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# Text and Music Revisited

Are words and music two separate symbolic modes, or rather variants of the same human symbolic practice? Are they parallel, opposing or overlapping? What do they have in common and how does each of them exceed the other? Is music perhaps incomparably different from words, or even their anti-verbal Other? Distinctions between text (in the verbal sense of units of words rather than in the wide sense of symbolic webs in general) and music are regularly made – but also problematized – within musical practices that create, regulate or use musical works, as well as within theoretical discourses on culture.

First, there has been a reductive verbocentrism in much cultural theory, which was for a long period dominated by linguistics and literary approaches, notably within the influential but problematic tradition line from structuralist semiotics to poststructuralism (including Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, Barthes and Derrida). There was a tendency to reduce all symbolic modes to one single core of semiotic codes, basically common to all meaningful human sign systems. All human communication was seen in basically linguistic terms as dependent on and ultimately derived from the verbal language system.

Instead of understanding music (or images) as simply a less perfect type of text, contrary demands have repeatedly been raised, for example by dance scholars or musicologists, for accepting that each symbolic mode is genuinely and irreducibly different (e.g., by Blacking, 1973: 21). Emphasizing the peculiarities of music makes it possible to acknowledge the very limits of language: everything is *not* reducible to words, and cultural theory should be aware of the limitations of prevailing verbocentric paradigms.

However, many who talk of music and words as two almost oppositional symbolic modes misrepresent each of them and underestimate their similarities, in a procedure of ‘stereotypical dualism’ that make each symbolic mode appear as a relatively closed whole following its own rules, autonomously from (or in opposition to) the others. This leads to an ‘essentialism’ of symbolic modes, in spite of all efforts to argue that they are socially and historically constructed. I will argue that the difference between text and music is not as radical as is often believed – both by literary theorists and by musicologists. At least, it cannot be reduced to a clear-cut dichotomy.

After a short historical survey of the conflictual discourses that have articulated the differences between symbolic modes, I will here discuss a series of dichotomies that circle around the text/music-relationship. These will be discussed in two steps: first the general polarizations of symbolic modes which are mainly based upon their dependance on sense modalities (visuality vs. aurality), and then the distinctions of symbolic aspects or levels connected to the concept of discursivity. I will argue that such distinctions have to be kept apart, in order to respect the complexities of the way text and music interrelate, and that they are all intersubjective constructions rather than objective facts. In fact, text/music is no polar dichotomy at all.<sup>1</sup>

## A contested dichotomy

Text was historically split from music in ancient Greece, as genres like drama, poetry and literature on one hand and pure and increasingly autonomous instrumental music on the other were separated from the diffuse unity of *mousiké*, the arts and crafts of the Muses, which thirdly also included dance.

Mixtures remained the rule, but as institutionalized *practices* arose that concentrated upon only one of these three (text, music, dance), the possibility arose also to *think* them as separable activities and art forms. A long and still continuing historical process of differentiation culminated with the development of the cultural branch of the modern public sphere, including the literary institutions, public concerts, specialized publishing houses and reviews in the press and other media, etc. Most people now take for granted that text and music are two essentially separate symbolic modes, even though they continue to be blended in songs, operas, films, etc. They work like naturalized ideal types – sociocultural constructions which mostly appear as obvious or objectively given, in spite of the fact that their boundaries are far from fix.

Musical practices and institutions are the arenas where such demarcations are fought for. This process sometimes appears in the form of open struggles. Conflicts have been staged between music and literature, between instrumental and vocal music, and within vocal music between a textual and a musical orientation. In opera and other Western song history such debates have repeatedly been voiced, for instance as one facet of the discussion on polyphony and monody, between French and Italian aesthetic song ideals, or concerning the hierarchy between pure autonomous instrumental music and opera.

I found echoes of such a debate in my study of an important music theatre show in the 1970s Swedish music movement, where a fusion of jazz and rock proponents was not without conflicts (Fornäs, 1993). A well-known Swedish jazz musician and composer, Christer Boustedt, often sounded quite hostile towards the power of words. He was much less willing than his rock fellows Ulf Dageby and Bertil Goldberg to let the music cooperate with song texts or work as ‘filmic’, non-diegetic background to theatrical action. Instead, he seemed to feel a need to defend music in itself and fight for the rights of pure instrumental music to be in the centre of the show more often. To the rock musicians, a continuous negotiation and compromise between text and music was much less problematic, while at least avantgarde or art jazz seems often to take an oppositional stance against the alleged dominance of words in Western culture.

Similar conflicts have also appeared within the rock tradition, between those who emphasize the verbal message and others who find the beat and sound elements much more interesting than the words. Such conflicts were common in the same music movement. Today, a compromise solution is mostly dominant, according to which pop and rock songs should put roughly equal weight on both text and music. Textless music often has an aura of high rather than popular culture, like in jazz or avantgarde art music, where the absence of words seems to signify a spiritual solemnity making the tunes less profane. Some of rock’s avantgarde art-ists also distrust verbality and flee from the tyranny of words into a pure inner play with sounding forms.

In techno and house dance music, it is instead the dancing body that is to be celebrated, so fully that too many semantically important words would again break the magic spell by threatening to disturb the dancers' performance and thereby disrupting bodily expression and non-verbal community. By the pop pole within rock as well, when it is used as functional dance music, lyrics seem to lose importance or even become despised as a sign of a too intellectual style.

Literary, anti-popular purists on the other hand conversely tend to avoid music and prefer written poems. The mediation of singing lyrics to music of course exists in many forms, including highly elite-connoted opera and *Lieder*, but is most typical to the compromising hybridity which marks popular music, as opposed to all fundamentalist purism. Most of rock and rap seems to have confidence in words and like to experiment with a dense cooperation between text and music, rather than developing one side alone.

Let me break off the historical discussion here, and instead dive into some dichotomies that have often been associated with the relation of text and music. I will limit myself to the visual and aural, well aware of the advantages of a yet wider treatment of all the senses, including those of taste, smell, touch, balance and temperature. A very fascinating cultural and historical discussion of the whole world of senses is offered by Classen (1993), but my aim here is more limited. It is true that synaesthetic experiences may associate other senses to vision or sound. And the tactile sense is, for example, still more directly connected to sight through three-dimensional images, reliefs, Braille, etc., and to hearing through sound vibrations that may be felt in the whole body. A musical performance is never just visual and aural, but always also includes smells, bodily experiences, etc. What I will do here is however instead to carefully scrutinize the assumed dichotomy itself, not by adding to it what it excludes of other sense modalities and symbolic modes, but by stepping into its own inner contradictions.

## Ear and eye

*Verbality* is a strange symbolic mode. It has two parallel forms: *writing* and *speech*. Contrary to much belief, none of them can be said to be primary. Writing cannot be reduced to only a transcription of talk, just as little as all talk is just a reading aloud of written texts. Historically, material traces and signs might be exactly as old as spoken words, even though the regular alphabet is of course much younger. And in today's practices, many written texts function perfectly well without ever being read loud.

Music theories often contrast music sounds to written words, while visual semiotics often contrast images to spoken words. In order to generalize these into theories of verbal vs. non-verbal modes, one has to see clearer that words have two irreducible versions: speech and writing.

Similarly, *nonverbality* also comes in at least two forms: *visual* and *aural*. *Music* and *images* are essentially aural and visual modes, respectively. Music can be transcribed, but unlike verbal writing, musical writing has no quite autonomous existence. Many written words are never translated into spoken words, even in the minds of their readers, while such musical scores that are not even transformed to sounding music in someone's inner basically

are visual images rather than music. Music is composed by organized sounds, while words are either organized sounds too, or instead organized visual patterns – a characteristic shared by images. Whereas images are crucially visual and music crucially aural, words talk to both senses and exist with equal right in both sense modalities. This also means that the aural mode is not music alone, as little as nonverbal images by themselves constitute the totality of the visual realm.

Instead of constructing one single dichotomous dimension of, say, words and music (or words and images), it is better to discuss *four interacting symbolic modes*, that can somewhat simplifying be named writing, speech, images and music. This means that the polarity between verbal and nonverbal symbolic structures has to be clearly distinguished from that between visual and aural expressions.

|                   |               |                |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
|                   | <b>Aural</b>  | <b>Visual</b>  |
| <b>Verbal</b>     | <b>Speech</b> | <b>Writing</b> |
| <b>Non-verbal</b> | <b>Music</b>  | <b>Images</b>  |

Aural sounds can roughly be divided into noises, speech, song and other (nonvocal) music, dependent on how they are produced, intended and/or perceived. All (except some noises) are organized sounds, whose organization is effected either in their material production or only in their use by listeners. Both speech and song are ways to use the human voice. Speech centres on words, song may or may not do so. Song is a kind of music, speech is supposedly not.

The existence of song complicates things further, since it joins a verbal and a nonverbal mode. Aural sounds can be said to consist of noises, music, song and speech, or song can instead be defined as a particular kind both of music and of speech. Verbality (words, text) then consists of writing, speech and song, while the visible shapes of visuality include writing (and thus literature), images (including art) as well as other visual forms (including architecture, human looks, etc.). Some symbolic modes obviously turn up in many ‘boxes’, either since they are themselves composite, or because the dimension of verbality intersects rather than coincides with the dimension of (visual/aural) sense modalities. It is never possible to construct a simple map of these symbolic modes; dichotomies like ‘orality/literacy’ are never enough, since the two sides are often combined or interacting, and, additionally, since other sense modalities like tactility or kinetics complicate the model even further. Few human expressions rely solely upon one single sense (ear/eye/touch...) or one symbolic mode: in real life they are frequently combined in the most subtle ways.

Verbality is in fact no autonomous entity, but rather a possible ordering structure within either visual or auditive expressions. All written texts can be seen as a pictorial kind of image, if one forgets about the meanings of the words and concentrates upon their form and design. All spoken words can likewise be perceived as music (which in fact often happens when one listen to people talking an unknown language). It is much harder to listen to pure instrumental music as if it was speech, or to ‘read’ an abstract painting as if it was a written text! In this way, speech can be understood as a very particular kind of organized sounds, where a specific verbal order has been imposed in a way that makes listeners lessen their conscious awareness

of the so-called ‘musical’ elements (timbre, rhythm, etc.), in favour of that aspect of the semantic level which is specific to verbality. But these ‘musical’ elements never disappear, only ‘go underground’. ‘Pure’ speech is (in contrast to ‘pure music’) an ideal abstraction with no real existence, and the same applies for writing in relation to images.

Text and music can both obviously be very different things, and out of all the many possible variants I propose the following *three main levels* and specifying concepts for the main uses of these and related terms (cf. Fornäs, 1996).

First, on the level of cultural *spheres* or genres one can discern certain artefacts, institutionalized practices and art forms that are primarily understood as textual or musical, depending on the relative focus on either verbal or musical modes of symbolization. Novels or lectures exemplify the former, hardcore rap or whistled tunes the latter. On this level, *texts* are genres centred on practices of speech and writing, while *musics* are genres focussing sounds that are primarily perceived as music rather than as speech or noise, whether they are artificial or natural, vocal or nonvocal. The more general semiotic use of the term ‘text’ to include ‘musical texts’ has not dissolved all contexts where a text is generally presupposed to be something written (or at least spoken). Even courses in music often have separate lists for texts (books and articles) and musical examples (recordings and scores). These two spheres are only tendential poles within a continuum of many overlappings and unclear bordercases, as indicated by the word ‘primarily’. Hybrid genres within theatre, opera, film or television show that texts/musics in this first sense is far from any real dichotomy: they do not exclude each other, they are not each other’s opposites, and there are lots of other, competing generic fields (pictorial art, dance, cooking, etc.). Such cultural genres can be conceived in either a *wide* or a *narrow* sense. Whereas for example a narrow, *scriptural* understanding of texts only refers to branches of literature, the wider *verbal* definition of texts also includes so-called speech-genres (from everyday conversation to religious sermons, lectures, drama and radio-talk).

Second, on the level of symbolic or cultural *modes* of expression, *words* or lyrics can be opposed to musical *sounds*. These symbolic modes appear relatively separately in the generic spheres mentioned above, as in written poetry or instrumental music, but they are elsewhere mixed in works or genres like films or pop songs. Words and sounds are here again no true opposites, since sung as well as spoken texts are simultaneously both. Within this second level, wide (verbal) and narrow (scriptural) variants of the text-mode can again be discerned.

Third, on the level of symbolic or cultural *aspects*, *textuality* as formal, spatialized and web-like structure can also be opposed to *musicality* as living, temporalized and continuously flowing performance. A single poem, song or dance tune can all be analyzed in these two main directions. Instrumental pieces do not contain words, but they share a textual (meaningful, structured and web-like) quality with verbal discourses. And words conversely have a musical side to them, whether they are sung, spoken or written, in that they have a sounding and rhythmic organization which is similar to that of nonverbal musical sounds. The tone and prosody of a speaking voice represents a musicality within fundamentally verbal speech. Textuality here refers to discursively or semantically structured patterns in a song, as anchored in its material traces (sound waves) and contrasting to its performance – in a

roughly similar way as linguists after Saussure contrast the language system (*langue*) with the flows of actual verbal performance and speech acts (*parole*).

In a way, this last level seems more abstract and metaphoric than the others, from which it is relatively autonomous. If words and music both have textuality and musicality, the use of these terms might appear confusing. However, as the term 'text' originally has to do with something web-like, it is not far-fetched to use it in such a very generalized way.

A third time, variants can be distinguished, though not quite of the same type as above. *Semantic* textuality points toward the existence of meaningful structures in general, including any symbolic webs, even live musical pieces considered as chains of material markings or traces in time-space. Then, the song text is simply the 'frozen', 'discursive' structure of all its words and sounds. From a perspective of *graphic* textuality, the term 'text' instead emphasizes the materiality of the fixation as such, including written words but also musical notes and even the physical tracks of a CD, as long as it is a fixated form of some meaningful symbolic web. But textuality is always simultaneously both these, since all communicative acts and symbolic forms must always have aspects of materiality (graphic, aural or other physical and objectivized traces), of form-relations (ordered structures) and of meaning (the constructed links to something else which is the specific point of symbolic practices and human communication).

Variants of this third-level musicality can perhaps also be found. In a wide sense, musicality is associated with time flows and temporal processes in general, but a more narrow sense confines it to those aspects of these flows that are (yet) non-symbolic. This is the way in which a romantic tradition of understanding poetic language (including Kristeva, 1974/1984) talks of the non-semantic aspects of literature, fleeing the symbolic order, as precisely musical. In all these variants, it will be clear that the border between the two are fleeting: they are always co-existent and depend upon each other in very complicated manners, that cannot be reduced either to polar opposition, painful tension or harmonious complementarity, but may in various contexts have all these forms.

It is to these last issues I will next turn. To sum up this first discussion, one may conclude that as sets of genres, practices, institutions or art forms, *texts* or *musics* can be distinguished from *words* and *sounds* as basic elements of symbolic expressions, as well as from *textuality* and *musicality* as more abstract, contrasting aspects of them. The conceptual pair text/music can be used in all these cases, but obviously with quite different meanings.

## Meaning, form and materiality

Now, the text/music polarity is not only problematically related to the visual/aural and the verbal/nonverbal ones, but also to a series of other ways to distinguish between various types of symbolic forms. Several useful conceptual pairs have been developed, partly in efforts to catch the essence of what separates words from musical sounds or images. However, again, I think that none of these other differences should be collapsed into that of text/music.

Susanne K. Langer (1942: 75f) presents three essential 'characteristics of true language, or discourse'. (1) 'Every language has a vocabulary and a syntax. Its elements are words with fixed meanings'. (2) 'In a language, some words are equivalent to whole combinations of

other words', which 'makes it possible to define the meanings of the ultimate single words, i.e. to construct a dictionary'. (3) 'There may be alternative words for the same meaning', allowing for translations between languages. These three together make verbal language a *discursive* symbolic mode.

According to Langer, visual forms (images) are not discursive, since they do not present their constituents successively, but simultaneously: there is no simple and univocal way to divide an image into elements with fixed meanings, to construct universal definitions of visual units or to translate them into each other. While music indeed forms temporally successive chains of sounds, like speech does, it is a 'purely connotational semantic', which 'lacks the cardinal virtue of language, which is denotation' (Langer, 1942: 82). 'Logically, music has not the characteristic properties of language – separable terms with fixed connotations, and syntactical rules for deriving complex connotations without any loss to the constituent elements'; thus, 'music has no literal meaning' and is mostly, like visual images, *presentational* rather than discursive (Langer, 1942: 188).

This model of music as non-referential, and of a distinction between discursive and presentational forms, is in many ways attractive. It has inspired much theoretical discussion of adolescent youth culture and rock music use, and is parallel to many similar such theories of more semiotic inspiration (cf. Middleton, 1990; Bradley, 1992; Fornäs et al., 1988/1995; Fornäs, 1995).

As useful as it might be, it is however also highly problematic. Before criticizing it, let me first present another version, this time in psychoanalytical terms. Below, behind or within the formal and rational *symbolic* order of the syntactic and semantic logic of discourse, Julia Kristeva (e.g., 1974/1984: 43) finds another, *semiotic* level, of drives and their articulations. This appears in nonsense, alliteration, rhythms and pulses, where the material and sensuous presence of texts interact with psychological processes associated with the primary processes of the unconscious and its transgressive enjoyment of 'jouissance' (Barthes, 1977).

The nondiscursive, nonsemantic, 'semiotic' traits in poetic verbal language that do not carry definite meanings or tell a straight linear story are often termed 'musical'. Like so many others, Kristeva repeatedly uses musical metaphors (rhythms, sounds, melodies...) to designate these basically nonverbal aspect of words. This is defended in terms very similar to those of Langer: 'For while music is a system of *differences*, it is not a system of *signs*. Its constitutive elements do not have a signified. Referent/signified/signifier here seem to melt into a single mark that combines with others in a language that doesn't mean anything' (Kristeva, 1981/1989: 309). This idea of music as a language which only signifies itself, a syntax without semantics, is widespread within semiotics (e.g., Jakobson, 1968/1971). The nondiscursivity and emotional presence of music disposes it to stand for deeply unconscious bodily impulses and desires. In modern western societies, music is often regarded as a pre-verbal, archaic mode without semantics: a symbolic mode with particularly strong and direct connections to emotions – a language of feelings, in contrast to the more rational verbal writing.

Middleton (1990) argues that music primarily signifies only structural relations (before/after, fast/slow, high/low, dissonance/consonance, mobile/static), while references to

the external world are only secondary significations through conventional associations. But similar arguments can as well be made concerning all symbolic modes, including verbality. 'Primary signification' in music is a rather awkward term for the internal form-relations between symbolic elements, which (together with materiality) only constitute a necessary condition for signifying, but are as such not yet pointing towards any meaning outside of the musical textures themselves. Middleton's terminology seems misleading: musical gestures are material and formal but not yet signifying aspects of sounds. All symbols open up meanings, but they always have other aspects as well, which should not be confused with signification (cf. Fornäs, 1995).

Real meaning is everywhere (in words as well as in music) the result of contextually and historically situated, intersubjective interpretive practices. In a similarly hermeneutic vein, Feld (1984/1994: 86ff) talks of 'interpretive moves' of various kinds. Verbal expressions are not so completely discursive as is often believed. Words can be enumerated in dictionaries, but in living languages, their meanings have a principally irreducible polysemic openness and are ultimately dependent on their context, so that no perfectly universal and fixed meaning-units exist. Sentences and larger textual wholes (works, genres...) both extend and delimit the meaning of each of their units. The univocality of a dictionary is therefore partly deceptive, and the discursivity of verbal modes is more of a striving and a tendency than an attained fact. Words have presentational as well as discursive aspects – as does in fact music! All symbolic modes contain aspects of materiality and form as well as meaning-making and pragmatic use – only their mechanisms and relative importance differ. In poetry and pop lyrics, the 'semiotic' side is in fact often extremely important.

Conversely, music (like other nonverbal modes) does not completely lack signification or even discursivity. Music is efficient in expressing and creating feelings, through parameters like volume, beat and sound. But it is only some musical parameters that in some contexts induce 'semiotic' *jouissance*. Melodic, harmonic and formal elements in music often combine in discursive ways and semantically carry associations to extra-musical experiences or objects. Within the context of a specific genre, sounds and visual marks invite being read as sequences of reasonably separate motifs whose meaning contents are as relatively determined as in the case of words – always polysemic, never with any fixed or objectively given referential status, but still intersubjectively fairly definable in each particular context. Discourses with pretty delimited meanings are often developed in music, most obviously in TV-signatures, mood and film music, as Philip Tagg (e.g., 1990) has shown by dissecting how the meaningful units ('*musemes*') of which they consist combine into ideological discourses. To a certain extent even Bach's most abstract instrumental works mean something, and against Roland Barthes, Susan McClary (1991: 102) argues that music is as socially organized and 'condemned to meaning' as is literature – the difference being more relative than absolute. 'Meaning is not inherent in music, but neither is it in language: both are activities that are kept afloat only because communities of people invest in them, agree collectively that their signs serve as valid currency' (McClary, 1991: 21). It is true that music alone, 'in itself', possesses no meaning, but neither does a written word without its context, including its

interpretive community of readers. All symbolic modes ‘just’ offer raw material for the construction of meaning in their use by human subjects.

The more diffuse meaning aspect of music thus differs more in degree than in kind from that of words. As much as it is an rationalist mistake to think of verbality as simply a logical, discursively meaning-making machine using words as carriers of univocal references to simple real facts, it is an opposite, romanticist mistake to think of music as pure, meaning-less materiality and form. Music not only has its formal rules that can be reflected upon and used rationally – musical themes and motifs can also construct linear patterns where specific elements point towards intersubjectively shared extra-musical ideas. Symbolic orders exist within as well as beside the verbal mode. Music and images are no diffuse flows that are given shape and meaning only by the presence of words. They, too, elaborate logical and meaningful structures, though different from verbal texts.

On reflection, it seems clear that no language, not even the most arid of academic language, is completely and purely arbitrary, without any allusion or reference to sound’s iconic potentials. All language, to be evocative, has rhythms and textural properties, the more so when it seems monotonous and flat. Equally, it seems clear that no music – not even the most rhythmic, the most textural on the one hand, or the most abstract, the most ‘syntactical,’ on the other – is without a range of meanings that have become conventional, traditional, and, to a certain degree, arbitrary in relation to the iconic potentials and possibilities of the sounds through which it receives articulation and life. (Shepherd, 1993: 29)

Music can mean something. The verbal mode may have wider discursive and symbolic capacities than music or images, but wordless music is in a certain degree also ‘textually’ structured. Words conversely also contain ‘musical’ elements of iconicity, presentationality and jouissant ‘semioticity’. In spite of their prolonged historical separation, music and words still have much in common. As a depth-level of all symbolic or cultural phenomena, the ‘semiotic’ cannot be identified with Langer’s particular presentational symbolic forms, which are only more open to these archaic aspects than the discursive ones. Both discursive/presentational and symbolic/semiotic are categories that do actually not distinguish separate symbolic modes (as implied in the use of metaphors by Langer, Kristeva, Barthes and many others), but rather aspects within each of them. Symbolic modes like writing/speech/images/music should not be conflated with symbol aspects like materiality/form/meaning/pragmatics.

Yet, there is an obvious difference in degree. The meaning aspect is more predominant in verbal texts than in pure music, as literature and speech acts have developed our ability to argue discursively and form meaning in elaborate ways. In western societies, referentiality has therefore come to be associated with verbal language, while the pulses and sounds of materiality have been associated with the musical. But just like music and images are the haunting back-side of words, the alternative symbolic modes of music or images cannot be understood other than in their tense relation to these verbal modes, to or from which they

always with love-hatred turn. On the other hand, they also contain keys to understand aspects of verbal modes from which not even the most rationalized discursivity can escape.

There is a whole spectrum of materiality/form/meaning/pragmatics in verbal modes as well as in music and images, but as a result of complicated historical processes, the word and music spectra have come to be hierarchically related to each other, so that words tend to be reduced to cognitive and discursive significations while music has become used as metaphor for the Other of meaning within language, namely its nonsemantic, emotional or presentational materiality. Discursivity is like symbolicity and meaning emphasized and highly developed in verbal modes, but not confined to them. Presentationality is like semioticity and materiality a basic aspect of all symbolic modes, but more salient in the non-verbal ones. The symbolic modes share basic characteristics but are still incomparable, since each of them combines materiality, form, meaning and pragmatics in a unique way.

Discursivity is then a particular form of symbolicity that may evolve out of the presentational basis through the development of a distinct and discrete vocabulary with some linearity, abstraction, definability and translatability. Such discursivity can be understood as a kind of disciplination that pushes aside and marginalizes that which does not allow itself to be arranged in such strict forms, but it also makes possible a communicative rationality of argumentation and a self-thematizing reflexivity. If and when discursive forms within certain symbolic modes tend to close the doors to their origin and basis in the presentational aspects, they create needs for revitalization, dynamization, mobilization and flexibilization, which often turn to alternative symbolic modes that do not seem to be as subsumed under systemic goal-rationality and as dominated by the meaning aspect.

Similar conclusions apply for narrative structures of opening, tension, resolution and closure. They are in no way primarily bound to the verbal mode, even if it is true that narration is particularly well developed in speech and writing. Since music is linearly ordered and can carry meaning, it may also tell something. Each single musical phrase (as well as each bodily gesture) is potentially a narrative germ. The capability of making and interpreting narratives is not necessarily bound to any symbolic mode – neither historically nor logically. Patterns of tension and resolution are neither derived from musics nor from words, but rather inhabit all human expressive forms.

It is true that instrumental music sometimes strives away from the symbolic order associated with words, into the extra-verbal as the Other of language. This is particularly tried by some avant-garde art and jazz musicians, where this search is very often tied to a movement away from the commercial ‘vulgarity’ of ‘mass culture’. A strong logocentrism often hides in the romantic longing for the seemingly absolute freedom of wordless music: it is from a verbal prison that music appears as the immaculate Other. Pure instrumental music like jazz has not in the same intense way as rock songs had to wrestle with the relation between words and tones, with all its conventional connotations to cognition and emotion, mind and body, culture and nature, distance and proximity, meaning and sensuality, reflexivity and devotion. The flight from words is in a sense a futile strategy for reaching the depths of jouissance, since the discursive potentials of music itself easily transforms the most self-consciously anti-discursive acts into the most feeble clichés. It is also an unnecessary

strategy, since the preverbally rooted depth dimension is never absent in the materiality of the verbal order itself. The extra-verbal hides within the words, the presentational within the discursive.

However, even though meaning, form-relations and materiality are mutually dependent and coexistent in every symbolic mode, music and texts as institutionalized relative constructs weigh them slightly differently. Both fields contain the whole spectrum of symbol aspects but differently emphasized. There is therefore a rational core in the use of music (and other allegedly nondiscursive symbolic modes) to 'flee' from words and enrich them with new functions and meanings from protosymbolic underworlds. One only has to understand that there is no pure non-symbolic field anywhere outside of verbal language, not even in music!

Music and song elaborate other levels or aspects of symbolic communication, not so much in direct (but in indirect) service of discursive meaning-making. It explores other levels of signification and pull them into the signifying process, thereby expanding the symbolic level with elements fetched from the semiotic or protosymbolic order (cf. Kristeva and Lorenzer). In words, materiality often is used to serve meaning in a more univocal manner. The grain of the voice (Barthes) is then more a hindrance to understanding textual meanings the intended, preferred or implied way. A very fascinating voice first distracts us and disturbs our interpretation of what is said. Like poetry, music is much more open to other aspects of the utterance (materiality and form, 'grain' etc.) and then enter them into other ('non-discursive') signifying processes. Here, Kristeva's ideas about the continuous interplay between phenotext and genotext, or between semiotic and symbolic levels of language, is more useful than Barthes' more rigid dichotomies. There are not two stiff and wholly separate fields of meaning vs. materiality, but an ongoing signifying process in which various levels interplay, so that meaning as well as materiality is always the result of an interpretive and communicative practice.

There is music in texts and text in musics. First, music turns up in verbal texts. Texts may semantically refer to music, they may on the level of syntactic form-relations be homologous to music, and they may on the level of materiality possess a certain 'musicality', related to experiences which have been discussed in terms of a bodily, freely flowing 'jouissance'. Music is thematized in writing, and literature borrows musical form-structures or sensuality.

In the reverse direction, verbal as well as graphic textuality also appears in music. Materially, much of the 'grain' of musical voices is borrowed from that of speech. In musical transcription, music is 'textualized' by being offered a written script, again through mechanisms of homologization. In musical semantics, there is also a certain degree of discursivity in the flow of sounds. This problematizes the romantic dualism where music is simply understood as the non-discursive or non-textual 'Other' of words. In fact, words and music share similar communicative aspects and levels, even though these often contrasted symbolic modes combine and balance them differently.

Thus, the discursivity/presentationality divide (Langer) is not identical with the symbolicity/semioticity one (Kristeva) – neither can the text/music one be reduced to either of

them. Again, distinctions have to be made, to avoid the inconsistencies that result from too simple reductions of dimensions.

## Constructed but nonetheless effective

In sum, it is important to note all this *complexity of several interacting polarities*, all of which are the result of intersubjective constructions and discourses, constituted more like *genres* than like physical facts. Insights into the way words, music and images work differently are indispensable for a general understanding of culture. If music is not reduced to a simpler form of speech, it can inspire a better understanding of symbolic practices in general, by illuminating important but hidden aspects of all human communication.

The text/music dichotomy is an illusion, but it may be a necessary and productive illusion. It is a metaphor for a subtle difference *within* each symbolic mode, projecting this difference out on the relation *between* these two modes. This relation is actually no true dichotomy at all: text and music (in whatever senses) are mostly inseparably blended and they are certainly not each other's Other, except in some verbal discourses where they are used to refer to a set of polar dimensions that in fact ought to be clearly separated, such as ver-  
bality/nonverbality, visuality/aurality, discursivity/presentationality, symbolicity/semioticity, meaning/materiality, words/sounds or textuality/performance.

All these differentiations are far from absolute or universal. They are contextually bound and historically varying, as they – as all of culture – are based in ongoing intersubjective communication processes. The difference between music and text, as that between song and speech, is neither sharp nor objectively given, but, in spite of many paradoxical or hybrid examples, it still works pretty smoothly in most of our daily aesthetic practices (cf. Fornäs, 1996). Each functional, social and generic context creates a kind of interpretive community where it is pretty clear what is what. The classification of vocal sounds as meaningful words and then as either song or speech is no absolute and objective fact, but is based on interpretive communities agreeing that it is *similar enough* to ordinary language use, song or speech. A scream becomes a verbal expression when its articulation is *to a satisfying degree* interpretable in semantic terms. A vocal sound can be interpreted as a set of meaningful words if it is *sufficiently close* to ordinary language use. Spoken words are heard as song if the vocal performance has *enough resemblance* with what is normally understood as song within the implied genre. This can always be renegotiated by new utterances and new sounds, which continually modify our understanding of what is music and what is text.

My proposal is thus to understand the differences between symbolic modes like text and music neither as absolute nor as irrelevant but as processual: they are as constructed as are the symbolic modes themselves, and they result from ongoing practices that strive to keep them apart. The polarity between words and music, as one such difference, is irreducible to any single functional or essential dichotomy, but is rather a tendency upheld in some textual and musical practices. Music and text are not the two autonomous and opposing fields they often appear to be, but relative gravitational centra within the streams of human communication.

The polarization is an artificial sociocultural and ideologically charged construction, but it is still effective in cultural practices. It may also help to uncover the else hidden aspects of

both sides: by talking of textual sides of music or musical aspects of speech one can see what this same widespread metaphor hides: that 'music' is also 'textual' and that 'texts' are also 'musical'.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fornäs (1995) investigates in greater detail how these problems relate to interart studies (Clüver et al.), comparative media studies (McLuhan et al.), theories of orality and literacy (Ong, Goody et al.), of discursivity (Langer, Foucault, Ricoeur et al.) and of other levels in the symbolic order as well as in the inner subjective psyche (Lacan, Kristeva, Lorenzer et al.). Cf. Fornäs (1997) for more specific examples of the confusion of music and text both in recent music practices and in everyday terminological uses.

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