

Expanding the classification of narrative phenomena in electroacoustic music: from intra and inter musical narrative to performative and dramatised-performative narrative

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Abstract

Narrative phenomena and their relation with electroacoustic music is a subject that is currently much debated in the electroacoustic community, but requires further investigation. This article aims to expand the classification of these narrative phenomena by introducing the terms intra and inter-musical narrative and performative and dramatised-performative narrative. To do so, it discusses narrative phenomena from the perspective of narratology (Abbot and Ryan) and electroacoustic music (Emmerson, Young, Wishart, Smalley, Andean and Roads). It then presents some alternative views on these phenomena and indicates some unspecified ones. Finally, the article, in reference to ideas of Austin, McAuley, Berns, Bell, Budd, Koelsch and Wolf, proposes the above terms to define, in the context of electroacoustic music, these different views and the unspecified narrative phenomena presented.

1. Introduction

The article commences by specifying the narrative and musical narrative context from which the terms intra and inter-musical narrative and performative and dramatised-performative narrative have derived. It continues by addressing the two main narrative phenomena found in electroacoustic music that result from the use of ‘referential’ and ‘non-referential’ sounds, and proposes the terms intra and inter-musical narrative to classify them. Finally, the article introduces the term performative and dramatised-performative narrative to specify and classify the narratives that derive from cultural, social and dramatised performative activities.

2. Narrative

Abbot (2008, p.13) defines narrative as the ‘representation of an event or a series of events’. Genette (1982, quoted in Ryan, 2007, p.23) suggests that: ‘One will define narrative without difficulty as the representation of an event or a sequence of events’. Prince (2003, quoted in Ryan, 2007, p.23) sees narrative ‘...as the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence’ and ‘the representation ... of one or more fictive event communicated by one, two or several ... narrators ... to one, two or several narrates’ (2001, quoted in Rudrum, 2005, p.195). Onega and Landa (1996, quoted in Rudrum, 2005, p.195) propose that: ‘What we get in the text are not events as such, but signs, the representation of

events' and Scholes (1981, quoted in Rudrum, 2005, p.195) states that: "A narration is the symbolic representation of events".

As seen, many narratologists agree that narrative is the representation of events. However, there are others that have different views. A central one comes from Ryan, who, after taking into consideration the use of the word narrative in various fields suggests that: "narrative is a fuzzy set defined at the center by a solid core of properties, but accepting various degrees of membership, depending on which properties a candidate displays" (2007, p. 470). Nevertheless, the narrative context of the terms presented in this article has been established from the wide and broad view that narrative is the representation of events.

3. Musical narrative

In respect to this broad view that narrative can be seen as the representation of events, many scholars have extensively discussed the phenomenon of narrative in music. Meelberg (2006, p.39) adapts Bal's definition that sees narrative as the: 'representation of temporal development, the representation of a succession of events that succeed each other in time' and suggests that music is the 'representation of temporal development, which consists of a succession of events' and consequently, music is narrative.

Andean (2016), from a slightly different standpoint, proposes a perspective shift from seeing narrative as a function of the work to see narrative as a function of our experience of the work. In doing so, he reconfigures the aforementioned definitions of Abbot and Meelberg respectively to: 'narrative is our experience of an event or a series of events' and 'narrative is our experience of a temporal development, and of a succession of events' (p.192). As seen, the central idea of representation of events is replaced with the idea of the experience of events.

Roads (2015, p.318), from his own unique perspective, introduces the idea of sonic narrative, stating that a composition is a 'function of time, it is born out of nothing, it grows, evolves and develops until the moment it finally expires'. The narrative thread created from the unfoldment of the events that make a composition - from the shorter events of a sound appearing, progressing and interacting to larger events where phrases and parts are formed - is what Roads regards as sonic narrative.

Taking these ideas into consideration, musical narrative as the context and the umbrella term of intra and inter-musical narrative is defined, based on Abbot's definition, as: *the representation of a series of musical events*. In this particular context, musical narrative is considered as a possible perceptive dimension where music can be seen as the representation of a series of musical events.

In reference to the original definition by Abbot, the idea of a single event constituting a narrative has been excluded since it is a rare phenomenon to have a musical work made only with one musical event. Further to this, the word musical has been added to the events in the definition so to specify that with musical narrative we particularly refer to events found within musical works. Similarly, the term musical was selected instead of sonic narrative, as the first is considered more accurate to indicate that we refer to narratives created from a musical practice than narratives created from any sonic practice.

Further to the above, as seen in the definition, the idea of representation has been maintained and has not been replaced with the idea of experience as proposed by Andean. There are two significant reasons for this choice. The first regards Abbot's (2008, p.15) view that sees story to 'pre-existing its vehicle of conveyance', meaning that a story is conveyed through a narrative discourse and not directly. The discourse is seen as the creative process that defines how the story is told and presented. This suggests that what we experience is not the presentation of the story events, but the representation of these events through the narrative discourse. Similarly, in musical narrative the idea of representation is used to specify that the experienced musical events are representations of the musical and narrative ideas that formed the concept of the compositions and, most importantly, the compositional processes that defined the way the musical events have been sequenced, rendered, conveyed and represented in a sonic medium to make a musical narrative. The particular perspective suggests that what we experience is not the presentation of events but rather the representation of events through the creative processes that defined them.

In alignment with the above ideas, the second significant reason for maintaining the idea of representation regards Ryan's (2005, p.288) ideas of 'being a narrative' and of 'possessing narrativity'. 'Being a narrative' indicates a semiotic object from any medium that is created with the intention of producing a narrative response that leads to the construction of a story. 'Possessing narrativity' indicates the function and the ability and possibility for a narrative response to be inspired, either intentional, unintentional, designed or not. This is a clear differentiation between any event that could possess narrativity and an event that is particularly designed and encoded in materials sign to create a narrative response. For example, watching a random fight between two people in the street and a fight between two people in a film, both events possess narrativity but only the second is classified as 'being a narrative'. This is because only the second event has been designed, materialized, directed and rendered in the medium of film to create a narrative response.

Linking these ideas with musical narrative definition, it could be said that representation is further used to particularly indicate that we refer to musical events that are part of a musical work, events that can be classified as 'being a narrative' since they have been designed to create a musical narrative response. At the same time, representation is used to exclude from musical narrative any sound events that could be imagined or experienced in everyday life and generally sounds that are not mediated through a creative practice. While these sounds could 'posses narrativity', they cannot be classified as 'being narrative' since they are not conveyed through any kind of discourse and are not used to create a musical narrative response. For example, the experience of the sound of a passing train in an everyday life situation is a sound event that is 'possessing narrativity' but can only classified as 'being narrative' when recorded and used as a musical event in a composition.

4. Musical narrative and its duality in electroacoustic music

Musical narrative has been defined in this article as the representation of a series of musical events. However, in electroacoustic music, musical narrative could be further specified to be the representation of any musical event, regardless if these are 'referential' or 'non-referential'. For example, both a 'non-referential' gesture based sound that suddenly interrupts a noise-based texture and a 'referential' sound of footsteps followed by the sound of

a door opening, equally form a musical narrative. This suggests that there are two main levels of perceiving the musical events. The first is the ‘non-referential’ level, where events are perceived purely sonically and the second is the ‘referential level’ where musical events are perceived as sources and causes. These two levels and the narratives they form will be later classified as intra and inter-musical narrative. Before elaborating on this classification though, it is important to briefly survey how other scholars have addressed the same phenomenon from different perspectives.

Simon Emmerson (1986), in reference to discourse in language, proposed the terms mimetic and aural discourse to address the duality between ‘referential’ and ‘non-referential’ sounds. Mimetic is the discourse where ‘referential’ sounds that mimic nature and human behaviour are deliberately used in the compositional process. Aural is the discourse where ‘non-referential’ sounds are used specifically for their aural-sonorous qualities, attentively avoiding any mimetic reference.

John Young (1996) sees the compositional effects of the duality and addresses it from a listening perspective as a continuum that is made from the opposite poles of reality and abstraction. Reality refers to a realistic-context perceived from a composition that results from the recognition of: (1) the objects (the sounding bodies) this context is made from, (2) the physical activity that causes the excitation of these objects (cause) and (3) the physical-context of these objects. Abstraction refers to a context perceived as to be made from sounds abstracted from their source, cause and context and it is, therefore, not recognisable. The continuum refers to the constant flux of listening-perceptive judgments regarding the sound material that cause perceptive-movement from one pole to the other.

Trevor Wishart (1996), similarly to Young’s continuum, suggests the notion of aural-landscape to indicate the sound-image created from the listening of the sounds that make a composition and the imagination of these sounds’ sources and spaces. A duality is created between: (1) the realistic aural-landscape and the perception of real-object/real-spaces, and (2) an imaginary aural-landscape with different degrees of abstraction that is defined by the perception of unreal objects/unreal spaces.

Dennis Smalley (1997) proposed the term of source bonding to indicate the listening tendency to bind sound with its possible source and cause. Relating this tendency with ‘referential’ and ‘non-referential’ sounds, it could be suggested that a source-bonded sound is a sound where the bonding of the internal -the sonorous- with the external -source-cause- is possible (‘referential’) while with a non source-bonded sound this bonding is not possible (‘non-referential’). Further to this, Smalley introduced the idea of ‘gestural surrogacy’ referring to the recognition to the gestural activity that initiates a sound. Non-surrogated gesture is the one that is recognised (‘referential’) while various orders of gestural surrogacy indicate different degrees of remoteness of a sound event from its gesture (‘non-referential’).

The above ideas have significantly contributed in addressing the phenomenon of using and experiencing ‘referential’ and ‘non-referential’ sounds in electroacoustic music. By doing so, they have set the theoretical base for the terms introduced in this article. However, the phenomenon of duality from these perspectives has not been directly connected to narrative.

James Andean (2010) approached these phenomena in relation to narrative but did not directly connect the duality of ‘referential’ and ‘non-referential’ with narrative. He proposed instead, the duality of a musical and a narrative layer. The musical layer is where musical-

objects progress and develop, forming phrases and establishing a musical flow. The narrative layer is the stream of images and sources evoked from this musical flow. These include evocations established not only from the material, but also from the imagination of the listener. In a later text (2016), Andean goes beyond this duality by unifying the musical and narrative layer and expanding them into narrative modes. In reference to Meelberg's idea that the events of a musical narrative are perceived through the sonic changes initiated from various aural cues (2006), Andean proposes various narrative modes with which acousmatic music is perceived: material, formal, structural, mimetic, embodied, parametric, spatial, studio, textural and extra-musical narrative modes. These modes can be activated in the listening process in combination or alternated in regard to the specific listening experience of an individual work.

Along with Andean there are other significant writings about narrative in electroacoustic music (Amelidis, 2016; Batchelor, 2015; Bruson, 2012; Camci, 2016; Giannoukakis, 2016; Giomi & Ligabue, 1998; Hoffman, 2013; Norman, 1996 and Picheiro, 2016). While these and the presented writings have been proven very important for this article, the duality of 'referential' and 'non-referential' sound in relation to narrative has not been addressed in the way to functionally support the narrative ideas introduced. Consequently, new terms that would address the duality of the use and experience of 'referential' and 'non-referential' sound in relation with musical narrative were sought. Intra and inter-musical narrative are the terms resulted from this seeking. Intra-musical narrative stands for the musical narratives that derive purely from sound (non-referential). Inter-musical narrative stands for the musical narratives that derive from the source, cause and context signification of referential sounds. The two terms are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

5. Intra-musical narrative

Intra-musical narrative is defined as: *the sonorous representation of a series of musical events*. It is the narrative deriving purely from the sound of the musical events. Take, for example, this given [extract](#) of *Echo the nymph of reflection*: a quiet and distant harmonic texture is suddenly been interrupted from proximate and loud intensively moving noise-based gestures. Suddenly, the gestures give their place again to a quiet and distant harmonic texture to return for one last time. This is an intra-musical narrative, a series of musical events as perceived from the sonic happening and changes described. As seen, the term intra-musical narrative specifically refers to the narrative perceived from within and based upon pure sound. While the term mainly applies when describing non-referential sounds, it can also be used to describe referential sounds strictly through reference to their sonorous qualities, and independently from their source, cause and context signification.

The term itself has been adapted from the terms (1) intra-musical meaning (Budd, 1995, quoted in Davis 2011, p.3) - the meaning derived from the internal structural relations, functions and causes between the sonorous elements of a musical work and (2) intra-musical referents (Koelsch, 2011) - the references between the constituent musical units of a sonorous structural network. These terms, in order to be used as intra-musical narrative, have been reconfigured not to indicate the sonorous elements and their structural relations, functions, causes and references per se but rather to specify the narrative these elements form.

6. Inter-musical narrative

Inter-musical narrative is defined as: *the source-cause-context representation of a series of musical events*. More specifically, inter-musical is the narrative that derives from the source, cause and context signification (referentiality) of a series of musical events and the relations these significations establish. This only happens when referential sounds are used. Take, for example, the given [extract](#) of *Moments of Liberty II*: we hear sounds of footsteps and breathing along with sound opening doors and striking matches. This is an inter-musical narrative, a series of musical events as perceived through their source, cause and context significations. These significations, stand for both the sound-sources that produce sound after being excited with a particular cause (footsteps causing the excitations of ground, a hand gesture that turns the doors handle and causes the opening of the door) and the physical context resulted from this activity (the size of space and its reflecting material, perceived through reverberations caused from the sound of footsteps and the door opening). As inferred, the term inter-musical narrative is used when describing narratives that derive from a series of ‘referential’ sounds and more particularly from any recognisable sound in terms of its source, cause and context.

The term inter-musical is adapted from the writings of Wolf, who proposed the term inter-musical references in instrumental music as: ‘a form of references to individual compositions or in the form of ‘system reference’; (references to historical or composers’ styles, to individual musical genres or compositional styles)’ (Wolf 2017, p.330). In Wolf’s terms, inter-musical relationships, formed from the above references, are created when sonorous elements of a work interconnect, sonically, with other listening perceptive levels; the perceptive level is that in which sonorous elements of the work are associated with compositional styles and musical genres. Here, the term inter-musical has been significantly reconfigured to signify something quite distinct; the interconnected perceptive level is that which is referential. In this reconfigured sense, sounds are not interconnected with genres and styles but are rather interconnected with their source, cause and context signification. Thus, it could be said that inter-musical narrative derives from the interconnection of a series of ‘referential’ sounds with their source, cause and context signification.

It becomes clear then that inter-musical narrative is established through a shared recognition among listeners of the sounds’ source, cause and context significations, like for example the breathing, the door opening and the walking heard in sound example 2. This shared recognition further suggests that the significations are found within the sounds per se and are not interpreted as mimicking or imagined and imposed by the listener as metaphors or symbolisms. For example, it is possible for the listener to distinguish the resonating sounding-body of the flute imitating bird song and the orchestra metaphorically referring to the sea, from recorded bird song and sea sounds used in an electroacoustic composition. Therefore, the term allows us to distinguish between inter-musical qualities found within the sound and extra-musical qualities that are drawn to the sound but which are outside of the sound itself.

As specified in this section inter-musical narrative stands for the narratives deriving from the source, cause and context significations of referential sounds. These include narrative deriving from human activity, soundscapes, machines and generally any recognisable sound in terms of its source, cause and context. To be able to specify in this broad field, the

narratives that particularly derive from human activity, the term performative narrative is introduced and further discussed below.

7. Performative narrative

Performative narrative is defined as: *the performative activity representation of a series of musical events*. Performative, is particularly, the narrative that derives from the performative-activity of people. As a narrative phenomenon, performative narrative has not been clearly specified and classified in electroacoustic music and thus is introduced here and classified as a subcategory of inter-musical narrative.

As a term, performative is inextricably linked with the action of performing: of carrying out, accomplishing and fulfilling an action (Bell, 2005). It was first introduced by J.L. Austin to indicate performative utterances which are actions themselves (Bell), and adapted by those in the field of narratology to indicate performative and evocative action (Berns, 2014). In this article, the term performative is selected, among other relevant notions like mimetic, material and embodied narrative (Andean, 2016), to indicate:

1. performative-actions taken by one or more anthropomorphic performing-agents
2. events that these actions establish
3. performative elements and qualities they both bring along.

In the context of musical-narrative, these performative actions, events and qualities are perceived through the referential (performative-activity) sounds that make a composition. An example of this is the previously presented [sound example 2](#) where we hear the performative activity of a human: his breathing, walking, opening doors and striking matches. These ‘referential’ sound based events, form a narrative though their source, cause and context signification. Due to this signification, the particular narrative can be classified as an inter-musical one. However, since these events result from and signified through a performative activity, the narrative they form can be more specifically labelled as a performative narrative. Taking into consideration that the performative activity referred to is a very broad term, it could be inferred, that performative is a subcategory of narrative that includes: cultural and social performative activities - parades, demonstrations, strikes and many more (McAuley, 2007) - and predetermined and acted activities. As a consequence, compositions that include cultural and social performative activity also fall into this category of narrative. In Luc Ferrari’s *Presque Rien N°1* we hear the social performative activity sounds of people passing by and chattering. In Panos Amelidis’ *Agoras 1* we hear various cultural performative activity sound recordings of sellers in a market. *Traveling to India* by Hildegard Westercamp is also a typical example of a composition incorporating various recordings of social and cultural performative-activities from markets, people gathering together and activities in temples.

Within this broad inclusion of performative activities, it was considered important to further specify a particular kind of performative activity that is predetermined in advance. The term proposed to address this kind of performative activity and the narratives deriving from it, is dramatised-performative narrative.

8. Dramatised-performative narrative

Dramatised-performative narrative is defined as *the dramatised-performative activity representation of a series of musical events*. More specifically, dramatised-performative is the narrative that derives from the predetermined, though dramatisation, performative-activity of people. In this context, dramatisation, both etymologically and practically, stands for the direct process of making something dramatic - dramatising - as an adaptation of a story, a novel or a myth into a theatrical presentation or generally referring to the process of presenting/representing something dramatically, in a dramatic way (Collins online dictionary; Merriam Webster online dictionary). [Sound example 2](#) is used for once more to illustrate this kind of narrative. The musical events of this extract are perceived through a performative-activity (a human breathing, walking, opening doors, striking matches) that was predetermined though dramatisation, and thus, the narrative formed is a dramatised-performative one.

9. Conclusion

It is hoped that the five terms presented (figure 1 below) have addressed some of the important narrative phenomena found in electroacoustic music. By doing so, it is further hoped that the terms will help to differentiate between the different kinds of narrative and their perceptive levels.

Remembering the terms introduced, musical narrative broadly refers to the perceptive stance where music is seen as a representation of musical-events. Within this stance, intra-musical narrative stands for the perception of these events strictly through pure sound. Inter-musical narrative stands for the perception of referential sounds through their source, cause and context significations. Within inter-musical narrative, performative narrative is introduced as subcategory to specifically refer to the perception of referential sounds that are produced exclusively from any performative activity of people (social, cultural and predetermined). Finally, dramatised-performative narrative is introduced as a subset of performative narrative to specify the perception of the particular kind of performative activity that is predetermined and directed in advance though dramatisation.

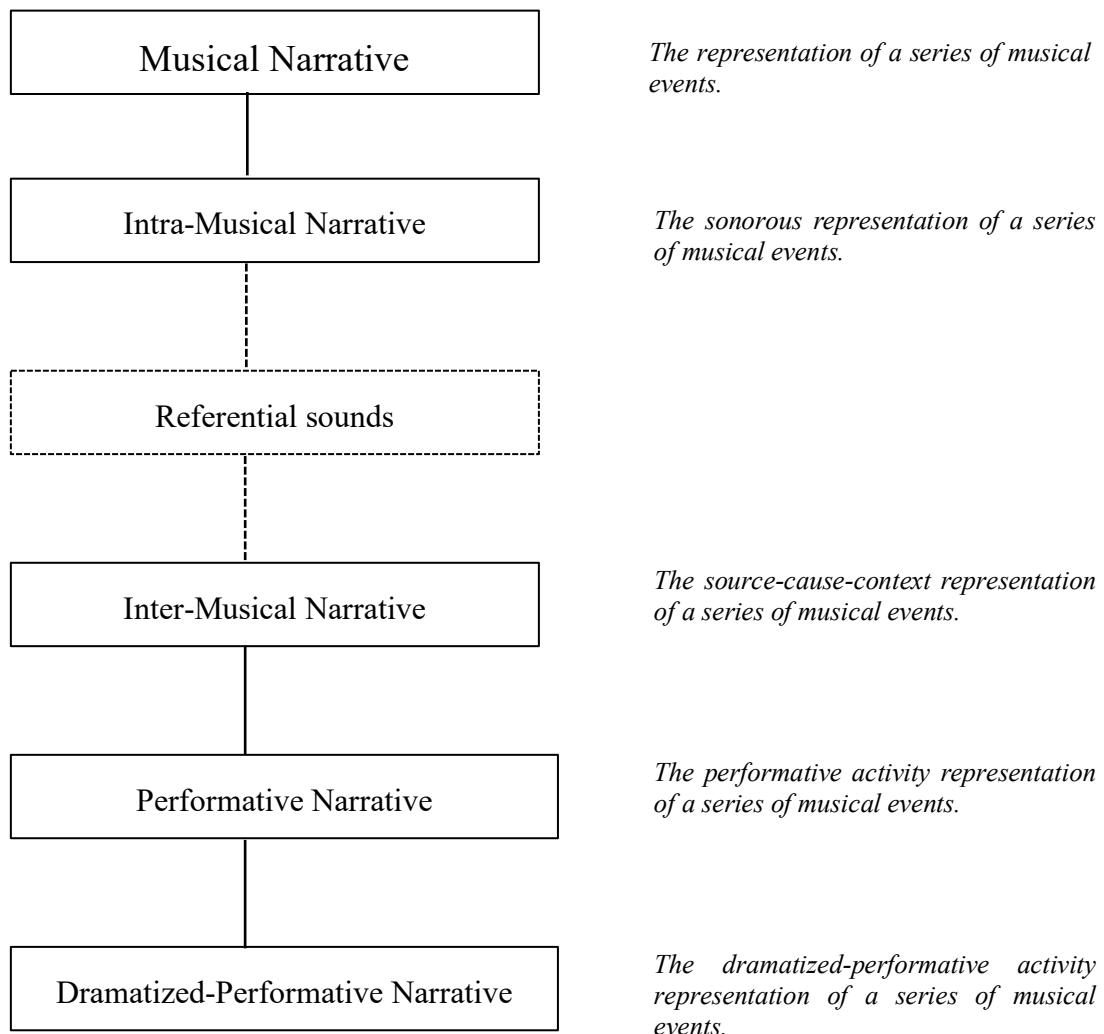


Figure 1: Musical narrative definitions.

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