

sound intermittences
intermitências sonoras

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Abstract

This dissertation aims at establishing a theory of sound-narration. Through a conceptualization of field-recordings' practice, it surveys the process of composing sound-stories. Based on the difference between narrators and story-tellers, it investigates the potential of editing as a method of narration and presenting the piece as a part of composing it; namely, telling the story. It takes into consideration the performative aspects of acousmatic sound as a listening proposal and the consequences of the cultural context where this happens.

Keywords: Field recordings, concrete sound, narrative, story-telling, fiction, mise-en-scène, editing, acting, performance and performativity, listening.

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Introduction

As a former film student and sound designer, I became intrigued by the potential of sounds to tell a story. When I started using sounds autonomously in my work, without resorting to any other medium (such as image), I thought I could narrate a story just the same way film does: providing the events with a sequence where it would be possible to relate one thing to another, in order to give my listener sources of information clear enough to have something to hold on to, but at the same time deploying a certain level of ambiguity (that is intrinsic to sound) in order to offer the listener the possibility of creating her/his own story.

When I started Sonology Studies, I wanted to reach a better understanding of how to tell a story with sounds. This brought up the necessity to clarify my approach: to question if I expect my listener to understand the story; to think if the identity of my work, as a storyteller, depends on the meaning of those sounds and how that is relying on the interpretation that my audience will make of them. How could I tell a story non-verbally, without becoming too literal and redundant? In other words: how could it be done with just sounds? This directed my attention to the process of writing the stories, which is composing them. I had to become more aware of the process; then, I thought, those questions could be answered.

Meanwhile, through the practice of composing, I reached several (provisional) conclusions about the use of the denomination ‘sound-stories’, as I call my pieces, perhaps romantically. I wondered if I should have called them sound-narratives instead. And the need to find a name for them derives more from a necessity to understand what I do than to label it as ‘this and not that’. Narrative is, as I have learned throughout this process, a transversal concept. What I wish to do in this research project is to find out whether I can be specific enough to call my work sound-stories or sound-narratives without employing that concept in a superficial and intuitive manner. Many times I felt that I was restrained by these concepts, but before freeing myself of them I needed to understand whether and how my concepts could be validated as a practice.

Throughout these two years, I have made several pieces, all of them quite different in their approach to these concepts. I think what they mostly have in common is the fact that they depend very much on the presentational forms I chose. Each of them have different settings and numbers of speakers, and I have been trusting this phase of the work to be the

place where I clarify and specify my proposal. Presenting my pieces is the moment that the story may happen, or is given a chance to happen. However, I could discern standard procedures preceding this presentation. I could observe a *modus operandi* in approaching these sounds from the beginning, recording them in a mode that is already narrative. I also found that it was possible to endorse the editing exercise as a method. Moreover, I realized that the core of my work lies in how I relate to these sounds myself. The narrative starts in me, of course, and that is what I inevitably aim at communicating when I play my work.

For this reason, I chose to focus my study on the process of composing sound-stories. The whole process includes the recording, editing and presenting parts as equally important. Each part has its own conceptual basis, but there is a common basis as well. Each part is defined conceptually towards a practical application. I do not aim to ground my work in my own intentions but in what happens when they are played and listened to, and therefore I shall think of the consequences of my presentation strategies. However, I can only be aware of those if I am aware of what I do and how I do it. Furthermore, I should specify what I will call a diegetic concept within sound practices – an account of what the story is that is being “told” by the sound. For this, I shall orient my considerations in terms of dramaturgy. The listener hears what is played, and that is as much absence and as much presence one can get; there is not a multi-level of narrative discourse.

The first chapter is devoted to introducing a tentative theory of sound. It aims at starting a perspective on sound that I believe is crucial for understanding its potential to become narrative. I formulate a hypothesis based on the actualization of the senses and in the need of understanding these. This conjecture ends up as a mirror of a crucial narrative concept: mediation. Therefore, to record sound is already mediating. Furthermore, the sound itself has a specificity that determines the relation of the listener-recordist with it. This relationship is based in a movement from ‘sound-pulse’ towards ‘sound-percept’.

In the second chapter, I will clarify my narrative proposal, from that idea of movement, and establish its practice as a method of editing the piece. It is important to think of the differences in applying a narrative to concrete sounds, in comparison with the use of narrative in film media or even in electroacoustic music. To make my distinction clear, I will

also base the analysis in a conception of narrative within the working process, and the idea of story as a part of communicating that work.

In the third chapter, I will consider the practical possibilities of the concepts delineated thus far. Therefore, this segment is dedicated to the presentation of individual pieces, their modes and elements. In this sense, I will delineate a conception of stage and formulate a paradigm of action that encounters a detachment of film theory and moves towards a context of “enacting”. For that argument I will take into consideration three elements: the loudspeakers as the stage advocates, the sound-actors as the carriers of the concepts formulated before and, obviously, the listener as the final extremity of these articulations.

Finally, to support my arguments I will address factual examples from my pieces, not aiming at analyzing those, but only providing my reader with the possibility of identifying some concepts in what s/he hears. For this reason, I could not further establish my arguments without taking into consideration the cultural context where I have been developing my work; not only in terms of its reception but the responsibilities that arise from it.

1 – Sound

This dissertation will start with discussing a specific conception of sound, in order to directly relate it to the practices to which such a conception leads. Through a very specific consideration of sound I delineate the approach in line with it. That consideration is explained in this first chapter, and its specificity is towards sound-narration. This preliminary specification influences everything that follows; to perceive sound in a specific manner suggests recording it in a particular way and stipulates how to do it. Through a sequence of ideas, I will explain how the conditions for listening are built up, to result in a reflection that expands from sound as a ‘pulse-object’ to sound as a ‘percept-object’. In other words: from the existence of sound (the former) to the awareness of such existence (the latter).

The reason why this preliminary specification is necessary is the inherent bond between the conceptual content and the way we subsequently treat the phenomenon it designates. In my case, this means that the recognition of sound, and the relevance of such recognition, will be a key point for discussion. For that reason, this sequence of thoughts arises from what I consider an inner *perspective* of sound, all the way through to the consequences of that perspective. From the specification of a perspective, an ‘identity’ emerges. Hence, specification will be an important concept in the horizon to understand what these sounds will *become*. Henceforth, specification is defined as an act of making specific, to specify a position.¹

Furthermore, this sequence of thoughts raises questions that, in turn, point to a methodology. To hold on to the idea of internal identity, I argue that this interiority articulates the perspective. Such subjectivity delegates a potential being to sound’s own possibilities and capacities, made of boundaries. I consider sound as part of existence, both internal and external to human beings and objects; with its mysteries and comprehensions, it is an extension of society and social individuals. To clarify this, I will explore the idea that sound is an organism; something that presents itself in a manifestation of movement in nature and has its own organicity within it.

¹ The idea of ‘identity’ is far from being an absolute value. In the course of this dissertation, ‘identity’ comprises an idea of ‘specificities’ that delineate the particularity of a sound. Identity is not, in any way, related to ideas of essence or meaning.

Recording Movement

Sound is movement, and to record sound is to record movement. To aim to represent sound is assuming the possibility of possessing it. To represent may refer to a previous happening that will be reproduced. That is to say, in such an endeavor, to record sound is an attempt to capture a circumstantial phenomenon that exists in a conditional situation. In terms of acoustics, it is fundamentally true that the sound, seen as air vibration, may be finished the moment it is recorded. In this study, however, the concept of recording sound is addressed from another position. In the present argument, to record sound does not aim to represent such air vibration, or to fix it as a solid and unchangeable medium. What happens at the moment of playing the recording is not the same happening that was recorded, but a new experience of that previous event, and thus a new happening. In the context of what is commonly called “field recordings” (a term that, for now, designates the action of recording sound in a social and environmental context) to record sound is, in my practice of it, similar to an act of improvisation.¹

To improvise-record is to search and improve techniques that happen out of the combination of intuition and experience, seeking a result that will not be absolutely repeatable or controlled. Especially, it cannot be changed. It can be modified, processed and manipulated, but such actions will produce a new sound, not modifying the original. It is an interaction between the interveners: the recordist interacts with the recorder, who interacts with sound, which in turn interacts with the recordist. Moreover, such interactions might be compared to improvising with an instrument, both in terms of the learning process of adapting instrumental skills to an improvisational context, and as the inherent unpredictability of it. To record sound in this sense needs to be more a reaction than an action, adapting to the environment and conditions that derive from several origins. These origins, or points of departure, are mostly social. This is the consequence of the fundamental contemporaneity of sound. The day of tomorrow will not sound like today. Sound is in permanent transformation; its organic character emerges from its ability to respond to natural stimuli. Sound is also able to develop itself into something that can be designated as *movement*: a flow, perchance becoming a pattern – which entails the possibility of remembering. In this

¹ My practices exclude automatizations of any kind, random choices or settings where I do not “operate” the microphone.

context, although Pierre Henry and I generally have a very different approach of “sampling”, his work “Variations pour une Porte et un Soupir” (1963) is a relevant example as a development of the idea of movement within the source itself, as for instance “Etirement” and “Gymnastique”.

To record, thus, is to go after a gesture of movement and in movement, and try to prolong and preserve it through other means, which go beyond the experience itself. The action of recording sound is an imposition from a subject that aims to externalize what s/he experiences internally: audition. Sound can be recorded, but what exactly is being recorded? I argue that the recorded ‘data’ is a specification of a perspective (which has already been defined in the formation of identity); in loose analogy to the better known term “point of view” I call it a point of audition. To record is capturing a fraction, a memory, a mirror of what was heard, something like a shadow, a resemblance, or a silhouette.¹

The recorded sound is distant and external to the sound-pulse, and becomes part of the subjective experience (sound-percept). On the one hand, the sound-pulse is the sound as it is out there, a manifestation of itself. On the other hand, the sound-percept is the result of the subject experiencing the object, it is the sound as the listener perceives it. Consequently, the recording of sound happens as a *mediation* of experience, becoming an experience in itself, and can potentially create another experience. I will argue that this is what creates a sound narrative. Such mediation is a mode of imposition – the recorder between these two bodies moderates experience, raising it to another level. The sound-to-be-recorded and the sound-of-the-recording are not the same. The involvement of the subject with the recording approach is already the production of a narrative, for it is the mediation of an experience, specific to that person. As Augoyard and Torgue assert: “every individual has a maximal limit of apprehension of information that is smaller than the flow of sound sources in our environment: To perceive is to select” (2006: 124). In this line, the work of the Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr is a clear exercise in these ideas of specificity, mediation and perspective. Especially, for its characteristics, see *Sátántangó* (1994), where we travel in the same story for seven hours in order to go to each event from the perspective of every character involved. But in this case it is not just a question of perspective, the ‘repetition’ of the scenes from

¹ The idea of “point of view” is a tool for narration. Within a film context, it can determine the path that the story takes. A clear example of it is *Elephant* (2003), by Gus van Sant.

another angle is adding permanently more layers of understandability and, therefore, specificity.

What can be extracted from these fragmentary selections? Perhaps sound is nothing other than the moment of change, the temporal motion; a permanent gesture that one is unable to grasp, hold or retain. “[Sound] never does anything but approach” (Nancy, 2007: 2). In this conception, sound cannot be examined as a ‘pulse’. Instead, it should be thought of in relation to its perception. Thinking about sound as a manifestation of movement is to think of it as an extension of one’s own body, and therefore as a self-extension. In these mutations, in the modifications in movement, an organism evolves. To record is to grasp this organism, by extending one’s self towards it.

The conditional self

(...) From a state of things to a quality, from a subject to another subject or to itself (...) where it resounds while still resounding “in me”, [...] (we will return to this “inside” of the subject, we will return to nothing but that). (Nancy, 2007: 7)

The existence of sound is a condition, as part of nature, the ‘out-there’. To use a term inspired by Heidegger (1927), sound ‘being’ is an expression and confirmation of presence in time and space; a manifestation of those elements. It is a condition of existence in time and space, for being ‘in’ and ‘at’ is a premise of sound. I propose to consider such a condition (the listening condition) a *sublime* material. This choice of term is motivated by its natural-environmental situation. It assumes a layer of cosmos that cannot be observed except from the outside, at a distance that exposes one’s inability to concretely and absolutely grasp sound as an object. The experience of hearing the sound while being aware of the inability to grasp it, makes the experience sublime. To think of sound as sublime elucidates the approach to recording, by identifying the uneven relationship between the interveners.¹

This relationship is based on the idea of a sound-pulse *becoming* a sound-percept. Whereas a sound-pulse can still be considered in terms of a factual occurrence, a sound-

¹ It is important to assert that there are no sublime ‘things’, but experiences that generate the idea of it. For reference, see Kant’s Critique of Judgement (1790). See also Augoyard and Torgue (2006; 117-123) for a description of the “aesthetic effect” Sharawadji, which is also related to the experience of the sublime.

percept is subjective evidence of that occurrence. On this account, sound must be investigated as an *immaterial substance*, instead of a material issue. The material status, conversely, is equivalent to the sound-pulse. To think of sound as material is to consider the recorded sound an absolute identity. Instead, I claim sound to be a fragmented form of accessing the experience of sound itself.

So far, this conception of the immateriality of sound establishes a main layer upon which other layers will be developed. This immateriality still contains a *body*; yet, because it is a body in movement, it is ungraspable. Dealing with sound from the perspective of a natural condition, a ‘being in there’ (out there), introduces sound as existing in an omnipresent active and ongoing situation. The observation of a manifestation presents the situation, a phenomenon willing to be experienced and only existing once experienced. Hence it ‘presents’, as distinct from ‘representing’. It is not regarding or representing something else. This manifestation has its own cycle and development; it is part of an organic whole that resembles the configuration of an object. To experience it is possible once the subject is part of the same moment: sound is a manifestation of time and space that happens by means of experience.

Yet, the experience is external to what is experienced, but it is internal to the subject who experiences it. In other words, the sound-percept experience is external to the sound-pulse itself, since the sound-percept is an internalization of the sound-pulse. The sound-pulse becomes sublime once it has been extracted from its own time and space, to become a ‘percept’ of that fragment of time and space. Such fragment, hence, a sound-percept, is a condition of a self-perceiver.¹

The idea of ‘immaterial substance’ is an oxymoron. To clarify this oxymoron the emphasis should remain on the idea of an organism as a body that implies a natural cycle, even though its content is, in its core, immaterial. But how can sound be an organism? To think of immaterial substance helps to further develop the idea of organism. This paradox makes it possible to think of sound as a manifestation of nature, a creature on its own. No sound is a fact to be taken for granted, because it occurs and changes over time. It resides in

¹ “Drone” music is, for instance, generally an effective example of sound ‘pulses’ that become ‘percepts’ as a condition of a ‘self’. The long exposition to the drones and their (usually) continuous movements create perceptual shapes in my imagination, which will develop the sounds beyond its individual elements (pulses) into something more articulated and specific in terms of individual experience. Inevitably, LaMonte Young is a useful reference for these experiences.

nature, but variably. ‘Sound as organism’ is not conceived on a metaphoric level; the conception merely assumes a sound-object (the audible component of any given object) as a natural-animate substance. Its animate nature is in opposition to what is usually considered a frozen object, to be found at any time, under any circumstances, mathematically. This is how acoustics usually treat the sound-object. That opposition establishes sound as a substance, although its movement and organicity are immaterial.

The best way to understand this is to consider sound as an organic *situation*. It exists in its own development and growth. If it is thought of only when experienced, it is because the experience of it is part of its organism, and also a consequence and evidence of it. A sound organism is a body of immaterial gestures that are organic as opposed to static. This experience does not happen on a meta-level, as it is not the experience that dictates the substance itself. In fact, the idea of the sublime expresses precisely the segregation between sound-pulse and sound-percept. Thus, the subjective character of sound sustains the idea of immateriality, in that the being of sound, the ‘sound-being’, is an extension of the ‘perceiver-self’. These two ideas together, although apparently contradictory, are based on a self-extension: for sound to exist only once and when it is experienced. It is to be regarded in the material world as an extension engaged by experience, depending on a self (‘-percept’). Self-extension means that the one self is extended to the object in order to grasp it. Therefore, an immaterial organism relates to an object that only happens inside the subject, and grows inside her/him. Sound happens as a consequence of perception – what is actually heard is not an object but the consequence of an articulation. This is the common relation established between the transmitter and the receiver, just as a story told exists only as a consequence of a subjective mediation, because it is then communicated. This model transmitter – receiver is not based in one direction communication, as neither intervener has a fixed role, but exchanges ‘positions’ too.

Yet, this does not confirm that a sound organism comprises a system, because sound still carries neither responsibility nor expectation of being perceived. Sound does not contain a structure, because the perception of it is not organized in terms of a system, but in terms of sensations. A system is, therefore, an *a posteriori* result of analysis, not a mirror of existence. Still, from the point of the receiver, one incorporates morphological aspects that deal with certain features, structures and functions equivalent to a gestural body. Incidentally, such

attributes have to be taken into consideration as a movement of witness, the testimony of evidence, and thus subjective.

With all these ideas in mind, we can now return to the issue of recording. To record is a relationship based on the need for constant *actualization* of an interaction. To interact is to absorb and give away new features of information, the maintenance of both sides in permanent change. It may be possible that these features can be organized into structures and observed in terms of functions. But these will only mean something if sound is scrutinized in terms of a body with organs. Instead, the conception of sound that is proposed in the following writing is one of a “body without organs” (Deleuze, 2004). Succinctly, the concept of a body without organs – which under this conception could be also ‘organism without organs’ – suspends the functionality of a system and entails an unstable/non static being, without a necessary function. If function is an explanation of existence, to be present is already a function *per se*, the potential of this presence. For, being does not require having a function, instead it requires only presence and movement. The ideas of movement and being are crucial for the following chapters. To follow this path of a body without organs, one could consider that sounds are like little muscles: sheer force and motion. Instead of being something, then, sound is always *becoming*, in a process that never results in something absolute, but *is the process of becoming itself*.¹

Towards sound-sensation

The ultimate premise of the present study is to consider sound to be a *sensation*: something between a feeling (emotion) and a thought (knowledge). In this perspective, sensation is a *hint*, an indication of existence, but not necessarily justifiable, understandable or tangible. The movement of these hints, through an ephemeral certainty, reaches sensation. Analogically, the ‘present’ time is ephemeral: at the moment it happens, it is gone. In this sense, sound is a permanent update of the senses, being always outdated. Hereafter, I work from the premise that sound is movement, movement is sensation, hence, sound is sensation. Sound is a sensation that results from experience.

¹ ‘To become’ here is already related to Deleuze’s concept of becoming, which will be brought to discussion later in this chapter.

The understanding of what a sensation is and why sensation is, in the end, all that sound can communicate to a listener, requires accepting the absence of assurance mentioned above: no sound is to be taken for granted, therefore one can never be sure of most factors that are implied in the understandability of it. One can only be sure of one's own experience of it. On that account, movement can be approached by means of hints. What are these hints? For now, I define hints as a transitory impression that resembles a gesture. Furthermore, sensation emerges from the conception of the ideas of *becoming*, *organism* and *matter* as one and the same thing. Thoughts are sequential and complementary; they become one another. The being-organic-matter is the sound-object that the listener senses. Now it becomes possible to grasp the fragments of the phenomenon to compose the experience back again, on account of mediation.

From this perspective, these impressions of sound turn it into a distinct form of communication, because of sound's unpredictable behavior as well as the uncertainty of its source, whether in terms of object or location. The senses bounce between the organic being and the immaterial substance. The difference is the fragment that presents and links the perception of the motion of time. To accept this difference is the first step to reckon sound as a sensation. But then, what is difference? Why sensation?

Difference becomes merely a relative measure of sameness and, being the product of a comparison, it concerns external relations between things. (Stagoll, 2010: 74)

Difference occurs in time. It is not concerned with sameness or variety, but with a relation of understanding. As suggested before, the perception of an object is based on a permanent actualization of the senses. This actualization will establish comparisons between 'now' and 'before', and it is based on the oscillation of these senses out of which chances of recognition and drafts of identity are shaped. The understanding of the 'object' is a result of these comparisons and recognitions. If one considers sound to represent, it can only do so as an aftereffect of this oscillation, when the sound "becomes an object of representation in relation to some identity" (Stagoll, 2010: 75). The concept of *becoming* is helpful to assimilate such conjecture. Becoming is "the pure movement evident in changes between particular events" (Stagoll, 2010: 26). Sensation is an idea, a guess of perception, the awareness of that moment,

the permanent restart of our senses facing continuously new information, a stream of consciousness. Nevertheless, it does not represent the identity of objects; it is the communication of the objects themselves, in one-self's perspective.

The witness of sound

So far, to listen is to corroborate the existence of sound. It does not mean that sound only exists if heard by a subject, but it definitely does not exist 'in' the subject if not heard by him/her. It happens without depending on it, but does it really happen without a subject to actualize it? Is it possible to formulate the specification of a perspective without the witness of it? If not experienced, sound does not become an extension of a self. Therefore, its manifestation would not become a witnessed gesture. The search for a specification of such an extension is the main argument of the following chapters. These concern narrative and storytelling as specifications of the mediation of sound into sound-stories. To specify and to mediate are possible synonyms in different stages of the process.

Syntheses of consciousness

In what sense does it matter to consider sound as an organic movement that leads to sensations? What difference does such a conception make in terms of practice? This organic being that sound is gains its influence by determining the listening effect. The discussion of sound in these terms imposes considerations that belong not only to the domain of ontology, but especially in an analytical circle. However, this analysis is no longer investigating acoustics or spectra-morphologic terms. If one may examine any morphology of this sound, it must be in terms of understanding its nature: the development of its being in relation with the listening act. Moreover, the nature of this 'being' is not an organization of forms, but the understanding of these forms. In other words, it concerns the development of these forms themselves rather than the way they are developed.

The issue is how sound is what it is, how it results in certain effects, and moreover, what it is beyond its acoustic and musical features. Because sound is by far the most important concept of this study, it is important to consider the heritage of "musique concrète", but in a different perspective. In this context, a concrete sound refers to some sort

of “foley” sound, but without the visual reference that foley is usually associated with in its cinematic use.¹

From now on, sound is the audible counterpart of a subject, in a space at a certain time, to which references are ascribed afterwards. Such references come from intuition and memories, reconstructing something that, as a social entity, one has experienced before. However, such reconstructions do not interdict the subject from new experiences, new perspectives or specifications. The new experience is still a new experience, but never without judgments from our previous experiences. The approach of sound is not only concerned with finding the sound itself ‘out there’, but also with bringing its context out. When a sound is used in a composition, the interest is not primarily in its resonance, but with the way it relates to other sounds and how it evolves in that relationship – which is most of all a relationship with the listener. Moreover, the sounds are not an exclusively aesthetic experience, but an issue content as well. Sound contains meaning; even referential meaning.

What Pierre Henry does in “Variations pour une Porte et un Soupir” (1963) is to liberate the sound from the specific meaning the word “door” has. He uses it as a sample that will be transformed in something else. This is a common practice within Electroacoustic Music. Nevertheless, when a sound carries context, it is not in the scope of musical/reduced listening any longer. In analogy with ‘augmented reality’, it is an ‘augmented listening’ mode. This term is relevant because the issue here is the liberation of meaning, and not the liberation of sound. In other words, contextualized sound liberates meaning. To liberate meaning is to underline the creation of new meanings, in order to fulfill the need for understanding the sound’s content. For example, I would not call the sound “door”, but bring the door’s surroundings to the piece.

Every sound carries potential meaning – every sound enfolds content. The validity of that meaning is not in question, but the attribution of it. Also, the content is not a single identity, but a multiplicity of possibilities. A concrete sound is a finding in nature. It is through it that possible meaning emerges. Therefore, the streaming of consciousness will be formulated as a method. To stream consciousness is, thus, to conceive an imagined context for the sound: to get acquainted with a contextualized sound, to sense its nature. Sound-wise, to

¹ “Foley” is the film technique of “dubbing” actions, ambiences and other background information in a studio. It was named after Mr. Foley, the pioneer in the early days of film industry.

stream consciousness is not to produce meaning, but to provide the prospects for meaning to emerge – just as in the narrative proposal I am about to put forward.

The idea of nature includes an organism that holds a routine in itself – in both senses of the word: a daily cycle and a choreography. The observation of this choreography will be the point of departure, leading to an exercise of what I will later explain as *focalization*. Focalization is a central concept within narrative studies, and its pertinence within these sound studies will be further developed in the next chapters. For now, it is only necessary to understand it as a filter that defines the perspective from which communication arises. The ear and the microphone are filters, as they shape a certain frame of the sound, the primal conditioning of the possibility to grasp the sense of it. To focalize is not necessarily a conscious act for an addressee, but it is indispensable for the emitter. It is a form of mediation of experience, which has to be carried from the ‘speaker’ to the ‘listener’. To mediate the sound is a narrative attitude, which brings us closer to the subject of this study: *sound-stories*. Hence, I will suggest and justify the idea that sound is inherently a medium of story telling.

At first sight it might seem that this conception of sound is contradictory with the practice of ‘sound-stories’ themselves. How can sound be considered a body without organs, nonfunctional, a condition of (its own) existence, immaterial, and still be the working material and used as medium, with tools and artifacts, subject to structures and categories? In the following chapters I will answer these questions. The answers become possible within the framework of narrative, as a proposal to grasp the possibility of understanding sound-sensation.

2 - Introduction of a method

Every day has its own story, one single minute would take years to tell, the slightest gesture, the subtle stripping of a word, a syllable, a sound, not to mention thoughts, which are very arduous things; to think of what one thinks, or thought, or is thinking, and which thought is that which thinks the other thought - the task is endless. (Saramago, 1980¹)

This chapter is concerned with the practices of the conception of sound exposed in the previous chapter. This reflection refers exclusively to the process of composition, rather than to an analysis of results. As such, this chapter is devoted to the second stage of the process of ‘writing sound-stories’. Effectively, once sound has been recorded (the first stage), the approach reaches another level, formally designated as the editing process. The starting point of ‘editing a piece’ as a working process is based on a film theory background – for ‘editing’ – the (visual) post-production of a film, is one of the technical languages that film history has produced.

Whereas in the first stage of the working process (to approach and record sounds) certain techniques can be developed and improved, it is in the editing phase that a methodology can be enlarged. The two stages of the work are complementary. It is through the practices of editing that the recording techniques are expanded – in clarifying the limitations of recording sound and in the options that contribute to the elasticity required in the editing session. It is in the editing stage of the process that the idea begins to acquire a shape. If recording is the first approach to sounds, the gathering of sounds, the editing session is the moment when these sounds become a potential story-teller. Accordingly, it is necessary to look at the methodology of the editing process, since it is only there that the idea emerges and acquires a form. This can be seen as the *morphology* of the process. The possibility of understanding such a morphology-in-becoming will call forth the concept of narrative.

The editing process is based on the idea of narrativity in that it seeks to ascribe narrativity to a sound medium. Mediating sound through narrative leads, later on, to the concept of sound-stories. It is necessary, therefore, to clarify the idea of narrative within this

¹ My translation.

context. These two concepts, narrative and sound-story, constitute the horizon of the following pages, surveying the potential of sound editing as a tool of narrative, which ultimately creates a potential story. For this reason, hereafter ‘editing’ and ‘narrating’ will be indivisible.

2.1 - Narrative as a proposal

The narrative form sets up a confrontation between the limits of a sense of humanity confined to the individual and the recognition by others that defines it in poststructuralist thought. (Bal, 1997: 23)

The need to discuss narrative within the context of sound studies arises from the belief that narrative is a logical consequence of human articulation and interaction with the surrounding. As much that is of a subjective character, narrative happens as a sequence of logics established in the relationship between listener and teller, which is it has in common with any kind of receptor and emitter in the communication mode. I argue that, for the context of the sound work under scrutiny here, narrative is what establishes these logics: a strategy that consists in *telling* the sounds that are no longer mere ‘sound-pulses’ but a result of experience (‘sound-percepts’). Narrative is of a subjective nature because it results from the experience of a subject with an object. What the teller or the listener tells or listens is not the object, but how s/he experienced it; *being-with* it.

Suggesting narrativity

[Narrative] constitutes a major reservoir of cultural baggage that enables us to make meaning out of a chaotic world and the incomprehensible events taking place in it. (Bal, 2002: 10)

Narrative, within an inventive sonic context, is a proposal. The experience of sound is based on suggestions. There is no intention of confirming the piece to be a narration, for such sense of narrative is of an intersubjective character (Bal, 2002). None of the concepts is expected to belong to the object itself as its outcome; they are only a model. It may happen that an audience understands some of these intentions, or even that they are effective, but the work will not depend on it.

Intentions would no longer be a concept, but ideas somehow transposed to objectivity. Distinctions between concepts and objects have been discussed for very long. The perspective defended here is that once a concept becomes an object, it is no longer a

concept. Moreover, concepts are tools (to do something with), rather than labels (to describe or identify things with). The experience itself might relate back to concepts, but there is no such thing as conceptual objects. Narrative is the concept, but the piece itself is autonomous and extrinsic to it.¹

The narrative approach evokes the cultural baggage of the listener. Also, it is inherent to the backstage part of the work: it is the chosen method for making choices and taking directions. Consequentially, narrative is the structure that holds the parts together. Like a red thread, it coordinates events to display a logic of causality which does not necessarily belong to them originally. This articulation is not even relevant for the sake of its external logic, but an attempt to make the act of listening understandable from one perspective, without it being the only one. The listening status is, at this moment, the act succeeding the recording moment, in which the sounds acquire the possibility of sharpening a perspective. It is not the act of listening to the piece itself in the play.

The paradigm of movement

The most important instance of sound is common to narrative: the perception of time. In the previous chapter, sound comprised the ideas of being, organism and matter as one and the same thing. I suggested these ideas to form a paradigm of movement. Here, it matters that time is the paradigm of movement for both sound and narrative. In this phase, movement occurs within the notions of happening, sense and structure. Happening comprises *being*; sense comprises the immediate confirmation of its existence, and structure establishes this existence in terms of consistency, in a logical manner (mediation). This amounts to arguing that this movement is, at this point, a sequence of mental activities towards *understanding* (of perception).

Whereas I divide such movement into happening, sense and structure, in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* one finds a hierarchical theory of knowledge, where sensibility, understanding and reason are temporally sequential and priority implies primacy:

¹ This discussion of the relationships between objects and concepts can be traced back to Gottlob Frege, who defines concepts as functions and objects as values, extensions of functions (Beaney, 1997). Bal also claims that "to use concepts to label something" is not very useful, unless "they can help to articulate an understanding" of it (2002: 22-23). In this context, I find Bal's description of "theoretical object" (Bal, 2002: 185) very elucidating. I will return to this term below.

All our knowledge begins with sense, proceeds thence to understanding, and ends with reason (...) But if we consider these principles of pure understanding in relation to their origin, we shall find them to be anything rather than knowledge from concepts (...) if we could not rely on the assistance of pure intuition (...), or on that of the conditions of a possible experience. (Kant, 1991: 211-213)

To a limited extent, parallels can be established between my three terms and these elements of movement. The main argument, so far, is that everything is movement: to think is movement, and the process of thinking happens through motion. Above that, sensation is a dominant faculty. Yet, structuring (narrating) sound requires a model of description specific to sonic resources. I formulate that specificity on the basis of this idea of movement. To find a proper model for sonic narration is an attempt to make sense of how sound takes part in a possible understanding of nature (the ‘out-there’) and, moreover, what nature might be in sonic terms. Narrative, being a human condition, is one possible way to grasp it. Understanding sound must occur within the same path as logical thought in movement.

The difference between my paradigm (happening, sense and structure), that stands for movement as the producer of understanding, and Kant’s schema (sensibility, understanding and reason) lies not only in the terminology used. Whereas Kant suggested sensibility to be in the first stage, I suggest happening is the first stage. His argument is that sensibility is the primordial intuition, where perception occurs, as the first and immediate contact with the object. However, I consider the moment of sensing as a condition *per se*. For that reason, ‘sensing’ is not the first occurrence in knowledge. The first occurrence is the occurrence itself, the possible experience. The happening is exposed to the senses, to sensibility, to sensing the occurrence. In this logic, occurrence and experience are in the same stage, they happen at the same time; they are synchronized.

After this point, reason is the second phase, as understanding these senses and, consequentially, structuring them. Such structure is a construction of sequential and logical organization of the facts. Indeed, it is from the action of structuring (as the third stage of ‘acknowledgment’) that reason – in Kant’s conception of reason as the production of thought – potentially occurs. In sound perception, this movement is equivalent to the acoustic occurrence, the self-absorbing of the occurrence, and the rational acknowledgment of the sound-object. This I suggest through the distinction between sound-pulse and sound-percept.

The paradigm of movement is relevant for narrative apprehension because, like narration, movement emerges from an irreversible exposition to facts: once events occur, there is no point of return. The scene is not the same any longer, and without being other, its impact is rebuilding itself constantly – restoring thoughts. It is based on this irreversibility that I will later develop the concept of ‘frame’. Also, the idea of no return lies at the root of narrative theory; it is what usually leads the sequence. In cinematic media, narrative has been strongly plot oriented. Once the inciting incident occurs, all the efforts are made to erase its consequences and return to ‘normality’. However, it is not a moment of return, or I would consider it a false return, as things do not remain the same; they only retrieved their balance. An inciting incident is the conflict that triggers the transformation of the normal world into a magical world, where conflicts and struggles challenge the hero in his search for a return to the normal world. That journey must leave its marks; therefore the return is to a modified world.

The work of filmmaker David Lynch is an example of how narrative can be a proposal. In some of his movies, the audience is placed in the condition of connecting each scene according to her/his own need for intelligibility.¹ Film narrative has a whole tradition of ‘causality’ and ‘verisimilitude’ that has been subjugating the audience into a one-way logical journey. Fortunately, there are several examples of films (and filmmakers) that are free of these conventions, in different ways. Michelangelo Antonioni has some examples in his filmography where the storyline is not committed to this kind of reason.² In another way, there is also a ‘new scene’ to which the critics refer as ‘indie’, initially due to their production circumstances (low budget productions and ‘independent’ of big producers/sponsorships), but nowadays I believe it has become a genre for telling stories. Even though they are based on archetypal constructions of the story, in the sense of structuring the events according to an intelligible sequence; the content of the stories is not confined to a sense of linear normality, which means that the journey from normal to magical world and back establishes its logic in an internal manner.³ Furthermore, there is a whole scene in avant-garde cinema, descended from both the surrealistic and futuristic movements, what is nowadays called “video art”, that

¹ See, for example, “Inland Empire” (2006)

² See, for example, “The Eclipse” (1962).

³ See, for example, Kelly Reichardt’s “Old Joy” (2006) and Miranda July’s “The Future” (2011).

explore other conventions to narrate ideas that are not necessarily related to the heritage of film history embedded in our culture.¹

Sound-wise, this journey does not take place. The need to restore the balance of the normal world is absent. There is no need of return; on the contrary, it is about not returning. The fundamentally performative aspect of a sound work is already deprived of normality: everything is exceptional in itself, for the organic origins of sound are replaced by technologic sources (organic sources vs. speakers), in time (present sounds of the live-moment vs. recorded sounds played back) and in the event itself (the moment I listen to is not the moment where I am). To narrate sound, most of all, is about sound *becoming* narrative, “the becoming which divides itself infinitely in past and future and always eludes the present” (Deleuze, 2004: 8). It is the articulation of the narrator’s perception of sound with the mediation of that experience, which is a proposal itself. To propose is, therefore, to suggest a *perspective* of understanding.

The question at stake in the comparison between the paradigm of movement described here and the paradigm of understanding proposed by Kant is that both are based on a theory of *actualization of senses* – becoming suggestions. Beyond that, a paradigm of movement reinforces the main ideas that have defined sound narrative: sensation, mediation and understanding. As Sheerin sums up:

The mind transforms the raw data given by our senses through mediating synthesis by the imagination of this manifold and through the judgments of the understanding by way of its concepts; in this manner what is given to us by sensibility can be thought through the understanding. (Sheerin, 2009: 25)

Before deepening the frame of mind that narrative acquires in a sonic context, I need to clarify the dual dimension of this narrative approach. Not two different approaches, but two standpoints: internally, the idea of a point of no return as a succession of events, within a temporal sequence that has no other moment than the present, yet referring to the past; and

¹ Andy Warhol is a well known example, as well Dziga Vertov’s “Man With a Movie Camera” (1929). To my own preference, Chantal Akerman, Luis Buñuel and Sally Potter are examples of diverse models of narrative. Another example of an approach where the narrative can be a consequence of the viewer’s articulation of information is the American experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage.

an external approach, comprising the idea that narrativity is a consequence of structuring the senses and results in a system of codes inside an articulation that is outer to the events themselves.

The narrative, then, is a proposal to edit the piece, and at the same time the 'editing strategy' is what generates that proposal. In the end, the editing session is like a narrator, a textual function.

2.2 - Considerations on editing

In chapter one, I described a particular conception to approach sound towards a methodology that is not based exclusively on aesthetic choices. I argued for the use of so-called ‘concrete sound’ to be handled on the basis of its potential content, in order to create a context where meaning may occur. To edit the recorded sounds is the narrative construction, aiming to carry certain sensations for a story to emerge. I approach the editing phase of a sound-story with the presentation mode on the horizon. Effectively, the framework starts by defining a series of *textual functions*.

Towards a method

The editing process is my method of sound composition. In general terms, these compositions are comprised of recorded sounds that are, afterwards, organized by groups. These groups are defined according to the number of loudspeakers that will be used in the performance of the piece. Normally, the sequence follows a path of introduction, development and conclusion, in order to propose a *fictional location* to the listener. Every piece carries a main subject or idea, depending on the nature of the sounds recorded and grouped. It may happen that different sounds in kind become part of the same group, as much as the ones of similar (if not the same) kind become part of different groups.

Nevertheless, the pieces work towards questions that are not repeatable, questions that make sense for specific ideas and materials. Each of them is aiming to find a method that is not systematic. Each piece searches for its own mechanism, in a unique way, and hence, the method is committed to consider the movement of the piece itself – the organism within each sound. To consider sound an organism in movement leads me to question the possibility of this movement to emerge in the piece as well. Every movement and organism is singular, and so is the process that deals with it. Cruz says something of this order:

The emergence of textual meaning requires the anticipatory structure of comprehension, being therefore the result or the effect of the dialogue of questions and answers established between the text and the reader's horizon of expectations. (Cruz, 2003: 12)¹

¹ My translation.

I argue that the “anticipatory structure of comprehension” entails the conception of sound formulated in the previous chapter. However, the idea of meaning is the most problematic to treat, and comes into the discussion within two possibilities: either the listener is expecting a textual meaning, or the composer is aiming at the dialogue to be an effect. Both questions lead to issues of intentionality, of which I will come to talk about in a later chapter.

The pieces aim to create sensibilities, producing senses, which indeed implies building expectations from the beginning. To a certain extent, these expectations must be introduced progressively, in order to become the listener’s own expectations as well. In other words, the path should follow the need of understanding, in order to go along with the listener’s own discovery. Editing builds the path of these expectations towards the confirmation of sensations. Perhaps, these sensations produce meaning, but only in terms of mediation. Here, to mediate equals the narration principle. Even if it lacks a systematic methodology, there is certainly a pattern of development that can be discerned, and such a pattern is based on mediation. In its turn, mediation shapes a perspective upon which a new experience can *happen again*.

Setting a sound-story

(...) rather than being the aim of analysis, structure is a tool. It can help point out elements and relations in the object under analysis, but this identification is not the end of analysis, nor is it an indication of its correctness or objectivity. (Meelberg, 2006: 6)

On a primary level, the setting deals mainly with what should come ‘when’ and from ‘where’ (from which loudspeaker, in practical terms). However, a setting is not necessarily a structure in the formal sense of the word. Most of all, it is an idea to be carried along during the *montage*, to build a message that, after all, does not aim to be deciphered or decoded. The setting creates the context, the *fictional location*. To structure the piece is an attempt at building such a location. Consequentially, roles have to be defined in order to begin the editing session.

These initial definitions shape the narrative mode, similar to the genre of narration. The session begins by aligning the sounds in a certain *position*, to resemble the moment when

the sounds were recorded. Position here refers to which loudspeaker the sounds are assigned to, a procedure to be explained in the third chapter: staging fiction. However, at this point each loudspeaker will have its own track. Once the link between the previous phase (recording) and the editing session has been established, certain qualities emerge from the sounds. These qualities determine the roles of each track, creating an idea of sections that will, step by step, develop the sense of context. Mostly, these qualities unfold new possibilities. Progressively, the sounds start to be dissociated from their original roots, to become a new material. These possibilities emerge from the decontextualization of the sounds, and it results in the possibility to create conditions for new relationships. Sounds from different contexts are now joined. As new material, they may acquire different specifications and be associated to other references/sources. Editing as a method suggests defining roles for each sound, in order to attribute to every sound, or groups of sounds, a feature.

The conception of montage has been related to narratology. Montage is the articulation of the events in terms of its chronology. However, in a fictional framework, this is not a historical approach to the chronology of events. At least, not in a continuous manner. Rather, this articulation is a partial ordering that enlightens one's perspective on them. The elected method of montage defines the style of the narrative. There are many styles, but these would still have in common a specific manner of narration for each of them, while some particular aspects may differ. The point of discussing one or several models should go, therefore, towards the specification of a proper model for sound narration.

Establishing hints

For such model, it should be possible to observe and analyze a *modus operandi* in the process of building a chronology. The emphasis should be on the possibility of a pattern, rules and techniques that define what is adequate or can be adopted as systematic in sonic terms.

In this regard, Doane suggests the following:

The ineffable, intangible quality of sound – its lack of the concreteness which is conducive to an ideology of empiricism – requires that it be placed on the side of the emotional or intuitive. If the ideology of the visible demands that the spectator understands the image as a truthful representation of reality, the ideology of audible

demands that there exist simultaneously a different truth and another order of reality for the subject to grasp. (Doane, 1985: 55)

Within film narrative, the editing process of a film has been subjected to extensive discussions. For instance, in the previous chapter, the topic of “stream of consciousness” could have referred to Eisenstein’s theory of montage. The so-called “montage of attractions” presupposes that “units of impression combined into one whole could be used to introduce a new level of tension into the aesthetic experience which would produce [unprecedented levels] of emotional saturation” (Cook, 1996: 143). I stress that such “emotional saturation” has directly to do with the need for understanding the fragments that are now combined, which is the goal of montage. It does not depend on a specific model of narration, as the examples provided above; it is a consequence of exposition to media. Nevertheless, I contend that in this sound context, it will be more a question of “intuitive saturation”, as Doane suggested, than of interpretation as happens in film.

Long exposures to fragments lead to judgments of comprehensibility. In that sense, some strategies are common to standard film editing language and the editing of sound scenes proposed here. To edit is mainly based on establishing, first of all, points of reference. However, film exposes the events in an emotional manner, because it shows the characters’ feelings and their vulnerability. Instead, sound is a proposal of suggestions, which will point to the listener’s intuition. I further develop these points of reference into the idea of *hints*. To put it succinctly, a point of reference gives a basis upon which hints emerge and comprehension will be tested. In relation to hints, the idea of a hierarchy of sounds begins to be inevitable. Such hierarchy is ruled by either the need for realism or the absence of it. These choices define the listener’s posture in relation to the fragments. Consequently, *intelligibility* is one of the common arguments for film and sound editing. Intelligibility is applied on two different levels: to understand the nature of the material (for example, realistic or surrealist), and, once the frame is defined, to understand the fragments in a logic of relationships and articulations of ideas. The concept of intelligibility engenders other notions, such as continuity and individuality. These notions will be further developed when applying the idea of narrative to sound practices. For now, the point is to apply strategies of editing to compose these sounds together.

Molds of organization

Every piece starts with a single sound. More than any idea or intention, it is always a sound that originates and triggers the start of the story. The process of writing a sound-story begins with the curiosity to imagine a chart, sounds that belong together (or not), which have something in common towards the sense of that communication. From this initial sound, an idea appears. In general, the intention is to bring the original experience to the listeners in the stage, now mediated. The finding of this sound is usually circumstantial; it is, indeed, a finding: something that calls for attention while going/doing/staying in some place or situation.

To organize these findings yields the chance of sorting the layers upon which ideas are built. For instance, it enlightens functions for the sounds in terms of a model of presentation as well: how to introduce every sound in order to give the feature it plays. This delineation is what defines the hierarchy of the time sequence. To organize these layers and hierarchies in molds enables the observation of what narrative does: to carry the experience filtered or mediated by the subject who experienced it. For this, I have organized the following possible sources, which later will also become the providers of those *hints*:

- Static; - moving; - imagined; - occasional, - hidden.

I observed such possibilities while doing some sound walks and field recordings. Usually, all these sources happen as a whole experience; they are only empirical divisions, not factually divided sources. ‘Static sources’ are those of a sound existing in the place despite of social conditions (time of the day, day of the week, etc.). It is a condition of the location, as it exists there unassisted; only variations occur. Thus, the perception of the listener is one of arrival: the sound comes to the listener as s/he arrives at the location. This location may be precise or not, meaning that one might hear the sound without being in its exact location, but also approaching it or passing by it.

The ‘moving sources’ are all those representing some kind of instability. They belong to the location as much as static sources; however they may not be found unconditionally. They may depend on the time of the day or other kind of arrangement, mostly social.

‘Imagined sources’ refer to things that one does not see, but only hears. Therefore, an attempt at ‘objectifying’ the sound is made. They may arrive from a distance so that one can only wonder about their origins, and therefore imagine them.

‘Occasional sources’ usually generate all the others. In this sense, something occasional appeals to closer attention, triggers curiosity, demands a posture of more careful listening of the surroundings. ‘Occasional’ might also be the moment when the sound is heard for the first time. It deals with a sociological context, but there is a somewhat incidental aspect that adds to these findings a special character, perhaps potentially fictional. They are related to events that occur likely by chance. They do not belong to the location unconditionally, but may happen within certain contexts, or only sometimes.

Finally, ‘hidden sources’ concern those that require a search. They either need more attention in the listening strategy, or devices that increase the ability of audition – such as contact microphones, hydrophones, or the simple action of listening closer to sources or objects, which I designate as ‘listening with the whole body’.

To organize the sound sources in groups helps defining, in the editing session, the roles for each sound. This does not mean that the sound source of a recorded sound has to remain in the same role in the narrative. However, keeping the same typology of source or changing it is what defines the role and the importance of that sound in the piece. It is this typology that, ultimately, defines the hierarchy of editing sounds.

Sections, roles, tasks – towards a non-systematic procedure of setting

I have previously suggested that the editing phase of a piece entails an act of narration. As such, the editing session would be the narrator of the story, and a narrator is the textual function (Bal, 1997: 16). The central question of theorizing sound editing would be, then, the possibility of analyzing the process of editing sound in a way similar to when one deals with texts. This means to grasp it in terms of a grammar, syntax and content. However, such content would have to be considered not in terms of meaning but in terms of understandability. The concern is not with the significance of these sounds, but how they become significant. In other words, how they became what they are, instead of questioning what their existence is about. To extend the text analogy, the concern is about how the words become sentences (in relation to one another), instead of what verbs are used or what they signify.¹

¹ The idea of discussing what an object is about instead of what the object is leads Susan Sontag to write her article “Against Interpretation”. This hypothesis will be approached again, in the chapter “on reception”.

To think of sentences supports the idea of expectations, inasmuch as generating these expectations aims at involving the listener with sound-generated suggestions. These suggestions provide hints about the events, culminating in the streaming of consciousness discussed earlier. Also, sound compositions deal with time notions in a different manner than grammatical tenses. There is no tense perception comparable to past, present, future. There are no such things as flashbacks, synchronisms or asynchronisms.

The main function one can identify in the process is to provide these hints to the listener on a permanent basis. These hints are necessary because they constitute threads to retain traces of understandability, which manifest the possibility of the narrative proposal. I have mentioned that hints are transitory impressions resembling ideas and producing sensations. It is through these transitions that consciousness flows, for “consciousness comprises both lived experientiality and intellectual attempts to deal with experience” (Fludernik, 2005, 36). The function of these hints is to create the flow: they are what develops the piece into a narrative and defines its specificity. However, hints are not structured beyond doubt. The concept belongs crucially to the idea of an organism, deriving from sensation, but most of all these hints are necessary because of the extra-textual aspects of sound.

Nonetheless, it is possible to formalize some notions of editing as a method. Again, an organism will not be regarded in terms of its functions, tasks or mechanisms executed. Instead, it should be considered in terms of how it manifests itself. Functionality should, consequently, be the observation of a phenomenon in its manifestation. It results from an observation that occurs *a posteriori*, instead of being a concept of the process itself, thus prior to the result. This is to say that these functions do not belong to the recorded sounds, but are attributed to the sounds as a method of organization. Therefore, I propose to structure a series of elements that organize the editing session:

Sections

∴ Sections are narrative moments, the same as segments. Scenes, to which I will return later, may vary within the same section. Sections can be understood analogically to blocks of information. For this reason, they do not have any chronological relation to the story itself,

dealing only with ‘telling’ the objects in question. As such, sections can be fragmented or brought back, considering the level (or amount) of information that the listener might have at a certain moment. Some information can be repeated (entirely or partially) to recall certain aspects. Also, some information might be hidden to prevent over-exposure of certain details: a section might be suspended and returned to later on, for purposes of understanding or merely as dramaturgic choices. Sections are levels of information, specific parts of the narrative that reflect the level of depth into the story, because they produce that depth.

Roles

∴∴∴ Roles are assignments ascribed to each section. They follow certain conventions of editing techniques. To find some support in the terminology from the field of film, some examples of roles are analogous to ‘establishing shots’, or other kinds of transitions towards the intensification of the experience. According to the level of depth, a sound may be assigned a certain role, defining, for example, the type of hint it should provide. The role of a hint is to give a point of reference, which directly relates it to the molds of organizing sources. Roles may be likely to give ideas of foreground, background, etc. If in sections the depth is of a psychological character, in roles it is related to the framing of a *perspective*.

Traits

∴∴∴ Traits are modes of handling the sounds, which is a consequence of the roles attributed to them. The role of the sound should provide certain features to understand the *specification* of each sound. That specification is drawn by the trait ascribed to it along the piece. Such a trait can be, for instance, related to the technique that the sound uses to be introduced. A few examples are superimposition, dissolution, convolutions and parallel cuts. And these techniques establish relationships between the different sounds. Equalizations and other effects are also means to develop the sound in terms of traits.

To sum up, these elements form the starting point to narrate a story. They will eventually return in the presentation of the story, but in the flow of the process they should blur in the sounds themselves, as the composition starts narrating. To think of narrative as a proposal to work sound, and the editing as a process of narration, leads to re-considering these two

elements. So far, the idea of editing as a method became synonymous with the narrative proposal. In this I depart from an approach to sound in terms of what the narrative aims to do, which is to suggest sensations. Therefore, from this point on, two needs clearly emerge. As we are dealing with acousmatic communications, the first need is to take into consideration the way electroacoustic music has been treating and carrying the concept of narrative. The other need is to observe the possible implementation of the editing and narrating concepts together; namely, editing sound as a medium for communication and the specificity of the narrative sonic model.

2.3 - Narrative and Electroacoustic Music

Verbal narrative is able to represent many phenomena, ideas, and views that cannot be represented in music in the same straightforward manner. (Meelberg, 2006: 1)

The particularity of electroacoustic music narration lies in its approach through non-verbal means. The possibility of sound narrative is the specification of experience, as a mediation of sensations towards the communication of a one-self perspective, the subject that experiences the occurrence. Would this conception be comparable to the way electroacoustic music conceives narrative? Studies that relate narrative to sound within this framework are not abundant. Even within the acousmatic context, the concern is not exactly with a frame of sound, but a musical instance of it; nor is it about narrative in this conception, but more about the perception of a chronologic sequence of events on a metaphoric and/or meta level (See Nattiez, 1990; Norman, 2000; Meelberg 2006, 2009).

Concerning sound narration, the differences between a musical approach and the one I propose here lie in the content of each sound: music may be an attribute of it, but not the only one. In other words, music is one of the layers of ‘sound-percepts’, among others. Listening to a tone, a timbre, a frequency or to the sound action of a concrete object, it certainly does not have the same effect. What should be stressed is not the hypothetical distinction between sound and music, but the difference of listening to a sound in a musical instance or in an associative manner. This means that the objects are in the scope of listening, not only the sounds they produce. This distinction is important because, as Maus points out for music:

The notion of a musical story is not an alternative to the notions of musical experiences or musical world. They are related as follows: a listener may have a unified experience, and that experience may include the imagining of a fictional world, and the events within that fictional world may form a story. (Maus, 1999: 183)

However, my approach does not define narrative as musical, but more broadly as sonic. It is a sound-story because it is a story composed, hence, told by sounds that refer to actions,

events and situations. Whether or not these sounds have musical qualities is not relevant for the discussion of their potential narrative properties. This is the main difference between the conceptualization proposed here and the perspectives put forward in the literature on the subject. Conceptualizing sound and narrative beyond the idea of music alone is of importance because music deals with a different notion of intelligibility than what concrete sounds do. My goal is not to grasp a discussion on sound qualified as musical, as discussed by Meelberg (2006). It is, rather, to recognize that listening to processed sounds has not the same effect as listening, for example, to a concrete truck – not to mention serial/tonal music.¹

In the case of the sound-story to which I am referring, made of concrete sounds based on the articulation of sound-percepts, it concerns sounds that refer to everyday life experiences, and bringing to these experiences a new presentation form – a mediated experience. For that reason, while Meelberg argues that intelligibility is a question of “musical conventions”, I stress that intelligibility, in this story-telling context, is the reference to specific audible situations, not necessarily in a musical stance, but in a position whose perspective is fictional as the result of mediation.

However, the validity of the piece is not conditioned on concrete and effective intelligibility; instead the sounds stimulate subjective fiction. Despite its fictitiousness, the reference is still important, because it is through the articulation of information, as an attempt of identification, that the listener will be able to *recognize* a story. I think Luc Ferrari is a great example of a sound-story-teller, although I do not dare to address his intentionality in this direction, neither question the reception of his work in those terms. I am referring especially the “Presque Rien” series (1970-89).

Narrative as metaphor

In his article “Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?” Nattiez proposes that musical narrative is a metaphor. Accordingly, the metaphor level is narration’s demand for a point of reference that “speaks directly to us”, in order to “work in a narrative frame of mind” (1990). Narrative cannot, in his view, be detached from a literary reference. Furthermore, he argues, “only when the listener decided to link the succession of sound events according to a plot

¹ It is also not a question of processed sounds vs. nonprocessed sounds, but a matter of reference to reality (in terms of recognition), as I have explained before about “contextualized sounds”.

does he build up the musical work as narrative” (1990: 242), in a so-called “narrative mode of listening”. This raises the question if there is a narrative mode of listening and if the work needs to be framed within that mode in order for narrative to happen. In that case, for Nattiez it seems to turn on “semantic possibilities”, which is what turns out to be the narrative aspect of a work.

In “Sounds Like a Story: Narrative Traveling from Literature and Beyond” (2009), Meelberg also suggests that there is a standard mode of listening to music, “a listening stance that differs from everyday listening”. As he explained elsewhere, “a narrative listening stance” is “an alternative manner of musical listening, [that] can be added to the set of possible modes of listening” (2006: 6). Meelberg’s focus is not on concrete sounds. His conjecture is built upon other possibilities of listening beyond musical considerations, with the avoidance of “everyday listening”. Moreover, Meelberg also argues that narrative in music might be a “superficial metaphor” (2009).

The first distinction between narrative structured by either pitches/frequencies/tones or by concrete sounds can be established: *sounds are not metaphors*. Sounds do not symbolize ideas or objects. They *are* the objects, a (considerable) part of the object (manifestation). The sound of the truck belongs to the truck and it is part of our common knowledge of what a truck is. Possibly, the working strategy can also generate a metaphoric listening mode. However, the mode is not intrinsic to the sound, but a choice of the composer or listener. In my case, it will be a choice of the listener. The truck's sound can become a metaphor for another idea or, indeed, a representation of a situation. Yet, primarily the sound of the truck *is* the truck, in the same way that a viewing of a truck by a passer-by would *be* the truck, not an image of it. The sound of the truck is the organic part of the truck-object. Moreover, “musical listening” consists of the listener’s ability to articulate and relate “phrases”. I find then a point in common with Meelberg’s argument, which is the idea that narrative is a strategy to structure music, an attempt to ascribe unity.¹

¹ The notion of “unity” is borrowed from Fred Everett Maus. Unity is primarily a result of analytical description, but he claims that it should be related to and characterize the musical experience itself. It seems to me that unity is his own tool for narration: “if I work toward analytical or critical formulations, including formulations about musical unity, I do so in order to communicate with others about my musical experiences, or to clarify for myself the qualities of those experiences.” (1999: 175). The sense of unity is equivalent to a solid perspective on the experience. The question at stake is if this sense of unity is possible within a ‘sound-percept’ or it results of categorizing ‘sound-pulses’. See “Rethinking Music”.

However, as Meelberg points out, such a sense of unity is a posterior effect, which is not a reflection on the presence of narrative in the process of composition. To relate music structuring to “phrases” risks being very reductive. Therefore, sound compositions are best seen not to deal with phrases but with contexts and actions. Moreover, all these ideas are based on the fact that narrative is a *representation* of the sounds (or a sonic representation of narrative), while narrative should be formulated as a mode of *presenting* sounds. The perspective I am seeking to articulate is performative. If narrative is truly structuring sounds, structure is not a metaphor. Narrative structuring should present the sounds in a frame of the mediation of experience. To not think of sounds (or music) to re-present is the first step towards elucidating the project of sound-stories as a non-metaphoric approach. As LaBelle asserts, “representation could thus only be trusted if it demonstrated some element of contingency” (2006: 96). In my point of view these sounds carry the potential of presenting rather than representing; the metaphoric layer is a detachment from the percept, perhaps a meta-percept.

Nevertheless, Meelberg points out that “the object itself has to have some qualities that invite the observer to regard it as narrative” – an *a priori* feature. At times Meelberg seems to be very close to the concept of sound story as I am formulating, for example when he considers that “the content of musical narrative (...) relates a story in the medium of music at the textual level, which consists of perceptible sounds” (2006: 42-44); that is when he suggests that concrete sounds are a medium of narrative. Could it be argued that concrete sounds are story-tellers? Not yet. Another discussion would emerge: that of questioning the recognition of the sound sources as necessary and indispensable for the understanding of the story.

The narrative dimension

How would it be if, for a few moments, it was not music or landscape we listened to, but the movement of one thing through another? (Norman, 2000: 238)

Another argument to take into consideration is Katherine Norman’s (2000). For Norman, the narrative aspect of electroacoustic music is a dimension. This dimension ultimately requires an involvement from the audience, to balance the boundaries between the fictionality of the

sounding act and the “real listening” – which is close to what Nattiez claims, although considering such involvement to be a causal articulation:

In a narrative there exist simultaneously a linear dimension – events happen at different moments in time – and relations of cause and effect between these different events (Nattiez, 1990: 242).

Norman tries to discern fictional elements in sound art. However, the first example she provides relies on words and orality. Notwithstanding the point she rightly makes in this analysis, approaching narrative through sounds is not the same if those sounds are (accompanied by) words. Words will always stand in the foreground, and their meaning will influence the understanding of the narrative and be preeminent over anything else, overdetermining the path of story-telling. In addition to the argument previously developed towards the idea of sensation, sounds have to be given the credit of autonomy. A sound composition does not need words to become a story, neither does it require metaphoric explanations to understand that story. In the latter, narration is often analyzed through oral arrangements, achieved directly by verbal objects. Orality is also of sonic nature, of course – but not its narrative potential per se.

Nonetheless, Norman explains that narrativity, in the first example provided, is given by means of concrete sounds, either present (as the “breath”) or absent (the ones that refuse to illustrate actions). In her view, what distinguishes the piece “Things She Carried” (Paul Lansky, 1997) from, for instance, a radio play is that the latter is a sequence of dialogues with sound actions that illustrate the scenes, while the former does not need such an illustration. “Things she carried” does not have illustrated actions, despite what the voice is saying – which (to paraphrase Norman) is what creates the tension and curiosity typical of a narrative thread. In view of my opposition to sound as representational, a theory that analyzes sound’s potential to narrate through orality, and which defends that the use of sound goes beyond illustrative functions, does not conform to the idea of ‘sound narrative’.¹

¹ It is important to mention that my reading of Norman’s writings is influenced by my own subjects. While she is concerned with proving her argument about “real listening”, I am analyzing how she considers narrative in comparison to my own conception of it.

In the second part of her writing, Norman's narrative perspective is put forward through an analysis of Luc Ferrari's piece "Presque rien avec filles" (1989). One important aspect that she highlights is that a sound narrative relates to the ability to *imagine* a stage or location, and that such imagination emerges through movement and the need to understand a sequence of actions. Still, the tendency to interpret these actions could be avoided, since to understand does not mean to represent. Norman's attempt at representation emerges from her curiosity to understand the piece. I would stress, however, that the balance between the curiosity to understand the sounds and the complexity of doubt is the most interesting aspect of sound-stories. Again, it is to *recognize* the truck, but at the same time to not reduce the sound to that identification, giving it the chance of developing its own presence. It means to find the comfort in a perception that is never stable, a perception in permanent *actualization*. For that reason, I would avoid interpretations that depend on a one-to-one relationship, such as attempts to translate every sound into words. Instead, I propose to open up the senses to the imagination without the detour through language. That opening is the extension of the narrative-object. The sound does not restrict itself to the object it belongs to, but it is a result of narration.

Moreover, understanding can only clarify the reception of the piece towards other layers and diverse possibilities, while to represent or interpret encloses these possibilities with names and figures. If to interpret is to reduce the piece to words, it is also repeatedly forgetting the sounds. The piece will become the words one remembers about it, and not the memorized sounds. Narrative is not restricted to a single direction, nor is it dependent on a closed resolution. Instead, it is the trigger to imagine a diversity of sound actions and a mode of creative listening.

Representation and Referent

Despite the fundamental differences between the argument of this study and the literature reviewed, these texts do highlight some aspects that are relevant for the position proposed here. Firstly, narrative is understood here to be a general form of human behavior, which results from and causes patterns. It deals with the content of objects and the need for understanding that content. However, narrative is considered to be analogous to experiences in music that are consequences of gestures, as these gestures are in some measure

representations of the intentionality of the composer. It is my argument that in composition, to represent and to refer pursue different aims, and also entail different consequences in listening. Furthermore, sound is extra-referential; it refers to ideas that are external to the act and moment of listening. It resembles ideas. Music, on the other hand, is intra-referential, referring to ideas that are internal to the piece, to which any external reference is, indeed, a representation. Music, including electroacoustic music, does not evoke an external context by reference. As LaBelle sums up:

A central problem in understanding the significance in music has been that, in their ‘abstract’ manifestations, the sounds of music do not obviously refer outside themselves to the world of objects, events and linguistically encodable ideas (LaBelle, 2006: 285)

Listening to music might give rise to a need to understand the articulations that occur in time, and the relationships between the elements. However, that understanding is not in reference to an external element. In the same instance, listening to concrete sounds triggers a need to understand those in terms of reference to its context, if the sounds are part of a plot.

Still, one might argue that representation is itself an issue of external reference (and thus also a method of narration). To verify the distinction between ‘reference’ and ‘representation’, one can think of a sound referring to a bird (i. e. the sound of a bird singing) or a sound mimicking (i. e. the sound imitating gesturally the bird singing). Indeed, both cases refer to the bird singing. In the latter case, there is the representation of a general idea that corresponds to what a bird usually does, while in the former there is a suggestion that ‘this is the bird’, and imagining comprises ‘what bird is it’ and ‘where is it’; which ultimately would lead to ‘how’ and ‘where’ as well. I think that the door in Pierre Henry’s variations can easily become a metaphor for a wind instrument, but I have asserted that in my working process, the door would be a contextualized sound. The difference results, therefore, in a ‘augmented listening’ versus an ‘aesthetic experience’ mode.¹

For this reason, I contend that electroacoustic music is not a story-teller in the same sense that I am attempting to describe. To be a narrator, electroacoustic music would have to

¹ To avoid the danger of generalizations, it is necessary to reiterate that I do not aim to make straight distinctions between what a musical gesture may be in opposition to a sound recorded. This distinction is neither linear, nor conclusive. The purpose of establishing its differences here is to expose why narrative has different incidences when applied to different modes of analysis.

be concerned with the process of telling an idea with the experience of that idea embedded in it. This is especially necessary when dealing with the sound-percepts in terms of *psychological depth* – recognizing the truck is still not exhausting what that truck can be – which is how narrative has been conceived thus far. In any case, it would mean that the object of experience must exist prior to the intention of communication, and then subsist in terms of an object to be communicated – and not in terms of representation. Nevertheless, it is not the case of a message to be told (meaning), but the *individuality* that resides in what is being told (reference). To sum up, the narrative aspect of any audible object must include *mediation* through *experience* (reference to meaning), and eventually lead to a story.

In the same way, narrative does not evoke a story but implies it. Narrative evokes a mode of telling, a personalization of experiencing events. The content of a piece of music is determined by its ability to refer to objects – and that is what develops it into a story. For that reason, the main problem of narrative within music studies is the misconception of the concepts of narrative and story-telling. To put it simply: to represent narrative is not the same as being narrative. If one considers music as being composed of concrete sounds, it will not be a mimetic any longer, but of sources that are, from that point on, actors that conduct events in a play. It is not a representation, but it provides sources so that a story can emerge in the listener's mind. Afterwards, that story will become his/her own narrative.

Framing expectations

Often, during the listening, the listener has certain expectations about the direction the music will take while moving forward, and these expectations are either met or not. (...) It is the sum of all these, and other, musical characteristics that suggest that music tells a story. (Meelberg, 2006: 39)

Sound narrative is related to 'augmented listening'. Musical narrativity is not a new subject, and it exists within the electroacoustic music context as well. Andean (2010) suggested that musical and narrative qualities of sound are "two distinct but simultaneous qualities of a work".

This requires conceiving of narrative in terms of *content* in relation to an everyday *significance*. It relates directly to the context of field recording, but not exclusively. It may be related to sounds that were recorded, but mostly because the sounds refer to expressions of

everyday life. Undeniably, everyday sounds are part of musical compositions. However, narrative in music seems to be more connected to “gestures” (Andean, 2010) than to sounds themselves, as expressions of everyday actions. Therefore, narration should comprise the act of listening to an object more than listening to a metaphor of that object (Nattiez, 1990). The issue at stake here is to address narrative in terms of a dramaturgic grammar (telling stories) and not in terms of an aesthetic or analytical experience (musicology).

The difference between a musical perception and a narrative mode of listening is, in conclusion, a matter of expectations. It is not dependent on framing the narrative mode of listening, but on the listener’s expectations. It may also be a question of abstraction, which has different levels, but to have expectations on the basis of timbre does not imply the same expectations that arise from the sound made by a swine, a pair of scissors or a door. The *level of referentiality* is different, and so is the possibility of ascribing content to the heard *object*. A story needs content from the objects, which can be described in narrative terms. For that reason, one factor that a timbre and a concrete sound may have in common is that both demand from the listener an active role in understanding what s/he listens to (expectations). ‘Augmented listening’ is, at the same time, an abstract mode of listening. The layer of abstraction of this mode is a consequence of sound being an *immaterial substance*. To ascribe an object to the sound heard is, after all, a guess produced by intuition, an assumption.

Nevertheless, it is through interpretation that the story emerges and for that reason, interpretation must be a subject of research as well. However, instead of attributing words to the sounds and from that moment on to refer to those sounds by the words that *represent* the sound-objects, interpretation will be the act of *framing* the sounds. Framing means that one is not engendering a narrative listening mode, but giving the necessary sources for that mode to emerge. It is to create a context. This asserts that one follows intuition and is lead by sound-sensation at first, shaping his/her own mediation, before structure gains form. It will be through mediation that the story will happen. Mediation is for a sound-story as recognition has been for narrative metaphors.

The idea is to validate a narrative form that does not depend on metaphorical references to composition itself, whether electroacoustic or not. Instead, I propose to organize a method that enables the narrative to be the composition strategy, intending for a productive imagination released of authorship.

2.4 - Narrative sound

Narration is a natural activity of social beings, mostly a mode to communicate individual experiences, to live in society. After proposing narrative as a methodology in this context, it is necessary to think of the possibilities and modes of sound to narrate. This includes assessing how sounds can narrate, questioning if there is a specific mode of sound-narration. A prior question is if concepts of narrative and story go together, whether they should be confronted, or considered equivalent, merely a matter of establishing the boundaries. Would the process of narrating a piece, as a strategy of editing it, presume a story as outcome? Sound-wise, narrative and story are linked but autonomous. In other words, both concepts belong to different phases of the process. I recall that such questions lead to the idea of plot. To mention 'story' immediately evokes it, a fact that is embedded in our culture. Conceptions of plot may differ, but a story is, usually, a conflictual adventure in a special world, with specific and gifted characters involved, that antagonistically pursue the resolution of the conflict. I have mentioned already that in a sound-story, the plot is secondary. Or, in any case, it is different from narrative conventions derived from other mediums.

There are no antagonistic forces, in terms of morality, the good and the bad. The sequence in time can have an archetypal development, but the impression of conflict resides in the permanent attempt to understand what is happening, how, where and, possibly, why. Sound-story is a consequence of listening to the narration of events and trying to understand those, which leads to a new experience and mediation. Therefore, a model of sonic narration cannot be based on the idea of a plot-oriented journey, at least if establishing the perception of that plot happens in notions of normalcy. On this account, the kind of plot that sound explores is different from the cinematographic one. A sound plot is just a story-line. I find the word 'intrigue' an appropriate synonym of stimulating curiosity or interest, especially if one thinks of stimulus within the context of sensation.

Within the previously proposed conception of happening, it is also possible to think of a non-plot structure. It is an acceptance of an organism that exposes the immediate existence of space: a being *in* presence, as extension of space. Such a presence is effortless, quotidian and simple, there is no conflict, no climax: there is nothing exceptional due to the presence of a listener. As the idea of plot foreshadows a climax, non-plot shall be the resignation of

archetypal structures of composition, whether in sound, music, performative arts, literature, or any context of fictional creation. Thus, a sound narrative is not happening as an exception (like the magical world of film narratives, for example), it exists beyond that fragmentary moment. It is a happening as a vortex that frames time and space in the same present, crystallizing it. In the sequence of examples from avant-garde filmmaking, Alejandro Jodorowsky is also relevant. His movies were structured in a way that is conventionally called “anti-plot”. The “anti-plot” concept is a sort of negation of the logic of causality, and therefore often associated with surrealism.¹

Narrative is not equivalent to telling a story, but to how the story is told: it is to generate the necessary conditions for that story to happen. It is in permanent construction, as the construction itself is the narrative. To narrate is to frame a story, for framing is integrating the sounds within the piece’s praxis. Furthermore, story may be a part of narrative, but narrative instances do not imply the understanding of the story by all the means, such as the exposition of facts, nor the facts themselves. As narrative is the choice of how to tell the story, the telling mode, the story is the result of an articulation of these events. They may be very clear or abstract, but if no story is a story until it is told, narrative frames the telling of it. Also, in this manifestation of normality, narrative does not necessarily have to lead somewhere, to be conclusive. To narrate is about the path, not about the destination. It is the engendering of a movement of mediation.

Narrative: an extension of sound

I have already argued that such a discussion has to consider, first of all, the particularity of using concrete sounds as the main material in this study. On a gramatical account, the text consists of concrete sound, although its concreteness has no meaning *per se*. Meaning can be related to two distinct implementations. On the one hand, meaning can be a clear source identification, which would lead to objectifying the sounds heard and to assume that this identification clarifies the perception of the events and thus elucidates the narration. On the other hand, attributing meaning to these sounds would directly result in interpretations. Therefore, I would like to propose that meaning is the production of the senses. More than

¹ See, for instance, *The Holy Mountain* (1973).

validating motivations, to produce meaning is to produce something between a thought and a feeling, namely sensations.

Above, I have proposed that a sound narrative is a suggestion. Therefore, meaning is a potential of possibilities; to sense is to assign significance. Concrete sounds are opportunities for recognition, and the narration occurs through the creation of patterns. It is wrong to assume that narrative only occurs by means of clear forms, objective recognitions. Narrative is a saturation of intuitions. Because sounds present rather than represent, sounds, even nonrepresentational ones, comprise signification by suggestion. Sounds extend an invitation to the active listener; and the act of listening presupposes the acceptance of this invitation. An active listener produces meaning through assumptions, and “assumptions are narrative effects” (Bal, 1997: 80). Its suggestive character releases narrative from strict conclusive approaches indeed, as well as from closed interpretations.

However, the narration should conduct and support an idea or sensation that holds the listener in a particular virtual space, which will create the sequential movement of events and actions that ultimately lead to a story. Furthermore, in the first chapter I defended the idea that sound and listener are extensions of one another. By extension, narrative results from this relationship, and is based on the actualization of it. Narrative is itself an extension of sound, as it is the most natural consequence of a happening within sound-percepts. The subject’s exposition to the sound-pulse, and its becoming a sound-percept, is itself narrative. It comprises the narrative elements, and it follows a self-narration path. In fact, the sound-percept is a result of mediation. And mediation happens because the listener, as an individual, assumes her/his own position in relation to the sound.

How can sound narrate?

The idea of a sound narrative is to provide enough sources to be able to create a network of the ideas that are formed in the listener’s mind – a self-structure that shapes this movement into something understandable. Narrative and story are not *objectifications*, but sensations and results from the articulation of these, in order to identify and specify expectations. If so far sound narrative presents a story in an unclear manner, it does undoubtedly present sensations. Editing as a method carries expectations, driving the listener’s attention into a certain condition, which I have called ‘intuitive saturation’.

Ultimately, the concreteness of sound can be seen as a form of quoting experiences. Fludernik (2005: 32-34) argues for a distinction in four levels of narrative. Of these four levels, one (the second in her series) is relevant here because it consists of “basic viewpoints which are available as explanatory schemas of *access* to the story”. Such schemas (viewpoints) are: “telling”, “viewing”, “experiencing” and “acting”. These amount to, respectively, a mode of communication (telling), an introspective reflecting frame (viewing), a recognizable experience and a “what” instead of a “how”. These distinctions are partially helpful for sound. Applying narrative to sound comprises neither a “telling” nor a “viewing” mode; there are no comparable perspectives and neither are there different notions of time (grammatically). All sentences are virtual, crystallized. In the moment of being played, the piece is the past tense, but referring to events that are transposed to the present. This *time dimension* occurs in an internal relation between micro and macro durations.

It is in relation to “experience” that the idea of suggestion has been proposed – as the time dimension is also one of the definers of the frame of narration. To act is an invocation of the event. But the actions *are* the experiences, instead of a different level. “Acting” a frame is very relevant, for this is what creates a pattern of storytelling. Listening is an experience that shapes other levels of experience, and also an action in itself. Therefore, “experiencing” and “acting” should be pointed out as the narrating levels for sound.

The time dimension is the first element to provide a sense of convention. The internal logic of the piece establishes its credibility, coherence and possibly the senses of continuity, individuality and intelligibility. It is crucial to establish a sense of continuity, which is to hold the frame of these actions in terms of consistency. The concept of continuity when applied to film, to the image, concerns the logic of actions and conditions of what is seen. For instance, the light should be continuous, which means that it should not be subject to abrupt changes unless for diegetic reasons. Concerning sound contexts, the idea of continuity loses that strictness: for example, a cigarette is a cigarette, there is no indication of jumps in the act of smoking in terms of duration. In other words, conventions of sound are established not by a logic of reference to real time dimensions, but are established in a logical manner within the time dimensions it presents. The difference is in the internal aspect of this referentiality. What defines these conventions are exclusively diegetic purposes instead of an axis for matching the actions. The logic is established in relation to a time structure that is not

formulated according to references of an external reality, but in an internal logic, which is in relation to what is provided along the piece.

The concept of continuity unfolds the sense of individuality. Precisely because conventions are established within every piece, and not in a general customized practice, every sound has its distinctiveness based on the relationship to other sounds. It becomes, for that reason, a question of prominence and development of these internal relationships.

How does sound, then, narrate?

To bring into relation together the threads of reality in order to tell stories.
(LaBelle, 2006: 31)

Narrative deals with the sounds in a conceptual fashion, while story-telling indicates the results of those concepts – emerging from a real experience of the sounds. At this point, one new question needs clarification: are sound-narrators and sound-tellers the same? I have asserted before that, in a literary context, the narrator is a textual function. Therefore, I assume that the editing practice itself is the narrator, for it gives to the piece the mediation, the perspective and the opportunity to create ‘specificity’. In line with this, it might seem reasonable that the sounds are the story-tellers, comparable to embedded story-tellers in so-called frame narratives.

However, what is the difference between a narrator and a story-teller? A textual function is a narrative function, while the teller is a vehicle for this function. Therefore, the narrator is an established element in the editing session, while perhaps the teller can be more vulnerable in the moment of telling the piece. This is to say that later the story-teller will carry the function (in the presentation of the piece), which was formulated in a fixed media narration (the editing session).

The sound narrative function is to create a frame where an internal logic is generated. This logic will be a context where the sounds can develop their actions and situations. Within this context, the idea of *psychologic depth* can be elaborated. As referred to above, listening to a truck does not imply a narrow idea of what that ‘truck’ is. Instead, it opens up impressions in terms of its character and development. The development triggers the imagination into the journey of the narrative, which is shaping a suggestion of what that truck might be.

Sound narrates through establishing a *focal point of audition* where actions and situations occur. They are agents of narration, even assuming that there is not a possible fixed function for each individually. It is precisely the flexibility of each one that originates the movement towards a story, and opens up the multiple possibilities of which the listener might be able to choose hers/his. Nevertheless, the concept of focal point of audition is located at the edge between the narration and the storytelling. One could also say that this focal point lies somewhere between the editing session and the staging of the piece. However, before the focal point becomes part of the practice presenting the piece, it can still be an articulated flexible strategy. Such a strategy must be consigned with the individual nature of the sounds and an approach to what can be a vocabulary of composing these stories.

Ultimately, sound narrates through the elaboration of intrigue. This intrigue, as I have suggested, is based on a *contextualized* curiosity and formulates as a distinctive form of plot. Sound narrates by providing suggestions of actions that lead the listener to assume a possible *identification* of it. Sound does not narrate by direct means, but by *becoming* an experience.

Focal Point of Audition

To define sound-narration specificity, it is best to delineate a focal point. A point of audition would be the equivalent in sound terms to a point of view. A point of view guides the psychic direction of the narrative. The reader/viewer assumes the position of the character whose point of view is exposed and, therefore, relates his/her actions to a series of motivations, causes and consequences that would possibly create empathy with the character.

Still, point of audition is different from a point of view. There is a sense of hierarchy, a scale of importance that is established by the objects' position in the frame. In sound there is not such an *a priori* sense of in and out of the frame. Instead, this sense is built up along the piece, by including and then excluding objects. When the listener hears something that then disappears, the in and out of frame is shaped.

For the same reason, the hierarchy of sounds associated with point of view emerges mostly from loudness, duration and repetition. These three possibilities produce detail. I would argue that it is through this sense of detail that the organization becomes clear, because it is the detail that holds the listener's attention and, therefore, guides a perspective to the

listener. The focal point of audition lies, consequently, in a combination of punctuating these details.

Hints: sound punctuation

A hint is simply a germ, of which the germinating can only be seen later. (Bal , 1997: 95)

Syntactically, punctuations are the marks used to distribute and organize elements of a text and clarify their meaning. In this context, I would compare them to seeds that sprout understanding. They are mostly hidden, but they can also be heard. They can be analogous to grammatical references, such as commas, exclamation marks, or other tools in verbal language.

Sound also knows punctuation. Undeniably, this punctuation varies within every piece. A “comma” can be a silence, or an iterate sound; while an exclamation mark would be more like a boost in volume, or a strong sound. These hints structure the groundwork; they themselves form a substructure. At the same time, they are not evident in terms of their functions, and neither should they be in terms of effect. The objective of these hints is, instead, to produce an underline upon which the listener can make the assumptions. This is not a conscious action by the listener, but a natural *articulation* of information.

In the 4th chapter I will provide some examples, while in the following section I will develop the practice of these concepts.

2.5 - towards the practice of sound-stories

Stories are important both in grasping the world and in communicating this grasp. (Meelberg, 2006: 33)

In the beginning of this study, I suggested that through a specific consideration of sound, specific effects can be sought. Such effects are expressions of *sound-stories*. First of all, to align sounds in a narrative *mode* does not turn the sounds into a *story*. The distinction between narrative and story is not only due to the different implications of each, but also to the possibility to link either with the idea of fiction. The concept of sound-story has two layers that must be developed in two distinct parts of this study. The first layer is concerned with the conceptual formulation of story: how it came into discussion, particularly as a result of the narrative practice. I have been defining the idea of sound narrative as analogous to the practice of editing the piece. Once this task is accomplished, we should observe the inception of the sound-story itself.

Towards a definition of sound-story

Since storytelling is a general and spontaneous human activity observable in all cultures, it provides individuals with culturally discrete patterns of storytelling. (Fludernik, 2005: 32)

A “story is what we get through discourse” (Abbott, 2007: 41); therefore to outline a possible definition of story depends on the discourse in question. Although a different medium establishes differences in concepts, it may still be useful to observe what a story ‘is’ in literary contexts. A story is a result of ordering events through text (Bal, 1997). If text is replaced by sounds, which is to say that text are not words but sounds, the question is if it is still the ordering of events that constructs the sound-story. Given the mutually constitutive relationship between story and listener, I proposed that the story becomes the curiosity of understanding those events. Understanding is, then, a form of ordering, so that it fit with the following remark:

If one regards the text primarily as the product of use of medium, (...) the story could be regarded as the result of an ordering. (Bal, 1997: 78)

Sound-story is, then, the ensemble of thoughts deduced from the listening sensations – what I have called the intrigue/plot. The story itself emerges from the listener, it comes as conclusions drawn by her/him, as thoughts derived from being exposed to an ambiguous set of actions. The sound-story is built by assumptions of understanding sensations. Therefore, a story is an effect of interpretation, of the attempt to understand the events. Ultimately, the sound-story happens in the listener's mind: exposed to the narration of a sequence of events, the listener also experiences them – although influenced by the mediation of the narrator. Hence, the sound-story only happens when the listener becomes a narrator too, mediating her/his perspective of this experience to her/himself or the others.

Thus, sound-story is constrained by interpretation. It is important to understand how to generate a proposal for interpretation, to frame it in a direction that works in terms of communication. For that reason, the organization of the material does not aim to define a structure designated by content, but to understand what that content carries itself and is able to communicate. This notion of interpretation aims at providing sources for the imagination, and not a direct translation of the sounds and their actions.

Understanding a sound-story is giving it an outline of a structure, which is its narrative mode. The structure happens after the story is composed, when it has been heard. The narrative structure will tell the story by means of exposing not what is being told, but how: building the possibility to expect a sense or a logic. Choosing its protagonists, locations, settings, actions, and other elements, makes it understood in terms of actions and motivations. As I have argued above, a sound-story is the consequence of the articulation of sensations.

Yet, what makes a sound-story specific is the fact that it is not 'told' by direct means, nor 'showed' by direct exposition. What could be a limitation is actually its specificity. The stories are suggested, and they are impressions. The issue is to induce certain experiences, even if they are only dramaturgic. This dramaturgy might deal with what in this context is often referred to as patterns. Patterns yield familiarity and recognition, and will balance any instability caused by permanently dubious sources of information.

Setting a mise-en-scène

A setting is a ‘where’, happening is a ‘what’, sequence is in time, a ‘when’, and interpretation is a ‘how’ – these are the principles of story-telling; the lead of a *composition*. As suggested above, a setting is not a structure. Instead, ‘to set’ is prior to structure: what should come where and when in terms of articulation. In other words, the structure will be constructed upon the set. If the stage hosts the scene, the setting hosts the structure. The setting is a technical effort to bring the ‘sound stage’ to the location where the actions/events happen. The concept of ‘mise-en-scène’ is common to both setting and stage, which gives perhaps a clearer idea of what ‘setting’ is about. Scene “is often a central moment, from which the narrative can proceed in any direction” (Bal, 1997: 106).

In a sound-story framework, the elements of the mise-en-scène have fluctuating categories. The same sound can be, initially, the provider of a sense of scenario, while its development turns it into a prop (detached of the general scenario) or even an individual sound that projects its own path. The mise-en-scène is, therefore, composed by fluctuating elements and their functions.

Framing sound

In the sound-editorial conception, I have introduced the focal point of audition as the sound-narration model. The sense of detail originates a frame, which is organized by means of duration and direction. The time span and the directionality define the dimension of the frame. In line with Bal (1997) I see direction as an indication of chronology. Frames delimit what scope of action can be attributed to the sound. The scope provides an outline for the sounds’ development. Such development is evaluated in relation to this support upon which changes occur. This is the central element of direction. Directionality is movement towards detail, guiding the attention of the listener towards a precise aspect of the sound. Most likely, the concrete awareness of this movement is conveyed by perceptions of duration.

Analogous to this is the frame in a visual context. An image that lasts very long is observed in detail; this gives its elements the opportunity to appear at every new instant of its duration. In sound this is very similar, as the duration of the sound can, by its enduring, reveal details that would not be noticed if it lasted shorter. In sound, direction is established

as a permanent confirmation of this movement. If movement continues to occur, boundaries start to be drawn.

Towards story-telling

Film is an expository medium: its narrative mode is 'showing'. (Bal, 1997: 40)

The idea of framing sound is an attempt to conceptualize a strategy of sound-story telling, just as much as a focal point of audition asserts sound narration. True, sound-story telling might be only an abstraction. Indeed, if considered in comparison to film language, sound-story telling has much less developed its own vocabulary and techniques. Moreover, it is still far from being an official concept and a recognized field of work.

One reason for that is the difference of the medium. The objects of communication are considerably different. This difference is that between showing and suggesting. A variety of different interpretations can be made from the showed object. But these interpretations are all based on the same source. In contrast, interpretations of sounds are primarily expectations concerning their sources. The identification of the source is open and ambiguous. It is precisely this ambiguity that intrigues the listener and leads to the assumption that s/he recognizes the source.

However, the identity of a subject as listener is not a narrow one. The listener-self might affirm that s/he has no need for recognition and that s/he hears no story in the articulation of the concrete sounds. For that reason, I have suggested that a sound-story has two different layers: the layer that is still within the process of narration, and therefore part of a concept; and a second layer, which is the happening on the stage, during the performance. With the affirmation that the story happens as a result of the listener's assumptions I am not presupposing that all my listeners need to recognize and identify possible sources of the sounds. Instead, I am arguing that for the story to happen in my listener's perception, that recognition is how it happens. This has happened quite a few times in my experience. The listener identified possible sources for the sounds s/he heard and created her/his own sense of fiction. Most of the times these sources did not remain the actual, 'real' sources. This discrepancy does not bother me because there is no such thing as 'real', there is just the

suggestion of reality, a connection to the 'out-there'. Moreover, it is a suggestion of fiction, which will possibly produce ideas and sensations.

Sound-story has as its ultimate narrative mode the suggestion of actions and experiences through the creation of a context where individual sounds *happen* to express their organisms in movement. For that reason, the concept of sound-story is also a concept-in-becoming.

3 - Staging fiction

In this chapter I will describe the third phase of a sound-story working process. I elaborate on a mode of presentation that aims at clarifying the narrative proposal. For every editing concept a new concern has emerged, in order to find a practical correspondence for each one. In other words, the concern is with how the editing ideas happen once the piece is being played and how the story gains concrete elements as a new event.

To ‘stage fiction’ requires investigating a new method of mediation. The sonic experience set into a presentation mode involves performative aspects. This is so because playing the piece will explore possibilities of sharpening the *specificity* of such a moment, its elements and consequences. If a sound-story is a possible practice, it is so as a form of *acting*. As a *happening*, these concepts gain a new layer, in some cases to become new concepts, in other cases to become objectified ideas. To name a few: setting, framing and hints become practices that turn it into fictional events. For example, the setting will be equivalent to stage, while hints become evidences. This transposition will bring two new terms into the discussion: fictionality and performance (both deployed with a sense of dramaturgy).

At this phase of the process we aim at producing the specificity of the story. Staging is, therefore, a new tool for mediation. Narrative has been proposed as a concept of composition, although extrinsic to it. However, it now acquires a practical layer, because it is staged. This stage hosts a series of elements: the stage itself as a physical location; the occupiers of the stage (actors and speakers) and, necessarily, the listener, who will corroborate story-telling. Therefore, playing the piece comprises the elements that constitute such a situation: the stage, the performers (speakers and the sound themselves) and the audience.¹

¹ Francisco Lopez’ paper, “Against the stage” (2004), contributes to identifying the necessity of formulating a practice of ‘stage’ that encounters the specificities of acousmatic work.

3.1 - Considerations on stage

In the context of a sound-story, stage is an element of narrative. It is a practical element instead of a theoretical object; it attributes to the sound the chances for it to build a path. The stage is the space where the participants to the event of the sound-story enact the story together. Stage is, therefore, a subject of narrative as it is the final tool of mediation. It influences the final perspective that shapes specificity. For that reason, this stage is not the formal location usually opposed to the audience, for example, in a hall. Instead, stage is the place where the sound happens as the new location of the events. But more important than as a space where the events are exposed, it is the location where the listener experiences the sounds. Hence, the stage is always in relation to the listener and to the speakers. One of the most important details of a sound-story stage is the lack of walls, in the sense that the sound knows no boundaries and therefore the whole space has to be taken into account. It is either on or off (for now, volume is not in question). As a result, one has to decide the listener's position in relation to the sources in order to define where the stage is, for the stage is where the sounds are heard and thus the listener is the epicenter of it.

To stage sound is to bring the *fictitious location* to the listener's position. In this sense, the stage is also a *happening*. It happens as a new experience of a sound-percept, which is being communicated *now*. It is fictional and mutable: it is where and when the audience meets the sound, where the sound meets an amplification system and where these three interact. For that reason, it is also singular. Besides, staging is also an event based on interaction; therefore, it is an event-in-becoming. Staging fiction means to create a new sense of frame, delineating an imaginary space that defines the conditions for scenes and actions. To place the sounds in relation to one another (what comes from where) but now in relation to the listener: background, center and/or foreground; close and far, and so on. The crucial aspect of a fictional sound work is to imagine the setting where the sounds exist together.

At this point a parallelism can be established: the previous concept of setting, the one that works towards the shaping of a frame in the narrative proposal, becomes the practice of a stage. The stage is related to the scene as much as setting is related to structure. While scene and setting subsist within narrative composition, the stage concerns story-telling practices. In that sense, scenes now become acts. Dramaturgically, acts deploy the development of the

presentation, fragments that build the path of the story. Yet, to clarify the difference between setting and stage one can consider the following example: a theatre hall has a stage, while a film studio has a set. This analogy, based on the main principle that distinguishes theatre from film, illustrates the main difference that should be enlightened here: soundwise, the stage is where the sound action happens, while the setting was a series of features to organize the event in the stage. I propose that such main difference is visual: film uses a screen as its medium, theater uses the stage dimensions. While the narrative proposal was based on editing as a method, and supported by film editing strategies, the mode of presenting the piece is based on staging as a method and therefore supported by stage-crafting.

Besides, the stage of a sound-story is not only a stage because it hosts the elements of story-telling (actors, loudspeakers and audience). It is an element in itself because it is a subject of reflection as well, inasmuch it does not have a “univalent denotation” (Bal, 2002: 203). Leading up to an organization of the elements that the stage comprises; this reflection will investigate two aspects of story-telling and presentation models; namely fictionality and performativity.

Staging fiction

Existence is not just another property, but is the condition for having properties. What does not exist is nothing and so cannot have properties. [However] for those who believe that there is fictional reference to non-existents, existence is just another property, and not a condition for having properties. (Stecker, 2009: 276)

To stage fiction is an extension of the concept of framing narrative. In fact, the stage will give a physical frame to the story. It does so by positioning the speakers strategically. First, I assume that fiction is not a question of true or false, in terms of actual existence, but a structure that produces evidences (previously called hints) of and for the imagination. It is not a question of coherence in relationship to the possibilities of reality in a physical, social and historic world. Fiction is a deviation from factual accuracy towards the integration of subjectivity and the liberation of logic constrains. It is also a production of sensations; therefore, immaterial. Therefore, it belongs to the conceptual family raised by sound-stories thus far.

Previously I have asserted my position about the notion of plot and how a story can be released from what I considered certain constraints. Instead, I proposed that the act of listening to concrete sounds stresses an idea of story-line. A line that emerges from our need for understanding what we hear and if it is plausible within its own convention. That produces a connection with the fictional sense of what will be, then, a performance. The same is to say that, within an internal convention, the piece creates the virtue of asserting its own logic of real-fantasy. Such is the main idea of “fiction-making” as an intentional “make-believe” (Currie, 2008: 18; Stecker, 2009: 276), what I consider to be the awakening of the imagination.

Whereas in editing the narrative was a suggestion, the staging of the piece is a promise. A promise is an illocutionary act of asserting (Currie, 2008: 13), in order to trigger the listener’s interest. It is a controlled fantasy, as it will have a beginning and an end, and the listener will be protected from any real consequences – it is a drive through the path. Nothing in this fantasy will affect her/his own reality, and by the time the story is over, the listener’s real world returns. In that sense, it is the travelling between the ‘real’ world (for instance, of sound-pulses) and the composed world of the story (therefore, of sound-percepts) what I consider to be fictional.

For that reason, fiction is the disposal of historic value, and the assertion of the performative function. The function of performing the sound-story is, besides triggering imagination, to produce an experience that afterwards can also be narrated. Therefore, it is a production of senses and perspective by and towards mediation. The stage is communicating sounds, and the dramaturgic aspect of the presentation mode is aiming at the shift from sound-pulses to sound-percepts, which means that the mediation is embedded and the playing of the piece is already an act of *becoming*-specific, subjective and individual.

To enlighten the relevance of bringing up the concept of performance to discussion, we should now observe the concept from the point of view of its practice. On that account, performing the piece is now unfolded in two sections: performance and performativity.

Performing sound-stories

Stage conveys the idea of performance as acting the piece. To play the piece is a performance, because it comprises the presentation as a tool of composition. To present is, therefore, part

of the process. Moreover, the idea of performance evokes a certain sense of rehearsal and arrangement, which is familiar within narrative genres (such as theatre, dance, installation), and the final transposition of the conceptual narrative proposal towards the effective acting of a story (the stage-crafting).

As suggested earlier, the narrative proposal is formulated as a presentation of suggestions, instead of a structure of metaphors. I have also asserted that *presenting* the sounds is aiming at specifying a perspective on them. Hence, the concept of performance emerges from the idea that, once staged, sounds are actors. Sound-actors are the result of a sound-percept after mediation. Initially, we were among sound-pulses that, once subjected to the listener-recordist, become sound-percepts. However, these sounds were then orchestrated in a sequence that addressed the perspective of the listener-recordist-player. In this way the sounds gain a second layer of mediation. Consequently, sound-actors have the role of playing this new layer of perception. Therefore, we begin to deal with performance as “the unique execution of a work”, for it “connects the past of the writing to the present of experience of the work” (Bal, 2002: 175, 177).

Again, it is a crystal time value. It evokes the past, although happening in the present. In this manner, it raises the *actualization of the senses* back to a new listener. In the performance of the piece, the listener is no longer the recordist (the first mediator), but a listener-actant. The listener as a subject will be scrutinized later in this chapter, but to consider the new listener an active part in this performance is inevitable – for s/he is also going to mediate the information, and inevitably these sounds will go through the movement of sound-pulses to become her/his own sound-percepts. It is because of an active listener that the concept of performance as a “given occasion” (Bal, 2002: 181) becomes insufficient to assess the staging fiction as a performance. It is necessary, after all, to have the sounds doing what they propose. The proposal is to suggest a specific perspective (mediation) of a sensation (actualization of the senses), towards a witnessing of a sound-story. Therefore, the piece needs not only to be performed but also to do what it proposes. According to Bal, that is the concept of performativity, “as an aspect of a (work) that does what it says” (2002: 175).

“Performativity becomes the instance of an endless process of repetition” (Bal, 2002: 179), creating the chance for individual experience, and therefore empowering the listener as

an agent of mediation. Moreover, the concept ascribes to the listener the capacity of intervening in the presentation. To a certain extent, this intervention is passive, for it does not change the *fixed media*. However, it is still the listener that will carry the subjectivity along the piece, therefore acting the piece as well. This flexibility is also, in my point of view and importantly, a declaration of responsibility. Both ideas of stage and audience claim to demystify the conventions of the former and to “break the dogma of intentionalism” (Bal, 2002: 180) that generally disintegrates the latter.

Hence, the ideas of staging fiction (as addressing imagination) and of presentation (as a performance) compel us to consider what this stage is embedding, and what consequences that entails in terms of its performativity – as it proposes a model of interpretation and an invitation for a listening mode that is itself also specified.

3.2 - Paradigm of action

While thus far editing is synonymous with narrating an experience, hereafter, the presentation of the piece is issued as an action equivalent to the telling of a story. Therefore, whereas narrating was a conceptual proposal, telling is a practice. If the telling of sound-stories happens as staging fiction, it is necessary to observe what elements stage comprises and how. However, the concepts of narrative maintain their pertinence, inasmuch as they will now be carried out.

Three layers inhabit this stage: the loudspeakers, as emitters of sound; the sound itself, as actors; and the listener, as an active agent. On this account, I aim to observe these layers beyond the mechanical action. Together they form a paradigm of action, as they are the ultimate strategy of telling sound-stories. Not only because of the performativity effect, or because *telling* is a craft of performance. Mostly, because playing the piece, and therefore, occupying this stage has to take into consideration the organic movement of the narrative, for it aims at sharing the considerations of sound mentioned in the first chapter. The paradigm of action is, in the end, a synthesis of organicity and movement towards the imagination.

3.2.1 - The loudspeakers

The arrangement of speakers is the most important step towards the definition of an axis of action. It defines a general epicenter, but it has to take into consideration that the propagation of the sound is multi-spatial and every listener will be her/his own *epicenter* for the story. Due to such relativism, it is of utmost importance to relate the speakers to each other. As the epicenter is subjective, the traveling of the sounds among the speakers is going to establish the *path* of the story. For that reason, at the time of the editing session I chose the speakers to have a specific role in the telling of the story. Those choices concerned not only the number of speakers (which is the first choice and with immediate consequences), but also if they were assigned to exclusive sounds, and/or if the assignment is more in relation to one another. The position of the speakers in relation to each other, and the logic that I contend to underlie these choices, defines the “aesthetic thrust of narrative” (Bal, 1997: 116). The loudspeakers and their articulations delineate a structure of sense upon which the fiction gains its own coherence and verisimilitude. It is mainly because of this strategy that the presentation of the

piece is a method of staging fiction, for it establishes an internal convention that encounters the definition of fictionality provided above. In this way, I am also avoiding the discrepancies that might emerge between the coherence that is built in the studio and therefore might vary from hall to hall, by founding the relationships internally.

Consequently, every loudspeaker is itself an agent of fiction. As a prelude to the distinction between narrators and story-tellers, I have asserted that the sounds were most likely to be the story-tellers. Such was as a consequence of formulating the editing session as the narrator (the textual function). However, “the narrator’s text explicitly indicates that the words of an actor are narrated by means of declarative verb and a conjunction” (Bal, 1997: 49). Thinking of the loudspeakers as an extra-textual function brings forth another possibility, which is to formulate the speakers as the narrators in practice. Such an idea is based on developing the narrative as the specification of a perspective, which inevitably includes a mediator. Undeniably, a loudspeaker is a mediator. This is so, first of all, because of his position. Secondly, a loudspeaker mediates because of the equipment’s variants. However, besides mediating through their position in relation to the one another and to the listener, loudspeakers are conjunctions – the connectors of sounds. And it is this connection that I claim to be the *telling* of the story. In other words, the narrator-in-practice is a teller, because it is the transmitter of the events.

Analogically to the narrator as a function, the teller is a tool. “The narrator makes statements about the character” (Bal, 1997: 130), while the teller would be that character, bridging the statements from the narrator to the listener. In a way, the character is evidence of narration. Therefore, the concept of character in sound story-telling is slightly different than in a literary context. In the latter, characters refer to individuals, *dramatis personae*, which can “resemble people” (Bal, 1997: 115); while in the former, characters are features. Such a situation is not related to the different nature of these narratives. As asserted before, for both contexts characters trigger the action. However, if in literary contexts the characters will resemble individuals, the sounds will resemble actions, contexts and fantasies. That is the fictional core of sound story-telling. In staging fiction as a practice, loudspeakers establish these connections. Nevertheless, such a distinction does not break with the concept of literary character. As Bal puts it:

The meaning of narrative resides in the reader's identification with the psychology of a character; this happens when characters are given the function of authenticating the narrative contents. (Bal, 1997: 37)

The formulation of loudspeaker as a story-teller comprehends such identification, and will consequently comprise a sense of authentication as well. The main difference, as I said, is in moving this identification with personas away and, instead, assuming it as a fiction that is less *humanized*. A sound character is devoid of reason. It has its own nature, and it was mainly for this reason that the sounds were conceived as an organism. For it grows as a creature, although dissembling personhood. To understand this, I propose some brief considerations on character, as it is often analogous to identity.

Character and Identity

The fictional demeanor produces a sense of creatures, which are the ideas floating between a character and an actor. A sound-actor plays its role within the fiction. It is an actor because the sound is no longer 'original', but played back. Its identity might be preserved by means of resemblance to its origins, but from now it is merely in reference to such origins, since it no longer emerges 'originally' from them. At the same time, it occurs as a new experience, it gains a new layer of experience. The loudspeaker generates characters, to reconstruct a sense of source, being and substance – the movement from sound-pulses to sound-percept. These three together will shape nuances of identity. They constitute specifications that will resemble identity. However, "resemblance can never be absolute identity" (Bal, 1997: 57), and for that reason I can ascribe the concept of character to the loudspeakers. A sound-character has no absolute identity, but a series of suggestions that produce assumptions. The term character refers not only to a set of 'characteristics', which define an object in terms of individuality, but as "part of a fiction or fictional situation", which is no longer necessarily a *dramatis persona*. It includes the "entire processuality of event and action series" (Fludernik, 2005: 32), therefore it can be anything one can fantasize. As Bal sums up:

Places are linked to certain points of perception. These places seen in relation to their perception are called space. That point of perception may be a character, which is situated in a space, observes it, and reacts to it. (Bal, 1997: 133)

The fiction is built consistently by a point of perception, which address the sounds to a permanent rebuilding of that fantasy. Its construction insists on a mode to grasp identity that is based in movement. The identity of a sound is as ephemeral as its presence in time. However, the existence of this character as a tool happens in space: a virtual location with physical properties (spatial properties), to confine the action. It is from this idea of space that the concept of the loudspeaker as a story-teller emerged, for it is through the loudspeaker that the fictional place (stage) is created.

3.2.2 - The sound-actors

I have proposed the idea of performance to be an action of staging fiction comprising certain elements. Among those are the sounds to become actors. In a sound composition context, to think narrative and story-telling together has been an exercise of conceptual readjustments. The former readjustment concerned a combination between character, identity and actor. The reformulation of character was necessarily related to the formulation of the loudspeaker as a story-teller. It is important to emphasize that the loudspeaker is not the story-teller because it is the (technical) emitter of the sound, but because its effect is analogous to the function of a literary story-teller. This relation is based on the fact that many times the story-teller is a character in the story. The point is that the three concepts (character, actor and identity) have a somewhat fluctuating function – they interact and supply each others. As Bal clarifies, “the actors are provided with distinct traits. In this manner, they are individualized and transformed into characters” (Bal, 1997: 8). Soundwise, “a sound actor uses many components of the same sound message simultaneously, practicing multiple niches” (Augoyard, Togue; 2008: 79).

This individualization is an attribute of identity. Once made the reformulation of the character as a concept, also the idea of identity had to be reformulated. Identity is a result of actors’ and characters’ interactions resulting in creatures. These creatures are not assigned human similarities, but fictional props. Bal contrast these two thus: “an actor is a structural position, while a character is a complex semantic unit” (1997: 115). This structural position in sonic contexts is related to a sense of blocking organization. Blocking is an English term for the word “didascaly”, which comes from *didascalie*, a French word that comes from the Greek *didascalía* (meaning instructions). It is used in theatre to refer to the instructions given

to actors and technical crew to guide the movements in the stage and *mise-en-scène*. One of *mise-en-scène*'s components are specific objects, usually labeled as props. These are objects or other means for characterization, which contribute to the comprehension of the action or characters. A prop has a diegetic function, not merely a decorative one. Thus, it is also a semantic unit.

Still, the semantic units are structured at the editing session. In these terms, we could not observe a certain flexibility that would supply the instructions from the *didascalia*. As compositions are fixed media pieces, the sound actors are no longer conceived in terms of the process, but as an effect. In other words, the effect of sound *acting* is dependent on the way the actors have been directed in the editing session. Yet, such handling becomes an experience when the piece is played, and therefore it belongs to the staging and presentation process. The playing of the sounds attributes to them its effects, modes and/or roles. These are perceptual questions, but they are the result of a scenic construction, since "to act is defined here as to cause or to experience an event" (Bal, 1997: 5).

The demands of a sound actor

To act is to invoke the process, to quote the features that it relates to. The main activity of the actor is to unfold time and carry out the space that it invokes. If all these features are supposedly established in the editing session, they re-happen in the performance. For that reason, I shall conceive the concept of sound-actor based on the concept of *iteration*. The concept of iteration points to the fact that the playing of the piece is not exempt of agency. It entails the fact that a performance is not a linear execution of the piece. Therefore, the sound-actor carries with it the intention of performativity. This intention is aiming at involving the listener in the act. For it is that involvement that triggers the fictionality.

To look at sounds as actors in a stage is to recall the relationship between sound and listener that is based on the difference and variety, which leads to the actualization of senses. A sound-actor stands for the differences between the context where it was recorded, the mediation it was submitted to in relation to other sounds, and finally the situation it encounters in the presentation context. Therefore, the sound-actor function is to mediate the concepts of sound-pulses and sound-percepts. It is an actor because, in the end, it is neither of these. After all, "the actor carries out an action with an object" (Bal, 1997: 38), which is

conducting and shaping the action and its character. The same sound might have different functions during the timeline, and thus change its role: either providing other sorts of information, or creating movement between the parts or the base upon which singularities occur. What distinguishes a sound actor from a sound character is that the latter is an idea produced as a consequence of the listening action. It is the result of a judgment, the issue of the effect, the perceptual impact.

In this sequence of thought, the sound-actor is demanding an active listener. The iteration of the process of narrating to the telling of the story, every single time of its performance, demands a listener that acts the story in her/himself. Sound-actors are the concretization of the “viewpoint – acting” as suggested by Fludernik’s levels of narration (2005) in chapter 2. Therefore, we have to take into consideration the third element of this paradigm of action: the listener, for her/him comprising the other level of narration “experiencing”.

3.2.3 - The listeners

Along this study, I have been proposing the idea of an active listener. I have suggested that, at last, the audience is the stage, because it is *in* the audience that the story is heard. Likewise, I have also suggested that the story happens if the listener takes himself as part of the narrative. Although the legitimacy of the sound-story itself should not depend on it, I have proposed the idea that sound only exists in the subject if the subject confirms it perceptually. This conforms to the idea that the listener, as an individual mediator, has her/his own independence in sensing the story.

On this account, a new conceptual readjustment is necessary: the concept of focalization. In literary contexts, focalization refers to the object perceived and who, in turn, perceives the events, characters, and places (Bal, 1997: 142). Therefore, it includes a focalizer and an object of focalization. Usually, the word is synonymous to *perspective* or *point of view*; although Bal has conceived it as an alternative of these. This adjustment was necessary because the traditional terms do not differentiate between the subject and object, nor do they specify the relationship between the two. As Bal asserts, no noun or verb can be derived from those terms. As a result, “they do not make a distinction between those who see and those who speak” (Bal, 1997: 143).

To bring this discussion to staging fiction is to assume the difference between the subject who plays the piece and those who hear it. Also, it releases the listener from the author's intentions. As described before, narrative is a process of mediation. It is the building of a path towards an experience. The listener will have her/his own mediation of what s/he perceives. To play a sound-story is not constrained to a particular mediation, and it should not be tied up to the player's intentionality. Thus, in the context of sound-fiction, the story is for the beholder to construct. It is the listener's task to accept the invitation to listen to the articulation of the events and go through the process of reshaping sound-pulses into sound-percepts. It evokes the witnessing of an event and to become conscious of it. Consciousness is a filter of the senses, and the awareness of sensation produces mediation.

Narration is the telling of a story in a way that simultaneously respects the needs and enlists the co-operation of its audience; focalization is the submission of (potentially limitless) narrative information to a perspectival filter. (Jahn, 2007: 94)

Therefore, the listener is a focalizer, for s/he bridges the textuality of the sonic-objects into an articulation of the events – her/his own perspective. Such idea is also a consequence of the former conception of characters. Focalization could be ascribed to one specific character. However, the sound-conception of character would not embrace the possibility of internal focalization, as it is disassociated of personhood. The same is to say that the listener has an active role in legitimating the sound-story. To that role I associate a function of intermediation. This function operates within the listener's internal perception of what s/he hears. But also, because this invitation places the listener between the sounds, the player and the other listeners, the sound-story can happen.

To qualify the listener as a focalizer is to say that the listener holds responsibility in the act of listening. It does not mean to require from the listener to focalize, but to assume that the sound performance occupies its own performative position. It presumes that the listener can make use of the multiple options these sounds have; hence, a sound-story will be the self-extension of the perceiver. In this way, the listener becomes the “witness” of the story, as suggested in chapter 1.

4 - Examples from my pieces

During these two years of research I have designed a different setting for every piece, in an attempt to explore the setting's potential for sharpening my listening proposal. For each of the pieces I tried to develop in practice a specific concept. No piece aimed at developing all concepts at once. The pieces grew into separate dimensions. Initially, I was more concerned with the story itself than with suggesting stories. Yet, it was through the observation of the pieces, and the changes of procedure, that I accomplished the conceptualization described above.

I will now exemplify some types of sources, roles, sections, scenes, punctuations, etc. Furthermore, I will describe the strategy of presentation, and how that influenced the process of composition, and how this process is related to the experience of the piece as presented. For the reasons explained elsewhere, I will not name any sound in terms of 'objective' source (for example "pen"), unless the sound-object is clearly identifiable (for example "bird"). I will not describe the examples extensively either, but give a few indications for some of the moments where these happen. I am not willing to develop a full analysis of my pieces, neither state what kind of story the sounds tell. Some had a very clear script in my editing session; others were, so to say, more liberal.

s'wing lives: 8 channels - c. 19 minutes

This piece was an exercise in the concepts of sound documentary and sound fiction. As it was my first piece of this series, I wanted to develop the idea of fictionality. Therefore, I based the structure on three different parts, and gave each a different organization among the speakers. This was the first exercise in terms of focalization, a multiple one. The silence between every division worked, in terms of punctuation, like a semicolon.

The first part aimed at establishing the context of the sound sources. It aimed at being real and to offer an introduction to that reality. The scissors (45'') were the first concrete hint to identify the sound's universe, but until the first sewing machine acts (4'26''), the mise-en-scène created by the previous sounds was not totally contextualized. To contribute to the sense of reality I presented it in a frontal stereo system. I assumed that the sense of the real

would be established in relation to the listener's position and the 'usual' perspective s/he has in confrontation with such sources. This position was the closest I could get to something like *cinema for the ears*. I have focused on introducing the sounds in terms of textures, durations and rhythms. It was the introduction to a family of sounds, real sounds, which would mediate a journey into a fictional situation. I wanted my listener to become familiar with the sounds before changing the sense of reality. This first part functions like an act, a first scene. In the logic of punctuating, the sound at 6'21'' is what I called a *didascalía*. It has the function of dividing the scenes. It will return in the middle of this part to punctuate an inciting incident (11'17''), it will subtly come back to divide the second scene from the third (13'35''), and it will be the "closing of the curtain" in the end of the piece.

The second part is distributed among four speakers. The context was already established, as the listener could relate the sources to a "tailor's universe". To each listener, each action was intriguing. The sounds were not literal, even though some could specify them. Therefore, the "normal world" could be modified. To emphasize the new scene, I changed the speakers to shift the listening mode, which means altering her/his position in relation to the sounds. I used this part to focus on developing the sense of character (9'50''). Using mainly the sounds from the sewing machines, I assigned one machine to each speaker, and the same machine always came from the same speaker. This contributed to establishing the sense of continuity, and as I was concerned to establish individuality for my characters, I insisted on individualizing the back speaker (11'25'') by giving it a different sound object from the other three.

The third part is a liberation of meaning (in the process of the piece, not in the listener's perception). Here, the eight speakers intervene and interact. It is based on remembering the echos from the first part, and the idea was to play with the sense of intelligibility to create a new scene. If the first part was aiming at documenting the social context, the second was concerned with fictional characters (here still in the sense of *dramatis persona*) and the third part was playing with the idea (from theatre) of absurd. Each part was a section, therefore the piece has 3 sections, and the last two sections have two scenes each. These sections are divided by silences.

den haag here&there: stereo - c. 4 minutes

As it was part of the radio program, and therefore a stereo piece, I had to base all the articulations within the sounds. The core of this piece is the editing technique. I was focused on finding a series of strategies of editing: superimpositions, jump and parallel cuts, convolutions, etc. It was an extension of the “absurdity” I was looking for in s’wing lives; although combining concrete sounds (easy to identify the sources) with very abstract sounds (whose original source is absolutely not identifiable). With this type of articulation, I was already exploring the idea of focal point, but providing my listener with several hints that s/he could hold in her/his memory as the main actor. For that, I chose several scenes: indoors, outdoors, crowded or deserted. I built the mise-en-scène by providing these sources in terms of perspective: near the listener’s perception or distant from it. This influences the sense of fictionality.

Here is a list of time marks to identify some concepts in the piece:

::0’14’’ - breathing sound is the “individual” sound. It will return and establish the main context where everything happens. (0’38’')

::0’29’’ - hint for the general surrealistic mood of the piece

::0’32’’ - jump-cut to introduce the genre of narrative

::0’43’’ - this sound will be used as sound punctuation (elsewhere I have called it a comma, because it separates the different sources, while still unifying them.)

::1’17’’ - superimposition of different locations

::1’45’’ - close vs. distant sounds, concrete vs. Abstract, real vs. imperceptible

::2’20’’ - the idea of return

::2’56’’ - sound-actor

::3’33’’ - repetition of hints

::::12 steps’ exercise

At this moment in my research, I was intrigued by the differences between structuring a story in a film-script and the sound practice I had known so far. For that reason, I decided to try to apply one of the most common theories of script-writing into sound-writing: I used Christopher Vogler’s schema for the hero’s journey, which is based on twelve steps. For each, I made a ‘sound translation’, in the sense that I thought of a possible way to articulate

the sounds in the same manner that we relate the characters in film. That led me to determine an amount of characters, and attribute a ‘function’ to each of them, which is usually called ‘role’.

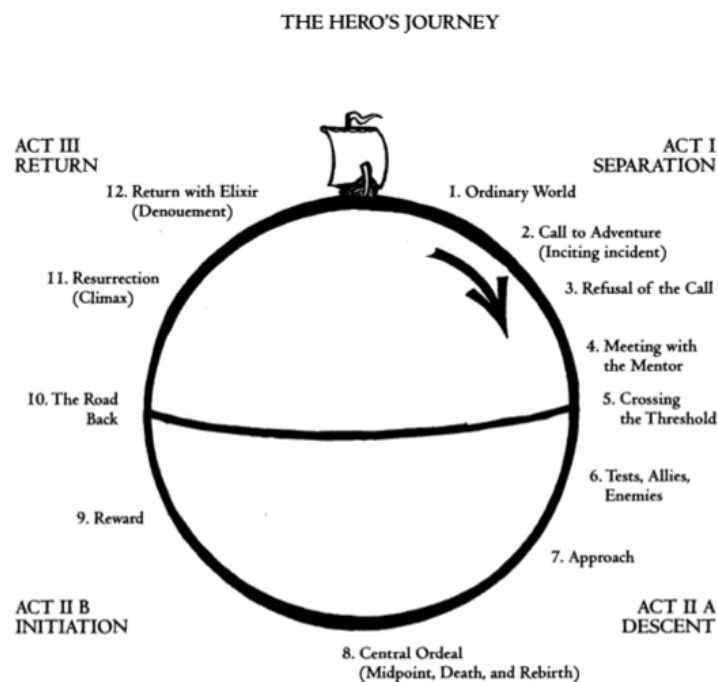


Figure 1 - The Hero's Journey (Vogler, 2007)

in the bus: stereo - c. 12 minutes

This was the first piece done within the 12 steps' exercise. I explored a long recording of a trip in a bus and tried to create notions of “sound character”, analogous to Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1971). I realized that to structure the sound in this manner was purely a part of the process, and that it would not be perceptible in the resulting piece. It was, however, an important step to deepen the relationship between sound and narrative. Because it was also the first piece in which I processed samples to originate new sounds, I had the chance to realize some of the points about concrete sounds I have been defending in the earlier chapters. It was in this piece that I first thought of the concept ‘fictional location’, first in the sense of an imaginary bus (that for some listeners was a air plane, and probably several other things). However, because it was constrained by a score, I was more concerned

with the relationships between the sounds than with a story. It was also my own liberation from the concepts of script-writing that I had brought from my cinema background.

quem conta um conto, II: stereo - c. 8 minutes

As the first exercise on Vogler's schema was very distant from my own idea of story, I tried a new piece with the same score, but this time with different and absolutely concrete sounds (for example, fireworks and pigeons). Still, I tried to combine those with processing, basing the "meetings" between the characters on that. The association of the sounds to a character in a tale made them grow in relationships, in the sense of interaction. I thought of connecting different places in time, ignoring their physical impossibilities, precisely to reinforce the fictionality of it. That would, I thought, enable the conflict that can emerge from it. Some examples of moments related to the journey' steps:

0'21'' - call for the adventure

1'14'' - refusal

1'36'' - second inciting incident

1'43'' - crossing the threshold

3'12'' - test, allies, enemies

4'08'' - approach

5'22'' - central ordeal

chapter three, in betweens: 4 channels + headphones - c. 17 minutes

This is still attempting to tell a story. It may be, perhaps, the first attempt to set free a story in my listeners' minds, to let them locate the happening, the fictional situation in which the character is played and shaped by the listener. This piece is about setting the stage for the event to happen, while allowing the situation to be a result of my listeners' imagination and freedom, instead of addressing every single definition to his/her perception. It was the first piece in which I attempted a sharp presentation mode that would contribute to the suggestion of a fictional world. As the piece is meant to be for 4 speakers and headphones, I will not include it in the cd. However, I can mention that there is a very clear intention concerning 'sound-actors', for it was the most direct 'acting' that I have arranged.

side walk: 5 channels - c. 13 minutes

This piece is not included in the cd either, as the current version is different from the one upcoming in the final concert. It is an attempt to find balance between the idea and the material itself, to think of the legitimacy of the former and the possibilities of the latter. For that reason, I developed a strategy of presentation that tried to make the space in the hall (stage) approach the experience I had with those sounds, in a very physical manner. Therefore, the process was based on the ideas of stage and scenes, for the sounds go through a walk that aims at different scenes, as “fictional locations”. For that, I first developed the idea of sound-actor. I am using one specific sound to guide the listener through these scenes; and I am specifically locating the loudspeakers in order to define a clear position in relation to the listener.

::::Upcoming piece

In the final exam I will present a new piece. This piece will again develop the idea of individual sounds. It will be a summary of most of the concepts in this thesis, as it is the piece I have been thinking of while analyzing my process. Thus, it will have different sections in the editing process, and hopefully the reader will recognize the sounds that will play the role of hints. Also, it is the first piece I will do with this idea of dramaturgy in mind, and for that reason it will be very focus on the mise-en-scène and theatricality potential of my sound-actors.

5 - On reception

Although this study took on a different direction, I still need to outline some thoughts about the aesthetics of this type of work. To question the subjectivity within which the sound-stories occur is only valid if I take it beyond their causes. Even though this is not the place for an extensive elaboration on the subject, there is a theoretical legacy that cannot be ignored. To propose a framework that involves communication and presentation forms brings responsibilities in relation to the audience. The legacy of aesthetics deals with theories about interpretation, meaning and intentionality. Together, these subjects constitute the theory of reception (See Sontag, 1964; Ricoeur, 1976; Frege, 1892; Bal 2002; Jauss, 2003).

Throughout the description of a method of composition and presentation, some questions about the listening proposal of these stories emerge. I have argued that a sound-story does not depend on the interpretation of the sounds and especially that this interpretation should not be confined to words. Within this proposal, I think the reflection on sound as an organic sensation is a relevant contribution, along with the proposal for an ‘augmented listening’ mode. It is not my intention to define a listening mode that suits my work. Such a thing does not exist. I do not intend to confine my work to a specific expectation, neither from me towards the audience nor the other way around. There is not an ideal situation or context that could be something else than just what it is. There are several ways of listening to a work, you might call them listening modes, and none is more important than any other. The question here is that of listening as a form of communication. For this reason, its *becoming* is culture-specific. Although it is possible to practice the work without taking it into consideration, I believe one should not think of the work without bearing in mind its cultural context.

The referential issue

The discussion about reference arises especially due to the so-called concrete sounds. I have claimed that these sounds do refer to real life experiences or objects, as they are part of social situations. In the conceptual perspective of this study, the level of referentiality also comes together with the conception of sound-percepts. To listen to concrete sounds challenges the

listener to understand the situation. This was described before as articulation of information. In this case articulation takes place in the attempt of making sense of what one hears, and it will become a matter of recognition (or lack thereof). As Ricoeur clarifies, drawing on Frege, sense is the predicative relation and reference is the pretension to say something about reality (Ricoeur, 1976; Frege, 1970). The sounds do evoke reality, the listener can relate what s/he hears to previous individual experiences, and this involves memory.

That relationship to memory is one possible way of understanding what augmented listening is. The listener-focalizer validates the idea that the piece is performed and, therefore, incorporates performativity. This listener is not devoid of a past, which turns (if for no other reason) listening into a cultural activity. Therefore, memory plays an important role in clarifying that concrete sounds refer to experiences. It is through memory that the listener becomes a focalizer. Moreover, memory and listening have in common the element of temporality. Both occur within a permanent actualization of the senses, which I have termed crystalized time. As Bal points out:

Memory concerns the past and happens in the present; the elements of present and past in memory are what specifically distinguish performance and performativity (...). Memory as mediator between performance and performativity operates on a mixture of temporalities (Bal, 2002: 183,199).

At the same time, this does not mean that sounds inevitably refer to experiences that one has gone through before. It is based on this cultural baggage that one can formulate impressions and sensations. A narrative assumption is a guess; and so is listening. But an exercise of guessing that triggers a travel to and into the imagination.

Within such possibility of recognition two other arguments emerge. The idea of recognition and referentiality questions the role of interpretation in 'augmented listening'. And, perforce, we have to consider meaning as well. As Nancy remarks: "to listen is to always be in the edge of meaning" (Nancy, 2007: 7).

Considerations on interpretation

The idea of interpretation is as inevitable as it is ambiguous. It is inevitable because of the semiotic layer that such an exposition to sounds unfolds. It is ambiguous because if, on the

one hand, I propose that a sound-story plot is the consequence of an attempt at understanding, on the other hand I defend some measure of liberation from interpretation. The point is that interpretation should not be prescriptive. Instead, it should be a tool for travelling through sensations. After all, “interpretation is never anything more than a proposal” (Bal, 1997: 11). And it should not constrain the possibilities of sounds to be something else than the listener’s first guess.

The difference I am trying to point out is that between referring to interpretation in the same scope that one refers to representation, and to do it in a creative realm. On the one hand, we have representation understood as a limitative translation of mimetic intentions. And “imitation implies a sense of intention (...) and requires the listener’s knowledge of the reference” (Augoyard, Torgue, 2008: 59). In this sense, the sounds acquire a figurative layer that will induct the listener to render them through words. On the other hand, I have already asserted that one cannot assume any absolute and definitive conclusions about the sounds and their relations. It is a permanent process of assessing the sounds and perceiving them. This is the organicity of a sound, its permanent change and rearrangement. As Sontag affirms, “interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there” (Sontag, 1966: 13), while Bal adds that interpretation can be a form of censorship (1997: 17).

This is the main reason why I never shared the story behind the process, nor made descriptive program notes. If I provide my listener with definitions and descriptions about the events, situations and actions s/he is about to hear, I am irreparably conditioning the perception of the sounds. I neither want to limit what these sounds can be in the listener’s imagination, nor do I want to impose my own take on them. I am the mediator of the experience, but I am not the provider of explanations about it. In short, I do not want the pieces to be ‘about’ anything, but to *be* something. Such questions can be developed regarding the idea of meaning embedded in my approach of narrative.

Dubious meanings

Meaning is related to two ideas: significance and intelligibility. The former is a part of a communication model. To consider ‘meaning’ is to expect sound to communicate. The ideal of communication is based on a fallacy, as it relies on the possibility of mutual understanding.

The main problem of a transmission is not only the fact that data may be lost on the way, but mostly that meaning is always determined by interpretation. The latter aims at understanding what the object of experience is doing and telling.¹

To interpret is to assume and assumptions are speculations. The meaning is about the ‘thing’, not about the experience thereof. In the same way that I proposed a ‘creative listening’, I argue that to attribute meaning to sounds also has to be a creative identification. Since it involves a subject, identification is predicative. As Ricoeur formulated, “the question here is whether the surplus of meaning (...) is part of [the works’] signification or if it must be understood as an external factor, which is noncognitive and simply emotional” (1976: 45).

Therefore, what I propose with the concept of sound-story is a process of *becoming* a sound-percept. This is an organic sound-signifier to which the listener will associate a sound-signified. This means that the piece is playing a sound-pulse, and the listener will hear a sound-percept. The meaning of that sound should not be repressive, but rather an act of spontaneity, as in Kant’s “synthesis of imagination”. To say that the sound ‘means something’ is an effective identification with a possible source, idea or sensation. The meaning of a sound, or the whole sound-story, is a narrative production sustained by the listener’s intuition (See Sheerin, 2009).

Intentionality and Reception

In general, my approach to sound as a narrative process can generate certain expectations. These can either be mine towards my audience, or from the audience towards me. According to the context where the work is played, the audience brings in a certain set of personal, cultural, and aesthetic expectations, the so-called “horizon of expectations” (Jauss, 2003: 64). This is why sound-stories rest on cultural memory.

One of my motivations to not share the back story to the piece is because, much in line with twentieth-century discussions in literary and art theory, I do not believe in intentionality to validate communication. Although the process of composition is handled through a series of intentions, the concept of intention will not survive in the work. Even though some intentions might be explicit and therefore communicable, in the end – if they

¹ To these ideas, the theory of the “Death Of The Author” (Barthes, 1967) and “The Open Work” (Eco, 1989) are of a substantial relevance.

were communicated – they are not intentions any longer but an aesthetic experience of the work. The fallacy of intentionality is discussed at length in Jauss’s “Theory of Reception” (Jauss, 2003). In his view, the process of perception is a goal in itself (50). The work should consider the perceiver as it considers the emitter: by questioning its position in the sight of the work (55), the relation between both interveners is what determines the evolution of it (57).

Furthermore, as Bal remarks:

The artist is involved only part of the way. He disappears, gives his work over to a public he will not know. What happens after the work has been made is not determinable by artistic will (Bal, 2002: 255)

To challenge interpretation and meaning is to liberate the work from citationality, which is included in the “dogma of intentionalism” (Bal, 2002: 180). I do not claim to have no intentions at all, as these indeed conduct my process of narration. However, in the same way I do not expect the listener to perceive the sounds as I did, I do not expect her or him to follow and comply with my intentions. That would be to tell them my own story, and precluding the story from becoming their own. I can influence this, prevent it from happening: if I am not locating my causes, the listener is free from my intentionality. What I most strongly grasp from the aesthetics of reception is that the work should remain as the experience of it and not the product itself. The same way that it should remain what it is and not what it might be about. Therefore, there is an idea of fate within performativity that makes the work the result of a relationship between the producer, the receiver and historic-social circumstances (Jauss, 2003; Bal, 2002).

This is the main reason why I chose to dedicate my study to the process of composition of sound-stories and to investigate the possibility of developing a theory of sound-narration. The process itself is the only thing depending on me, and I can take responsibility for it. What happens from the moment that I play my pieces, even if within the boundaries that I established in the presenting modes, is already an option to my listener. The listener gets to choose how much attention each sound is worth, and what kind of focalization s/he is demanding to devote in that moment. Moreover, I cannot predict all the

circumstances, neither do I aim at controlling those – in the end, everything is a question of chance.

Conclusion

The reason why I dedicated the study to the process of composition was to investigate the possibility of developing a theory for sound narration. I have started the dissertation by attempting at explaining my own concepts about sound. I am not claiming a universal truth considering these concepts, and I have no intentions to impose them on my listener. These concepts are part of my process, and should remain there.

The logic I try to establish with the first chapter is to explain my own positioning as a field-recorder. It is due to these considerations that I do what I do in the manner that I do it. It is based on thinking about sound as an organism that I choose from what perspective to record it. From that moment on, I am mediating the sound through the microphone and I am the focalizer of that situation. The narrative idea is generated within this recording approach. It begins then, as an experience that will be brought to the studio. The recording is my memory of an organic development that I bear in mind at the editing session and try to narrate.

I have proposed the sound, and its narrative arrangement, to be a suggestion of sensations. Along this, I established some differences between my approach of narrative and the one I found to be the most common (or the most documented) within electroacoustic music. How are narrative sensations different from musical sensations? In the end, the differences are not the point. In the same way film has diverse models of narration, sound art also does. As for the attempt at theorizing sound narrative in the previous pages – and insisting on sound narrative rather than music narrative – the difference of sound-sensations lies in the assumptions to which concrete sounds lead, what I have claimed to be a narrative effect.

These assumptions are the basis of the presentation mode. I have been investigating strategies of presenting the pieces in a clearer way towards the suggestions I am about to make. For that reason, I tried to remain loyal to my practices as they are, and think of the concepts of the process in retrospective.

In this sense, I can say that two possible ways for my work are now started: I either investigate further the theory of sound-editing as a narrative tool, or aim at an extensive practice of dramaturgy towards something like “theater for the ears” – as different from “cinema for the ears”. For that reason, I saw this study, my pieces and the overall experience

in Sonology, as an opportunity to figure out what exactly these “sound-stories” can become. I see this study as a living-document. I never aimed to come up with definitive answers to the subjects I selected for this study, instead I looked for questions that would provide me with the possibility of developing one. I see it as the start of my work, not a proof of it.

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Appendix – Contens of the Cd

- 1 – s' wing lives Folder: 8 channels
- 2 – s' wing lives WAV file: stereo recording
- 3 – den haag here & there (wav file)
- 4 – in the bus (wav file)
- 5 – quem conta um conto (wav file)
- 6 – pdf version of this document