

"Where are the bizarre chords in the middle?" A search for the sound of imaginary music

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Disciplinary background A. Musicology has always relied on the notion of an epistemological gap between music and language. Even though New Musicology has attempted to rethink and underline the importance of different types of discourse about music (Kramer 2003), the topic of "music in literature" remains, with some exceptions, somewhat unexplored by musicologists.

Disciplinary background B. In turn, Literature has fostered many different reflections about the importance of music in literature. These studies are intrinsically connected to the development of the field of Word and Music Studies, which has motivated the emergence of terminology such as 'verbal music' (Scher 1970), and the 'musical novel' (Petermann 2014).

Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the study of 'music in literature' and to analyse fictional 'verbal music' (Scher 1970) from a musicological perspective, by approaching the reader as co-creator and listener, thus aiming to understand how the verbal description of imaginary music in a novel can interact and alter the way we perceive, interpret and think about music.

As a literary description of a piece of music that does not exist or cannot be identified, imaginary music presents itself as a kind of empty space, or a blank canvas, that fosters communication, participation and, consequently, the proliferation of meaning. I will focus on the novel *Kafka on the Shore* (2002) by Haruki Murakami and analyse the case of imaginary music included in the text, as well as different attempts to transpose this inaudible verbal description to the musical medium. On Youtube, there are seven different musical interpretations of the song "Kafka on the shore". Although they are all based on the lyrics presented in Murakami's novel, each song chooses a particular language, instrumentation, melodic gestures and tempo, which, in turn, motivate different reactions from the users that have read Murakami's work. These intermedial transpositions and the debates that they stimulate allow us to better understand the importance of language and metaphor in the creation of musical meaning and to value the reader's auditory imagination. As many comments to these musical adaptations suggest, imaginary music forces us to search for sound and allows us to participate in a process of "worldbuilding" that is simultaneously personal and collective. Also, the different materialisations of "Kafka on the Shore" act upon the readers and change the way they interpret Murakami's narrative, its characters and the overall reading experience.

Interdisciplinary implications. By proposing that imaginary music is a form of verbal music worthy of distinction and reflection and by analysing a case of musico-literary intermediality that re-interprets the reader as a composer or a listener with specific musical experiences and expectations, I hope to suggest that words and literature do not simply silence music and fixate a particular interpretation of its meanings (Odello 2013), but, on the contrary, prompt different "hearings" and help us communicate and understand the values we associate with music as an idea and as a practice. Overall, I aim to demonstrate that imaginary music creates spaces for discussion and signification that allow us to access and dialogue with participatory processes and to understand our cognitive relationship

with musical sound. Consequently, this specific phenomenon can be thought of as a methodological tool for Musicology and, as such, can test the limits of music's intersemiotic relations.

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