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The critical analysis of musical discourse

Theo van Leeuwen*

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

This paper argues that, contrary to what many musicologists and classical musicians have maintained, music can, and should, be analysed as discourse. It then surveys a number of approaches to the critical analysis of musical discourse and applies these approaches to a range of examples, including sonatas, advertising jingles and news signature tunes.

Keywords: critical analysis; musical discourse; social interaction; hegemonic music

Introduction

Music is, and has always been, in every human society, an integral part of social, political and economic life. It can create emotive allegiance to powerful nation-states, religions and other social institutions, and it can express the values these institutions stand for and rally people behind them. ‘Without music no State could survive’, the music master in Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* said, and after the French revolution, a National Institute of Music was created to ‘support and bestir, by its accents, the energy of the defenders of equality, and to prohibit the music which softens the soul of the French with effeminate sounds, in salons or temples given over to imposture’ (quoted in Attali, 1985, p. 55). In this special issue on the critical analysis of musical discourse, David Machin and John Richardson highlight the ‘bestirring’ role of music in Nazi Germany through a detailed analysis of the Horst Wessel song and the closely related Marching Song of the British Union of Fascists (Machin & Richardson, 2012).

But music can also be subversive and challenge power. It has been feared and repressed by dictators the world over, as is shown in this issue by Massimo Leone, who discusses music in Iran since 1979, the year when Khomeini banned music altogether, declaring that it is ‘like a drug’ and that ‘we must eliminate music because it means betraying our country and our youth’ (Leone, 2012). As Leone shows, Khomeini did not succeed. If anything, music instead strengthened and unified protest in Iran. But even in the West singing a song can be a criminal act, as Simon McKerrell shows in his paper on hegemonic sectarian folk songs in Scotland (McKerrell, 2012). And Western popular music can provide counter-hegemonic social commentary as Martin Power, Aileen Dillane and Eoin Devereux show in their analysis of Morrissey’s ‘Interesting Drug’, which also pays close attention to the relation between image, text and music in the video of that song (Power, Dillane, & Devereux, 2012). Nicolai Graakjaer, finally, discusses the fundamental role of music in contemporary consumer culture by analysing the music played in a chain of fashion stores which extends the erotic investment in fashion already familiar from advertisements and fashion magazines to the entire shopping environment and the entire shopping experience (Graakjaer, 2012).

These papers all demonstrate the potential and power of critical music analysis. Yet, within the broader field of critical discourse studies, critical music analysis has remained an exception, in part because music analysis as seen as difficult, too specialist a domain for critical discourse

*Email: theo.vanleeuwen@uts.edu.au

analysts to enter, in part because most musicologists do not see music as discourse and refuse to deal with musical meaning. Below I will take issue with both these views, arguing that music can, and should, be analysed as discourse and drawing on the work of musicologists who *have* analysed music as discourse in proposing tools for music analysis that are accessible to non-musicologists and allow critical music analysis to move beyond impressionistic description and adopt the same rigour critical discourse analysts apply when analysing language and speech. Cooke's (1959) *Language of music*, for instance, is an astounding compendium of musical motifs and convincingly brings out the quite constant meanings these motifs have had in Western music over the centuries. Lomax's (1968) *Folk song style and culture* is an equally impressive compendium of aspects of singing styles and their social meaning potentials. The work of the Canadian composer and theorist Schafer (1977, 1986) is replete with insights on almost all aspects of musical meaning. McClary's (1991) feminist musicology reveals the pervasiveness of gender discourses in music. The work of Shepherd (1991) and Tagg (1982, 1984, 1990, 1994) on popular music is a rich source of ideas for the critical study of voice quality, tonality, musical time and many other issues. Writers such as these have shown that musical signifiers, aspects of melody, harmony, musical structure, rhythm and timbre, can be convincingly linked to social meaning potentials in ways that can help us analyse both the hegemonic ideological work and the counter-hegemonic work of music in society and to unlock the astounding potential of music to herald emergent, social, cultural, political and economic developments, often even before they become visible in other domains of social life (cf. Attali, 1985).

Music as discourse

In his autobiography, Stravinsky (1936, p. 91) wrote

I consider that music is, by its very nature, powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, or a phenomenon of nature. If, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality.

The music semiotician Nattiez (1971) echoed this: 'Music, by itself, signifies nothing' (p. 8). And so did many other musicians, musicologists and music semioticians. Music is still widely viewed as autonomous and abstract, even if it can be aesthetically pleasing and emotively engaging. And the preferred form of listening to music is still widely held to be what Adorno (1976, p. 4) called 'structural hearing' – focusing on the formal aspects of music in the way that can still be seen every day in classical music (and now also jazz) reviews.

In fact, Western music, especially in the context of seventeenth-century Italian opera, quite deliberately set out to develop a 'representative style', a set of resources that would allow music to tell stories, to evoke settings, characterize *dramatis personae* and signify actions. McClary (1991, p. 35) has discussed this in her work on early Italian opera:

One of the great accomplishments of seventeenth century culture was the development of a vocabulary by means of which dramatic characters and actions could be delineated in music (...) The achievements of the *stile rappresentativo* made possible most of the musical forms with which we still live today.

The musical forms that stem from this tradition have culminated in the twentieth century in the global musical language of Hollywood film music, understood by anyone who has ever been exposed to Hollywood films.

Yet, there has been, from the early nineteenth century onwards, an increasing tension between the 'descriptive' and the 'melodious' aspects of music, between music as discourse and 'pure' music. Schlegel, in 1798, could still see music as discourse, as 'philosophy in sounds' (quoted in Dahlhaus, 1985, p. 34):

Must not pure instrumental music create its own text? And does not the theme undergo the same processes of development, confirmation, variation and contrast in music as the object of meditation in a train of musical thought?

But ever since the early nineteenth century, composers, musicologists and philosophers have begun to express a sense of embarrassment about ‘descriptive’ music. Beethoven gave the movements of his *Pastoral Symphony* titles such as ‘Scene by the Brook’, ‘Happy Gathering of the Villagers’ and ‘Thunderstorm’ and yet felt he had to defend the work as ‘more the expression of feeling than painting’ (Dahlhaus, 1985, p. 21). More than a century later, Honegger’s *Pacific 231* ‘described’ the sound of a steam locomotive. The whistle was played by strings abruptly sliding up. Brass, strings and timpani played the chugging of the engine, first low and slow, then gradually faster and higher. But on the sleeve notes (Erato 2292-45242-2), Honegger is quoted as downplaying the representational aspects of the piece: ‘What I was looking for in “Pacific” was not so much to imitate the sounds of the locomotive, but to translate visual impressions and physical enjoyment with a musical construction’.

The critical music analyst, however, should pay attention to the ‘descriptive’, and link it to discourse, in the case of Honegger, for instance, to the discourses of technology of the period – Russian constructivism, the work of Léger, Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* and so on, all of which used machine motifs either to celebrate or to critique the new power of technology in society. Music can engage listeners emotively with such discourses, making them feel the majestic power of the machine and its promise of progress or dread its mechanical monotony and de-humanizing effects.

McClary has written extensively about discourses of gender and sexuality in classical music, arguing that the ‘putting into discourse of sex’ which, as Foucault (1981) noted, started in the seventeenth century, coincided with the musical construction of gender in opera. It was there, said McClary (1991, p. 50), that men began to stifle their feelings while women were expected to indulge in emotional expression, so that men who *did* express emotions, for example, Orfeo in Monteverdi’s opera of the same name, were regarded as effeminate. It was there that extensive soliloquies by abandoned women and musically realized feminine seduction tactics offered the public insights into the female mind ‘revealing, without mediation, *what women are really like*: not docile, but insubordinate or threatening, unless they can be reconciled with a strong male authority’ (McClary, 1991, p. 52). McClary related the popularity of such discourses to the patriarchal backlash of the period:

In the name of ‘entertainment’, many contradictory models of power slipped by a guileless representations of the world itself (...) If we are to make sense of early opera – its achievements and its discontents – we must begin to unravel that tangle of gender, rhetoric and power that first found its voice in the musical convention of the *stile rappresentativo*. (McClary, 1991, p. 52)

Similar models informed instrumental music, for instance in the first parts of sonatas and symphonies. They can be reconstructed by paying close attention to key musical signifiers, as well as, of course, the social context in which these signifiers were used.

Ascending and descending melodies: According to Cooke (1959, p. 102ff), ascending melodies, melodies rising in pitch, are ‘active’ and ‘dynamic’. This, Cooke argues, is because in singing pitch relates to vocal effort. The higher the notes, the greater the effort required from the singer. This is why songs that seek to energize people, to rally people behind a cause (for instance, national anthems), have melodies characterized by rising pitch (cf. Machin and Richardson in this issue). Descending in pitch, by contrast, allows singers to decrease vocal effort and is therefore more ‘passive’, ‘inward-looking’ and so on.

Large intervals/small intervals: The same applies to the size of the intervals between the notes. Large energetic steps upwards are typical for ‘heroic’, masculine music and small steps

downwards for ‘sentimental’ music and ‘ballads’. Chromatism, which uses the smallest steps possible in Western tonality, is a standard device of ‘sentimentality’ in music.

Dotted rhythms and suspension: Dynamic, energetic melodies may have ‘dotted rhythms’ in which each note is anticipated by a short note (DAA-de- DAA-de- DAA-de-DAA), giving a sense of exact, precisely disciplined timing. In the case of ‘suspension’, on the other hand, notes languidly linger and stretch, delaying the next note, and this, too, is a standard device of ‘sentimentality’ in music.

As McClary explains, the sonata form opens with a ‘masculine theme’ that typically uses active, assertive musical signifiers such as ascending melodies, large intervals and dotted rhythms and is usually also loud and played by loud instruments such as brass and timpani. Then follows a ‘feminine’ theme, typically more passive and sentimental, using descending melodies, small intervals and suspension and played more softly and by gentler instruments such as woodwind or strings. Not all of these characteristics will of course always be present in every ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ theme, and variations can outline different kinds of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, as McClary (1991, pp. 69–79) shows in a fascinating analysis of the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s 4th symphony. After the two themes have been established, they begin to engage in interaction, travelling, during the ‘development’ of the movement, through different tonal territories until, in the ‘resolution’, the feminine theme is subjugated, transposed into the key of the masculine theme. With this schema, McClary says, many stories can be told – the violent stories of Beethoven, which ‘often exhibit considerable anxiety with respect to feminine moments and respond to them with extraordinary violence’, or the gentler stories of Mozart and Schubert who ‘tend to invest their second themes with extraordinary sympathy’ so that ‘one regrets the inevitable return to the tonic and the original materials’ as the feminine theme is ‘brutally, tragically quashed in accordance with the destiny predetermined by the “disinterested” conventions of the form’ (McClary, 1991).

Music as social interaction

The act of making music, and listening to music, is by nature a form of social interaction, and the relations of power and solidarity that are created by musical interaction are a primary source of musical meaning. In contrast to conversation, which is sequential (although various writers have pointed at the frequency of simultaneous speaking, e.g. Feld, 1982; Tannen, 1992), musical interaction is usually simultaneous, and this is of course at the heart of music’s great power to unite people and create group feelings (cf. Machin and Richardson in this issue). Three broad kinds of simultaneous interactions can be discerned:

Social unison: Social unison (or ‘monophony’, as it is called in music theory) is a form of interaction in which all participants sing and/or play the same notes. Positively, this can create or represent solidarity, a positive sense of belonging to a group. Negatively, it can create or represent conformity, strict disciplining and a lack of individuality. Lomax (1968, p. 157), in his ethno-musicological survey of song styles across the world, notes that social unison is the dominant form in ‘leaderless’ societies in which there is an emphasis on consensus and conformity. But it occurs also in more complex societies such as ours, for instance, in the pub, the sports stadium, the church, the school or the army.

The unison voices can fully blend, so that no individual voices stand out, or be ‘heterophonic’, with individual voices standing out to a greater or lesser extent, so that both group solidarity and individual difference are signified.

Social pluralism: In ‘polyphony’, *different* melodies are simultaneously played or sung by different instruments or singers. Each could stand on its own and still have musical interest, yet they all fit harmoniously together. It is therefore a form of interaction in which the interacting

parties are ‘equal but different’. Lomax (1968, p. 165) found that two-voiced polyphony, in many of the smaller societies in which it is used, symbolizes gender roles with a clear division of labour between men and women, but without the one being valued more highly than the other.

In the history of European music, polyphony began to develop from the ninth century, first in the form of ‘parallel organum’, what we would now call ‘harmony lines’, then in the form of counterpoint, where melodies are the inverse of one another (e.g. if one goes up by two steps, the other simultaneously goes down by two steps), and finally into full musical pluralism, with melodies that are melodically and rhythmically independent, yet fit well together.

Social domination: In ‘homophonic’ music, one voice (the melody) becomes dominant and the other voices subordinate, accompanying and supporting the dominant voice. On their own, these subordinate voices would not have musical interest. They are meaningful only in relation to the whole. Their role is ‘harmonic’ – they must ‘harmonize’ with the dominant voice. Homophonic music therefore celebrates relations of inequality and domination, although these relations can of course be inflected or even subverted: with harmony comes disharmony – muffled tension and dissonance behind, or even overt clashes with, the melody, the hegemonic voice. The music must then seek to resolve this dissonance if it is to progress towards a harmonic resolution.

In European music, homophony started in the age of the industrial revolution and culminated in the symphony orchestra. Many writers, including Weber (1958 [1911]), have commented on the similarity between the organization of the symphony orchestra and the factory, seeing in the symphony orchestra the same division of labour into in themselves meaningless functions and the same importance of the supervisors who must bring all these functions together. The symphony orchestra thus enacts and celebrates the values of the industrial age and it is significant that countries such as Japan and China, as soon as they began to industrialize on a large scale, also began to play Western symphonic music.

But there are also sequential forms of musical interaction. ‘Call–response’ patterns are common in many forms of music and always involve the interaction between a real or a symbolic leader and his or her followers, whether it is a priest and a congregation, a male singer and a group of female back-up vocalists, or an advertising jingle in which a male voice sings the praises of a washing powder and is responded to by a choir of housewives. Much can be learnt from a close study of the relationships this can create (cf. van Leeuwen, 1999, pp. 71–77). There can, for instance, be a respectful distance between the part of the leader and the part of the choir, or the two can overlap or, even, in the end join forces. Lomax (1968, p. 158) has described how this happens in African performances:

Frequently the performance begins with the two parts just touching and, as the excitement of the performance grows, the chorus will encroach more and more upon the leader’s time, until at last both are singing without letup in exciting rhythmic relationship to each other.

But it can also occur in contemporary advertising jingles (van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 72):

Leader:	So listen to me baby, Got a new plan, Why don’t we
Leader+Chorus	Take a shot of Comfort

And responses can be a full response which adds new information, as in the example given above, or a simple affirmation, whether the congregation’s ‘Amen’ or ‘Halleluiah’ or the female vocalists’ rapturous ‘Aaah’ (van Leeuwen, 1999, p. 73), as in the example given below:

Leader:	Take me to the stars And shoot me into space now Move...
Chorus:	Aaaah...

In an analysis of the aria ‘Bess You Are My Woman Now’ from Gershwin’s opera *Porgy and Bess* (Lomax, 1968, pp. 86–90), I have shown that the same relationships can also inform vocal duets.

Musical time

Musical time enacts and celebrates the timings of social interaction. Some forms of music adhere strictly to a regular, metronomic beat, just as some social institutions require strict adherence to the mechanical time of the clock. Other forms of music are polyrhythmic, allowing each player to keep his or her own time without endangering the cohesion of the whole. Musical choices of this kind may either characterize particular kinds of music or be used representationally, as in the example of the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ themes of the sonata form.

Measured versus unmeasured time

Unmeasured time does not have a regular beat, but a slow and ongoing drone that may fluctuate slightly and irregularly. It cannot normally be produced by the human voice, and for this reason, it tends to signify the ‘non-human’ – eternity and divinity, the grandeur of nature, the wide expanse of the cosmos. Special techniques such as circular breathing and special technologies such as the church organ or the synthesizer are developed to produce it.

Metronomic and non-metronomic time

Even measured time does not always have a strictly clock-like, metronomic beat. As discussed already, ‘suspension’ stretches time, and in Afro-American music, the beat is often anticipated or delayed. Music can thus either align itself with the time of the clock or rebel against it. Philip Tagg has described the timing of rock music as an attempt to ‘gain some control over time through musical expression’ in a context where such control is lacking and where mechanical time remains dominant ‘at work and in other official realms of power’ (1990, p. 112). Disco, on the other hand, does not have ‘the same extent of subversion of clock time, not the same human appropriation of the mechanical pulse’ (Tagg, 1984, pp. 31–32).

Major/minor

The major scale became the norm in Western music in the late Middle Ages. The hegemonic music of the time, the music of the Church, had not used the Ionian mode, which corresponds to the current major scale, although that mode was widely used in secular music. Pope John XXI, in the middle of the fourteenth century, tried to ban the major scale (quoted in Harman & Mellers, 1962, p. 123):

Certain disciplines of the new school (...) display their method in notes which are new to us (...) they stuff our melodies with upper parts made out of secular songs (...) their voices are incessantly running to and fro, intoxicating the ear (...) We now hasten therefore to banish these methods (...) and to put them to flight more effectually than heretofore, far from the house of God (...) let nothing in the authoritative music be changed.

The ascendance of the major scale, the secular scale, was therefore subversive. It indicated a shift of cultural hegemony from the religious to the secular, and from the Church to the rising merchant class, and it came to be associated with the positive values of that class: belief in progress through human achievement science, industry and so on. Minor, by contrast, literally depresses the major scale, by lowering the third, the sixth and the seventh note, and so became associated with everything that stands in the way of progress. For a long time, pieces

in a minor key had to have a 'happy ending' (the 'tierce de Picardie') – and happy endings of this kind are still common today in many Broadway songs.

These meanings have remained remarkably stable. In the Soviet Union, Stalin urged Shostakovich to make greater use of the major triad, so as to 'give enduring expression to the heroism of the people's lives in the period of the victory of socialism' (Nestyev, 1961, p. 458), and wherever the ethos of industrial progress gained a foothold, the major triad soon followed. Cooke (1959, p. 55) notes that, after Independence, Indian sitar players began to add major thirds to the bass drone of *ragas*, which, until then, had always been a 'bare fifth'.

In the West, we have of course 'privatized' the discourse of music, and speak of major and minor in terms of 'mood', with major as 'happy' and minor as 'sad', but in fact music fuses ideological meaning and emotion, and it is precisely therein that its power lies.

Voice quality and timbre

Values and identities can also be expressed by voice qualities and instrumental timbres. Take vocal tension for example. We can recognize the sound of a tense voice, as it is higher, sharper and brighter than a lax voice. We know where such tension comes from – from excitement, for instance, or apprehension. We can use it to express tension even when we do not actually feel tense. And we can recognize the quality also in the way musical instruments are played or in other sounds. Just what tension will mean in a given context will of course depend on the other musical and non-musical signifiers it combines with and on the social context in which the tense sounds are produced. Lomax (1968, p. 193) described how tensing of the voice in female singing is customary in societies where there is a good deal of sexual repression of women:

It is as if one of the assignments of the favoured singer is to act out the level of sexual tension which the customs of the society establish as normal. The content of this message may be painful and anxiety-producing, but the effect upon the culture member may be stimulating, erotic and pleasurable since the song reminds him of familiar sexual emotions and experiences.

Other aspects of voice quality can be related to physical, bodily experiences and social experiences in similar ways.

Soft/loud: Soft and loud are most crucially associated with distance and therefore also with *social distance* (Hall, 1966, pp. 184–185). At 'intimate' range, we whisper; at 'close personal' range, we speak softly and so on; and only at 'public' range do we fully project our voices. The microphone and amplification have of course made it possible to disengage loudness as a signifying system from real social distance, so that we can now, for instance, whisper intimately to an audience of thousands and mix up the 'private' and the 'public' in ways that were hitherto impossible.

High/low: Because the voices of men are, on average, lower than those of women and children, the meanings of pitch relate to gender and age in complex ways. Men use the higher regions of their range to assert themselves, women the lower regions. In combination with, for instance, loudness, this has led to iconic models of female identity such as the low soft voice of Lauren Bacall in *To Have and Have Not*, for instance, at once assertive and seductive, or the higher, breathy voice of Marilyn Monroe, at once childlike and vulnerable and seductive.

Vibrato/plain: Like other aspects of voice quality, vibrato 'means what it is'. We can recognize trembling or wavering in the sound of a voice or instrument, and we know what causes it – emotion, whether it be love or fear. Vibrato is therefore equally good at pulling the heartstrings in a love song as in creating a sense of fear and foreboding in the music of a horror film.

Breathiness: In breathiness, the sounds of voices and instruments mix with the sound of breathing. Again, we know where that comes from – exertion or excitement. Soft, breathy

voices can suggest intimacy and sensuality. Advertisers use it to give their message erotic appeal, and singers and instrumentalists use it for the same reason.

Roughness: A rough voice is one in which we can hear other things besides the tone of the voice itself – friction, hoarseness, harshness and rasp. A smooth voice is a voice from which all noisiness is eliminated. Again, roughness means what it is: rough. We know it may come from the wear and tear of a hard life or from the unvarnished, ‘hand-made’, ‘lived in’ qualities of the ‘authentic’. Lomax (1968, p. 192) mentions that it is common in male speech and singing in hunting societies and strongly correlated with the assertiveness and resourcefulness a good hunter requires.

All these qualities are simultaneously present in every timbre, though in different proportions, and they can characterize the habitual style of a singer or an instrumentalist or the preferred sound of a musical genre. The voice of Billie Holiday, for instance, is tense and relatively loud, rather high, than that of other women jazz singers of the same period, and with just a touch of vibrato. These features combine to express Billie Holiday’s identity as a singer: tense and tough, struggling to have her message heard, yet also vulnerable, and betraying suppressed emotion in the long notes.

Perspective

Music can use relative loudness to position the listeners close to some parts of complex musical events and distance them from others. The closest part or parts will form the musical foreground or ‘figure’, the part on which the listeners are meant to focus most closely. The middle ground, or ‘ground’, forms a kind of social setting for the ‘figure’ and will be ‘heard but not listened to’, and the background, or ‘field’, is an even more distant, physical setting.

Musical perspective can be used representationally. In Charles Ives’ *Housatonic at Stockbridge*, the music represents an early morning walk along the river Housatonic. The river is represented by soft, hazy, atonal chords, played by strings, and drifting along irregularly and seemingly haphazardly, with a piano adding twinkles of light. After a while, we hear a hymn melody coming from a church on the other side of the river, played on horn and lower strings, very softly at first. Gradually this melody gets louder as we ‘walk towards it’, until it clashes with the sounds of the river in a conflict between the unpredictable and ever-shifting rhythms of nature and the world of order and communal values expressed by the hymn – a conflict also expressed in many other American cultural products, for example in Westerns. But musical perspective can also characterize, for instance, the hierarchy between melody and accompaniment in certain genres of homophonic music or the gender relations between a male solo singer and female ‘back-up vocalists’.

Conclusion

I will end by briefly indicating how these various elements can come together in an integrated analysis, returning to an example I have discussed earlier (van Leeuwen, 1999, pp. 60–64), the news signature tunes of the ABC, Australia’s national, state-subsidized radio and television broadcaster.

For 32 years, the ABC had used a news signature theme called ‘Majestic Fanfare’. It had a simple call-and-response structure in which the ‘call’ was played by unison trumpets, and the response a homophonic melody played by the whole orchestra, with harp glissandos being particularly noticeable. The tune set up a relation between the news and its audience in which the news called the nation to attention, and in which the nation responded, in all its variety

(as represented by the different instruments used), but at the same time harmoniously, without dissonance.

The trumpet theme was a typical masculine theme – a rising melody using large intervals and dotted rhythms, and set in a major key. Thus, the voice of the news was (a) that of a leader ('call and response'), (b) active, 'masculine' and nationalistic (the anthem-like melody) with militaristic connotations (the 'bugle call' instrumentation), (c) disciplined (the dotted rhythm), (d) optimistic and confident (the major key) and (e) unified (social unison). The audience was characterized as (a) diverse, including even artistic, lyrical elements (the varied instrumentation and the harp glissandos), but nevertheless (b) harmoniously joining in with the main melody (social domination). In short, the news was characterized as assertive, vested with authority, emanating from a centre of power, and obediently followed by a mass audience.

In the late 1980s, this theme was replaced with a new theme. It had three parts. The first part began with a synthesizer drone which continued throughout the whole part. Soon a call and response came in, just as in the old tune, but the call was now played by a single piccolo trumpet, and the response by a brass ensemble. Then, the call and response were repeated. The middle section had a fast ostinato rhythmic pattern that could be taken as a musical imitation of, say, a teletypewriter. On top of this, the voice of a newsreader read the headlines, punctuated by very short melodic phrases, which alternated between a rather harsh-sounding motif, played by brass, and a softer, more lyrical one, played by a synthesizer. The final part repeated the call and response one more time.

This new tune characterized the news in a different way. The synthesizer drone, which, on television, was accompanied by an image of a revolving satellite, suggested the news coming in via satellite (unmeasured synthesizer sound). The imperial self-assurance of the unison trumpets with their militaristically disciplined timing made place for a single piccolo trumpet, playing a minor and for the most part descending melody with jazz-like syncopation. Authority was played down, the former self-assurance much diminished, and element of entertainment had entered (the syncopation; the 'sentimental' rather than militaristic melodies). The news was also portrayed as *urgent* and *immediate* (the relentless ostinato pattern), and as *varied*, containing both 'hard' and 'soft' news (the alternation between the two kinds of melodies in the middle section).

When I asked the composer why he had made these changes, many of the things he said tallied with my initial analysis, for instance, the emphasis on the urgency, immediacy and variety of the news. But when I asked him why the tune was now in a minor key, he hesitated and wanted to confer with the arranger before answering. In the end, he said 'It's because the news is more dramatic today'. I begged to differ. I felt that the composer, who was also a broadcaster, disagreed with recent changes in style of presentation, and in programming, which had done away with the ABC's previously well-patrolled boundary between news and current affairs, and that he had, perhaps subconsciously, expressed this by musically diminishing the former assertiveness and glory of the 'Majestic Fanfare'.

Clearly, the principal musical systems – melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and so on – are not just abstract, formal systems. They realize social meanings and express values and identities and ideologies. It is hoped that the example set by the authors of this issue will be followed by other critical discourse analysts and that the critical analysis of musical discourse will get the place it deserves in critical discourse studies.

Notes on contributor

Theo van Leeuwen is Professor of Media and Communication and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney. He has published widely in the areas of critical discourse

analysis, multimodality and visual semiotics. His books include *Reading images – The grammar of visual design* (with Gunther Kress); *Speech, music, sound; Multimodal discourse – The modes and media of contemporary communication* (with Gunther Kress); *Introducing social semiotics and Global media discourse* (with David Machin), *Discourse and practice*, and *The language of colour*. He is a founding editor of the journal *Visual Communication*.

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