoring note), supertonic (something unfinished or about to happen), mediant (a state of happy or sad/chilling note), subdominant (building, moving forwards or creating space Tonic), dominant (anchoring note), submediant (pleasurable longing, nostalgia), and leading note (wistful of painful).
- Voice quality and timbre: This category describes the sound of the different voices in terms of oppositions like tense/relaxed, rough/smooth, bright/opaque, high/low, etc.
- Modality: It is related to the concept of "naturalism" and representation in terms of degrees of truth. How "natural" or close to the original instruments' music sounds.

Textual metafunction: This metafunction describes the musical pieces in terms of text configurations according to their form and structure. Form refers to the kind of piece (symphony, sonata, suite, fugue, concerto, choral, cantata, minuet, song, score, etc.) and allows us to establish a connection between the piece and the social practice involved (Agawu 2008, p. 22). Musical structure refers to the compositional architecture: Primary form, Binary Form, Ternary form, Rondo shape, Theme with variations, etc.

4.1. Pop songs as multimodal context: No more I love you's

Pop songs typically constitute a genre that blends music with lyrics. On the one hand, words are clearly verbal but, on the other hand, being sung instead of spoken, melody – a musical feature - is added as a supra-segmental

phoneme in the form of intonational curves.

No More 'I Love You's is a song written by British musicians David Freeman and Joseph Hughes and recorded by them as the Lover Speaks. It was released in June 1986 but was covered by the Scottish singer Annie Lennox for her 1995 album *Medusa*. Lennox's version shows differences with the original in several features: tempo, harmonic structure and melodic line. Instrumentation includes synthesized strings, a choir that functions as melodic base, and electronic percussion. Over this, the leading voice sings the main melody.

In the ideational metafunction, the presence of lyrics makes possible to identify one participant a narrator in the first-person singular:

I used to be lunatic from the gracious days
 I used to be woebegone and so restless nights
 My aching heart would bleed for you to see
 Oh, but now
 (I don't find myself bouncing home whistling buttonhole just tuning me on)

The narrative is thus defined by this “I” as subject, agent and experiencer of what is narrated. Instrumental music adds the idea of developing movement to the processes narrated. The choir starts singing “do bi do bi do do do, oh” eight bars before the leading voice, establishing itself as part of the harmonic base. At the end of the verse, the “do bi do bi...” becomes “I don't find myself bouncing home whistling buttonhole just tuning me on...” and then the voices disappear to give way to the leading voice singing the soft version of the chorus (with a soft percussion section). After the chorus, the choir reappears to sing the line “*the lover speaks about the monster*” prior to the start of the second verse in which it goes back to “do bi do bi...” Once again, at the end of the verse the choir changes “*I don't find myself bouncing home whistling buttonhole just tuning me on...*” and the chorus starts again. This time, the choir does not disappear but instead sings background voices: uh uh. In the last repetitions of the chorus, after the coda, the choir track is duplicated, and some voices sing *uhuh*, while others go back to the *do bi do bi...* until the end of the song.

This structure builds a situation in which both voice lines compete - sometimes singing at the same time, sometimes not- for the supremacy in the harmony, although the leading voice clearly wins. This generates an effect of the leading voice representing the “I” in the lyrics while the choir is some kind of alter ego, consciousness voice or external element to that “I”. The leading voice is not dialoguing with the choir but, instead, the choir is reinforcing what the leading voice is narrating.

In the interpersonal metafunction the act of demand is constructed symmetrically in each verse. The song is in Eb but at the end of the verse, at the beginning of the line “Oh, but now, (I don't find myself bouncing home

whistling buttonhole just tuning me on)” prior to the chorus, there is a modulation to Cm7 that ends in F7sus4, in wait for resolution. The modulation starts in the submediant and holds at the supertonic. At the macro-structure, the song creates tension (demand) at the end of every verse and offers full resolution in the chorus, so the tension keeps going until the coda, where something similar occurs, only this time the modulation goes to Ab and the line ends up resolving in the chorus again, back to Eb. Thus the song provides a more or less stable structure that presents tension resolved almost immediately.

Social distances in the song also play an important representational role. The voice tracks begin at a personal distance; as talking with someone who is near but not extremely close. In the verse, the voice sounds as in relatively close conversation. During the chorus volume raises and seems to be reaching a public distance, a little further away. Finally, in the end, the voice adopts a very smooth tone, posing an intimate distance at the very last line of the song

Tonal gravity articulates the mood of the song. The tonic of the song is Eb. There is a first modulation is to Cm7 (submediant) in the pre-chorus; and the coda goes to Ab (subdominant). The modulation to the submediant creates a sense of longing or nostalgia that is solved returning to the tonic in the chorus. The submediant waits for the chorus creating some kind of longing for it. On the other hand, the modulation in the coda, to the subdominant, creates two different paths: first a sense of moving towards a goal but also, detouring the way by following a different tonality, seems that the goal is a different one than the originally posed, the tonic. Even though, the coda ends up resolving again in the tonic.

In terms of voice quality and timbre all voices in the song sound smooth. Choir is high pitch while leading voice goes around medium to high pitch; ending in a somehow broken voice in the final line of the song, coinciding with the intimate distance constructing a somehow sad end.

The naturalistic modality is recognizable by the voices that, although worked artificially, try to emulate a state of purity with no identifiable effects on them. Synthesizers add a technological feature. Nevertheless, they are emulating strings and not introducing a technological or futuristic sound in the song. The human voices sound close to real and with no fictional effects.

The musical form -textual metafunction - is pop song, a format that was, at the time of the release of the song, distributed through physical formats (cassettes, CD's, vinyl). As a pop song it was widely spread. Its topics – in lyrics and music – tend to be known elaborations of previous themes, ideas that are already present in the common sense of the western society: the disenchanted lover of the lyrics and the pattern tonic-dominant-subdominant are present in many hit pop songs (Knocking on Heaven's Door by Bob Dylan, Don't Tell Me by Madonna, to name a few).

The musical structure is ABABCBB, ternary form that includes verse,

chorus, and coda. The chorus is based in the same melody than the verse, making it expectable, at a certain degree. Some arrangements – and of course the melodic line of the voice - remark its importance and differentiates it from the verse but instrumental melody is basically the same. Its simple format makes it acceptable for a massive public.

As we can see through the analysis of the three metafunctions, lyrics and music interact to construct meaning that neither of both modes can convey by itself.

4.2. Music and images: audio-visual material

In audio-visual material the visual mode can conflict with verbal and musical clues. Also, each audio-visual genre presents its own particularities. Considering this last issue we analyse two common genres: documentary films and cinema.

4.2.1. Documentary films: Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret

This genre constructs meaning as verisimilar as possible; the aim is to show “the truth” about something and, therefore, the use of semiotic resources is related to that. *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret* is a documentary film produced and directed by Kip Andersen (who also appears in the screen as interviewer and host) and Keegan Kuhn. The film explores the impact of animal farming in climate change and the politics and NGO’s attitudes towards it. As a characteristic of the genre, there is very few music in the film and all of it is non-diegetic (not part of the world of the participants represented. Only we, as viewers can hear it). Often considered as emotional bias, documentaries tend to use almost no music but many ambient sounds in order to construct closeness with their object.

In the ideational metafunction analysis can be seen that music is non-diegetic and serves two purposes: adds a feature in the construction of participants and marks the morally right or wrong in the desired interpretation of the words of the interviewed participants. The film begins with the words of Bruce Hamilton, from Sierra Club, about the seriousness of climate change and its impact of species extinction. During this part, background music is like a growing buzzing that eventually becomes disturbing. After a few minutes, the interviewer, out of camera, asks “*what about our lifestyle?*” and the music suddenly stops and silence is set for a few seconds, signalling the direction the documentary will take and the gravity of it. Music resumes after that but now is a folkloric theme during the opening credits of the film and the presentation of Kip Anderson, co-director of the film and protagonist. This kind of folk, country guitar music serves to establish a traditional mood while Kip presents himself as an average American kid: father in the military,

mother teacher, and a simple life. Following this scene, he mentions a break in his world-view when he watched *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's film about climate change. Here music turns to string section playing with a gravity that marks the seriousness of the situation. Then goes back to the folk theme when Kip says that he became OCE (Obsessive Compulsive Environmentalist): the music relates to his identity. Then back again to the gravity when he starts to think there's more to the story: "...*farmed animals are the main contaminant and nobody, not NGO says anything...*" Here music stops. Kip talks about the huge amount of water consumption farmed animals do and Heather Cooley's (Pacific Institute) interview starts talking about how harmful animal husbandry is. Still no music is played.

The folk theme in the intro presents the protagonist and associates him with traditional values in the US. Music changes when Al Gore's film comes into screen. Its gravity slowly surrounds everything while the protagonist talks about global warming and human responsibility. Folk theme comes back when the narrative turns to the ecological practices of the protagonist after watching Gore's movie. Gravity comes back when talking about animal farming and CO₂. Interviews have no background music but it reappears at the end of some of them adding gravity to their words. So used, music identifies participants and circumstances.

The interpersonal metafunction shows constructions that combine music with the images. In the act of demand, the folk theme does not present extra tension; this is, other than the basic tension that constructs the theme, there are no cadences or melodic ruptures creating extra-tension. In the orchestral theme, on the other hand, cadences do not resolve. This resource is used to leave the images and the words of the interviewed persons in tension and in waiting for a resolution that exceeds the musical dimension. This resource creates tension not only in music but on the screen, making an uncomfortable situation for the represented as well as for the interactive participants (the viewers).

This tension in the act of demand is combined in turn with perspective and social distance construction. The growing buzzing and the music that marks gravity establish a public distance that calls for attention. They resemble an uncomfortable public situation. On the other hand, when the folk theme enters presents a closer situation but not an intimate one.

Tonal gravity is part of a complex construction. During introduction, when Bruce Hamilton is being interviewed and talking about how climate change is getting faster and impacting nature, species and extinction, synthesized strings play a raising melody with chromatic notes, adding some dark urgency due to the melody but also to the dynamics of instrumentation. When the interviewer asks *what about our lifestyle?* Music stops, along with Hamilton's enthusiasm. He replies *What about it?* And then the screen turns black and the folk theme starts to sound while titles and presentation is shown

on the screen. During the presentation, images show earth turning, cars moving at full speed, landscapes, bees and flowers, etc.; and all this while the folk theme sounds. In the moments of tension music is constituted by synthesized strings playing a melody that goes from the tonic to the dominant creating the major tension possible. Folk music is used to relax, opposed to tense strings; although folk theme stills keeps an up tempo that maintains the urgency. Regarding voice quality and timbre, it must be mentioned that all music is instrumental, no lyrics. In the folk song it can be heard a smooth staccato and some legato resources. The orchestral pieces present more legato than staccato. In the folk theme, modality is naturalistic. Just an acoustic guitar with no effects added. The gravity theme, on the contrary, includes some technological features that give the sense of futuristic music.

The pieces present belong to two different genres: folk song and orchestral music. The folk song presents an AAA structure, this is, a primary form. The orchestral piece is only heard partially: the cadence. It is impossible to identify what type of structure it presents.

In this documentary, music blends with the visual and verbal elements to co-construct key meanings in particular parts of the film, adding features that cannot be added by other modes.

4.2.2. *Music in cinema: The Last of the Mohicans*

In artistic cinema, music constitutes a very different resource than what it is in documentary films. It often presents a score written particularly for the film that covers the complete cinematographic sequence. In the case of *The Last of the Mohicans*, the score was written by Trevor Jones and is a construction based on a folkloric theme, re-elaborated during different stages of the narrative. Here we analyse the segment called *Promontory* and its functioning during the final chase in the last minutes of the film. During the entire film music is non-diegetic, combined with ambient sound. We can actually hear what characters are doing: footsteps, grasps, screaming, etc. Only in the scene when the characters of Cora and Nathaniel make love the motive starts as diegetic and becomes non-diegetic as the scene develops.

Ideational meaning is structured through the main musical motive that runs through the whole movie with different variations in melody and instrumentation. It harmonizes the folk melody using i-VII-III-VII-i, to make the tonal centre shift between the minor tonic (i-D minor) and its major relative. The topic seems to refer to the massacre and despair in the narrative. Therefore, the motive is tied to tragedy as a process more than to a specific character. It starts at the beginning of the movie, with the initial credits. As it appears in different moments during the film, it generates an accumulation effect that never reaches its peak until the final scene, when music drives the narrative to its very definition. In this scene, music starts after the elder's

sentence and marks definiteness in the fate of the characters: from that point on everything is an inevitable march to death.

Although there is an almost constant string section that presents a melody in competence with the main motive, in certain moments – coinciding with particular changes in the visual action – this string section raise over the violin line. This occurs in two types of situations:

- When big mountain landscapes are shown in the screen. Symphonic music has been usually used by cinema as a synonym for enormousness, majesty and inevitability.
- At definitive moments in the narrative: when characters die. After each of the two first deaths, the violin motive is resumed, illustrating the pursuit, until the final death in with the strings take over to end the music and the scene in the tonic upper octave.

The constant repetition of the motive builds the idea of persistent movement, which is directly related to the chase: four characters – Cora Munro, played by Madelene Stowe, Hawkeye-Nathaniel, played by Daniel Day-Lewis, Chingachgook, played by Russell Means, and Uncas, played by Eric Schweig - are chasing a group of Hurons (whose leader is Magua, played by Wes Studi) that held Cora's sister – Alice Munro, played by Jodhi May) as hostage. Music illustrates the chase as a process adding intensity, constancy and inevitability but also a solemn atmosphere to the scene. In this sense, it refers to the particular context, participants and processes involved in the screen but also to the whole situation created by those events: the war in North America between the English and the French and the involvement of the North American natives.

The interpersonal metafunction is also musically tied to the main motive. A small sense of tension is created through an authentic cadence that configures an act of demand. Although, as the motive repeats constantly and the resolution is full, the sense of tension is quickly lost. What transmits tension in a more profound way is the raising in the strings section that slowly grows bigger until it takes over the main motive, imposing a power over the situation that diverts the attention from the characters: the motive moves to the background and the lead is taken by melody posed by the strings. The structure of theme with variations gives the melody an aura of increasing tension by addition: new elements added to a known context make us think of a worsening situation, an issue that urgently needs to be solved.

In terms of perspective and social distance, music starts somewhere in the middle of personal-informal distance and, with the entering of the strings, it goes to public. This journey through personal-informal-public distances helps build the idea that the tragedy is as personal as collective.

Regarding tonal gravity, the motive follows the pattern i-bVII-III-bVII-I. The tonal centre oscillates between the tonic (D minor) and its major

relative (the mediant, F), granting some sense of persistent sadness to the melody. Violins sound tense, in terms of voice quality, but at the same time smooth and not too bright. The collective sound rises from low to high pitch, as the strings gain strength. Finally, the piece presents a naturalistic modality. Instruments are not modified in a non-naturalistic way and notes are articulated in legato / tenuto form with some sustain in the articulation. The opposition motive-string section creates a kind of shadow-light structure that develops through the harmony, giving dynamics to the whole piece and avoiding the use of modulation.

Although it is a soundtrack and, therefore, has been developed to maintain some connection with what happens on the screen, the piece can be thought as an independent orchestral work based on a folkloric motive. Textually we can say it evidences a structure of theme with variations. The repetition often presents the exact same pattern. But every now and then the last bar is altered by a few notes. As we mentioned above, this gives the melody an aura of increasing tension: new elements added to a known context make us think of a worsening issue.

In this film, music becomes part of the narrative, adding an element that only music can bring: tension. The emotional mood of the situation and the links with the represented participants make it an indissoluble part of the scene.

5. Music, cognition and representation: a grammar of transposition

In multimodal constructions, music helps constructing participants and processes. Although it cannot configure them by itself, music contributes with features that can be fundamental for the identity of represented participants and the processes they are involved in. Also, music constructs the situation, the social space in which the participants live and their relations with each other and the viewer/listener. In this sense, music establishes the emotional moods for the represented and for the interactive participants. Finally, music also tells us something about the conventionalisation of the situation in which it participates due: specific genres in specific social contexts.

In *No more I love you's* music constructs emotionality in the narrator's voice, transforming the words in an emotional state of mind. The melody creates a sense of recurrence by repeating the verse structure adding something each time to build increasing tension. During this process, public and intimate contexts are constructed, getting us closer and apart in key moments of the song. In *Cowspiracy*, music constructs the director's perspective: judgment over the words of the interviewed, arguments in favour

or against them. The different music tells us the role of the participant in the narrative is. *Mohicans* music is not just a feature of the characters or the situation, it becomes a fundamental part of the narration, connecting participants, processes, emotions through rhythm and giving the story and the characters an epic aura.

In all, music is a conventionalised construction, accepted in a given community as carrier of particular meanings. Every piece of music, every musical phrase, short progression, etc. has a history in each community through which it becomes associated with particular ideas. In that sense music can be thought as discourse or, at least, part of it. But there is a particular contradiction in human multimodal information decoding: while our dominant sense is sight, we grant a higher value to the verbal messages we hear. Verbal dimension seems to lead our interpretation in most cases. So considered, we can think about the existence of a hierarchy in the selection of modes for decoding: in every multimodal text there is a leading mode and accessory modes. Meaning moves from the leading mode to the rest adopting the possibilities they offer: if the leading mode is verbal, pronouns and nouns will be assigned as the representation of participants and music as a part of the process. If the leading mode is visual, music can be a feature of the process or add some participants' characteristics.

In any case, it is undeniable that music constructs discursive meaning in multimodal contexts and its importance in discourse analysis cannot be avoided. Therefore, future developments must point to the conventionalization of musical constructions and their relation with other semiotic modes.

Bionote: Diego Forte has a degree in literature and linguistics (University of Buenos Aires) and a PhD in multimodal discourse analysis (Universidad del Salvador, Argentina). He has taught undergraduate and post graduate courses in multimodal discourse analysis and ecolinguistics and has held a researcher position at the National Library of Argentina. His current work focuses on multimodal approaches to the study of language and discourse.

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