

# Between Sensibility and Intelligibility in Musical Performance: Principles for the Operationalization of Tensive Semiotics Applied to Musical Realization

Caio Victor de Oliveira Lemos  
Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE)

Carolina Lindenberg Lemos  
Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC)

## Abstract

This work discusses the relevance and viability of operationalizing theoretical-methodological tools from French school Semiotics applied to musical performance. Based on Zilberberg (2002, 2006) and Tatit (2019), basic concepts of the tensive proposal are presented, more specifically the notion of intensity (sensible) and extensiveness (intelligible) in the apprehension of discourse values. Both the epistemological basis and the methodological aspects are investigated within applications aimed at analytical perspectives in musical performance, taking into account the synchronic and diachronic aspects that make up the musical enunciation. In order to provide greater analytical refinement, the benefits of using phorèmes (Zilberberg, 2006) is discussed, aiming at describing in greater detail discursive instabilities. Finally, the paper concludes that the theoretical-methodological tools presented are efficient in operationalizing the description of the dynamic and moving nature of the object and relevant to the most varied research issues within musical performance studies.

**Keywords:** musical performance; music analysis; French School Semiotics; musical semiotics.

## Introduction

With the recent establishment of musical performance within academic studies, it is already possible to note a systematic and diversified production of works within the subfield in recent years, reflecting a plurality of methodological perspectives and epistemological bases. If previously musical performance was largely investigated in the orbit of other areas of knowledge such as anthropology, philosophy, sociology, history, now production in the subfield is increasingly imprinting the perspective of the researcher performer in the production of knowledge about musical realization.

The diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches points to the complex and dynamic nature of the research object. The reason for this is that, in a musical performance, unique conditions are established for its realization, since the act is inserted within a social-historical context, a specific situation, in short, within an enunciative scene, which makes the project of tracing stable and definitive characteristics incompatible with the nature of the object. However, this unstable and dynamic nature does not mean that the scientific treatment of performance is unfeasible; these characteristics only reinforce the complexity of the scientific treatment it must receive. The research method, however, should not take the form of a random approach taken on a case-by-case basis. Rather, we need to understand the conditions of their realization and the relationships built contextually and in act, synchronic and diachronic.

Within the recent production of musical performance, there is also a benefit in the interdisciplinary treatment of research, expanding reflections to a level that might not have been possible with methodology coming exclusively from the musical area. Taking advantage of this opportunity, this paper presents and discusses the possibility of operationalizing the theoretical-methodological tools from French School Semiotics for performance research. This perspective is part of a research project into the construction of meanings in musical performance and relates to various issues pertinent to performance, such as discursive strategies in act, the relationship between performer and audience, and performance as a syncretic object.

First, we will try to contextualize Zilberberg's tensive scheme within semiotic studies, stressing that the central questions that led the French semiotician to formulate his project – analyzing the moving and unstable elements of discourse - are precisely in line with pertinent and current problems in musical performance research. Next, we will present and discuss basic concepts of the tensive proposal, more specifically the relationship/tension between the sensitive and intelligible aspects in the perception of discursive elements, always directing the explanation towards the relevance and possibility of analytical operationalization in musical performance. We will also discuss *foremes*, a theoretical development that allows for greater depth in the tensive categories and analytical refinement. Finally, we assess the relevance and feasibility of the proposal for research into musical performance.

## 1. Tensive semiotics in musical performance

Claude Zilberberg, by proposing a new vocabulary for semiotic metalanguage and highlighting the sensitive dimension in the investigation of meaning, found “the clues to a new path for semiotics”<sup>1</sup> (Tatit, 2019, p. 11). Tensive semiotics, elaborated and developed by the French semiotician and other authors, by seeking a greater degree of abstraction in discursive elements and their interaction, offers a model that takes into account the dynamics and

---

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “as pistas de um novo caminho para a semiótica”.

instability of discursive values. This movement provided a significant broadening of the semiotician's field of action, both by contemplating a wider range of objects and by promoting dialog based on a common metalanguage between different levels of the theory itself (content and expression, for example).

As Fernandes shows, “semiotics aims to investigate the relationship between the plane of expression and the plane of content of languages, understanding what, since Saussure, has been understood as semiosis”<sup>2</sup> (Fernandes, 2014, p. 82). Basically, on the content plane we have the path by which we construct the meanings of a text and, on the expression plane, the means by which it is manifested. So, by way of illustration, if we think of a written text of a journalistic nature, the plane of expression (the totality of graphic signs) serves, in short, only as a vehicle for the plane of content (meanings), *i.e.* the fact being reported.<sup>3</sup> However, in aesthetically crafted texts, the relationship between expression and content is more complex. In poetry, for example, the number of lines, the rhymes, the rhythm, in short, how the text is expressed (level of expression), will be combined with the elements of the verbal content to construct the meanings of the text. In other words, the meanings will be made in the relationship that is established between the planes of content and expression. In texts with a more obvious aesthetic character, it is insufficient to try to understand the generation of meanings on the level of content from the abstraction of the components of the level of expression, *i.e.* in texts of this nature, the configuration of the level of expression tends to have a direct relationship with the basic components of the content level. In music studies, then, the plane of expression – sound in the case of recorded music<sup>4</sup> – is seen as the plane of meaning.

In this sense, it was a challenge to investigate the meaning in music, due to its more abstract nature, exclusively through Greimas' generative path of meaning,<sup>5</sup> “structured to meet the meaning demands of verbal texts”<sup>6</sup> (Fernandes, 2012, p. 12). In the tensive scheme, what is proposed is a kind of “prosodization of the content plane”, that is, describing its oscillations, movements, stresses and, with this, “offering an effective model for understanding the increases and decreases typical of the appreciations we make of abstract meaning”<sup>7</sup> (Tatit, 2019, p. 16).

---

<sup>2</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “a semiótica destina-se a investigar a relação entre o plano de expressão e o plano de conteúdo das linguagens, compreendendo o que, desde Saussure, entende-se por semiose”.

<sup>3</sup> In this example, we are simply considering the text of each piece of news. If we were to consider the newspaper layout, the graphic distribution on the page, the font size, the relations between the images and texts would become relevant.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the graphic expression plane on musical notation, see César (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Lithuanian linguist and semiotician established in France, Algirdas Julien Greimas was the founder of the semiotic perspective that was later called “discursive”. The book that launches this investigation project is *Sémantique structurale* (1966). Zilberberg's tensive approach is a development of Greimas' semiotics.

<sup>6</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “estruturado para atender as demandas de significação dos textos verbais”.

<sup>7</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “oferecer um modelo eficaz para se compreender também os aumentos e diminuições típicos das apreciações que realizamos do sentido abstrato”.

Tatit goes even further when referring to poetic languages. According to the author, the main interest in these languages may not lie in investigating their content:

With its reiterative and particularizing resources, it produces a continuous return to the phonetic or graphic instance and the constant postponement of a clear definition of the elements of the content plane, even though it allows listeners or readers to live with some interpretive glimpses that change over time. In short, what remains in poetic language is the return to the plane of expression. There is not always a commitment to clarity of content (Tatit, 2019, p. 128).<sup>8</sup>

To formulate the tensive scheme, Zilberberg turns to musicologist Gisèle Brelet and imports concepts and reasoning from the musical field, proposing a vocabulary that better takes into account the movement of values inherent in discourses. In this way, he incorporates concepts such as tempo, tonicity and intensity into semiotics. In line with Tatit, it can be said that the semiotician's project was to "look for rhythm, tempo, affection, stress and other tensive concepts at the heart of the structure itself"<sup>9</sup> (*Id.*, p. 12), thus making it possible to analyze the dynamic and unstable variables of discourse. From the outset, we can see the benefit of investigating the tensive perspective applied to performance, since many of the research difficulties in the area of performance stem precisely from the difficulty in considering the dynamism and movement intrinsic to the performative act, in our case, in the construction of its meanings, concerns that are precisely in line with those of the French semiotician in formulating his proposal.

## 2. Intensity and extension

Zilberberg, in his fundamental paper "Précis de grammaire tensive", states that "three data deserve our attention, because meaning is tributary to them in various respects: structure, because it formulates; progress, because it orients; tempo, because it directs the duration of progress"<sup>10</sup> (Zilberberg, 2002, p. 114). Thus, the author highlights the relevance of categorizations and internal relationships in utterances (structure), the setting in motion of this structure (progress) and, finally, the quality of this movement (tempo).<sup>11</sup> In this formulation, the author shows that he is tributary of

---

<sup>8</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "Com seus recursos reiterativos e particularizantes, provoca o retorno continuado à instância fonética ou gráfica e o adiamento constante de uma definição clara dos elementos do plano do conteúdo, ainda que permita a convivência dos ouvintes ou leitores com alguns lampejos interpretativos que vão se modificando ao longo do tempo. Enfim, o que permanece na linguagem poética é o regresso ao plano da expressão. Nem sempre há compromisso com a clareza do conteúdo."

<sup>9</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "procurar o ritmo, o tempo, o afeto, o acento e demais concepções tensivas no âmago da própria estrutura".

<sup>10</sup> Translated from French: "ces trois données ont retenu notre attention parce que le sens leur doit à des titres divers : la structure parce qu'elle formule, le devenir parce qu'il oriente, le tempo parce qu'il règle la durée du devenir"

<sup>11</sup> One should note that Zilberberg's notion of tempo is analog to that which is used in music, since it deals with speed. However, the general and abstract character attributed by Zilberberg allows the term to describe the subjective idea of fast and slow that is recognized in popular expressions such as: "time moves too slowly", "the frenetic rhythm of life" (when one says "frenetic rhythm", they are, of course, referring to tempo, to how fast or slow everyday life feels). We develop this concept in more details in a specific section further down.

his Greimasian heritage, while at the same time giving it a new direction. This is because, in the tripod presented, he takes up aspects from Greimasian theory (structure and progress), but considers the approach to be insufficient without considering its tensiveness (tempo). In other words, at the same time as it maintains the epistemological bases that support Greimas' proposal, it provides "the theory with the possibility of moving from more topological categories to more temporalized categories"<sup>12</sup> (Lemos, 2021, p. 67), highlighting the movement, instability, and dynamics of values in discourse. Also, in presenting the basis of his tensive formulation, the author explains that structuralism privileged microstructures and neglected the elasticity of discourse (Zilberberg, 2002, p. 114).

When we approach the area of music, the relevance of Zilberberg's proposal (structure, progress, and tempo) is maintained, both because of the interrelationship it establishes in the construction of meanings, and also because it describes different levels of analysis. By listing and relating elements of musical notation and/or musical performance, such as harmony, scales, dynamics, timbres or gestures, one operates within the framework of the structure of the musical utterance. By adding movement to the structure (progress), especially through the insertion of the enunciator responsible for the enunciative act, the relationships of meaning that can be deduced from the utterance are deepened. Here, it is possible to glimpse the discursive strategies employed, veridictory relationships between enunciator and enunciatee, ethos and pathos (discursive images created of the enunciator and enunciatee), the presence or erasure of marks that refer to the enunciative act and so on. Finally, by tracing the qualities/characteristics of the discursive movements (tensive tempo), *i.e.* considering the levels of impact of the structural progress, we arrive at a level of description that goes deeper into the relations of meaning. At this level, the rise(s)/fall(s), rupture(s)/continuity(s), concentration(s)/dispersion(s), etc. of the synchronic and diachronic discursive values of the utterance are assessed. In this sense, the tensive proposal takes the presence of enunciation further by highlighting the sensitive appreciation of the enunciative instance.

Thus, in addition to discursive dynamism, Zilberberg also reinforces the role that the affective aspect will play in his scheme. Not just as an element to be considered in the theory, but as a guiding instance in the apprehension of meanings: "Here, we are concerned with approaching "sensitivity" not in terms of its translatability into the "intelligibility," but rather with grasping it in the tension that binds it to the intelligible."<sup>13</sup> (Fontanille; Zilberberg, 1998, p. 210). The subject then apprehends discursive values in the relationship/tension that is

---

<sup>12</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "à teoria uma possibilidade de passagem de categorias mais topológicas para categorias mais temporalizadas".

<sup>13</sup> Translated from French: "Il s'agit ici pour nous d'aborder le 'sensible' non pas en tant qu'il est traduisible en 'intelligible', mais de le saisir dans la tension qui le lie à l'intelligible".

established between sensitive and intelligible aspects of their perception or, in semiotic terminology, in the interrelation between intensity (sensible) and extensity (intelligible).

In a musical performance, for example, the spectator's affective disposition (sensitivity) guides the way they conceive/understand that event (intelligibility). Certain sound/visual elements in a musical performance can impact the enunciatee in different ways and to different degrees, within a continuum that goes from high impact to low impact. The generator of this impact on the spectator's mood can be something unusual, unexpected, the abrupt entry of a certain element, etc. For example, a performance in which the guitarist plays standing up with the use of straps holding the guitar, as in the case of the Duo Macarri-Plugliese performances (figure 1), an unusual fact if we consider the classical guitar universe; or the case of the performer dressed as a clown, as in Luciano Berio's *Sequenza V* performances (figure 2). On the other hand, the performance can strictly follow the expected protocols for a given situation, reverberating actions, gestures and interpretive ideas that have been largely crystallized by tradition, in which case it generates little impact in that particular aspect of the performance.



Figure 1 – Recital by Maccari-Pugliese Duo  
(source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TNSkhCZ-BQ>)



Figure 2: Performance of *Sequenza V* by Luciano Berio  
(source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxD5Vh4G0mY>)

This high or low impact can be marked by the relationship of attraction or repulsion that the subject establishes with a given discursive element, which can be dominated by euphoric (positive) or dysphoric (negative) values, according to semiotic terminology. Therefore, discursive values are not previously given, but are built in the relationship they establish with the subject (Barros, 2005, p. 86). An exemplary case in the history of music, which illustrates very well the points raised so far, was the premiere in 1913 of the ballet *The Rite of Spring*, with music by Igor Stravinsky and choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky. From a musical point of view, the concert halls in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century had as their assumed spectator a listener used to tonal works, mostly from what we now understand as the Romantic period; from a dance point of view, the spectator was used to smooth movements, elongated bodies, organicity, etc. However, from both a musical and a dance point of view, that ballet performance presented new forms of sound organization and a very contrasting conception in relation to what had been expected of ballets up until that point. Zampronha describes some of the innovative musical elements:

This brief moment at the beginning of the piece [The Rite of Spring] transforms the harmony into a percussive timbre, a feature that will be returned to in different ways at various points in the composition. This harmony is not functional as in tonal music. The interval complexity of this chord<sup>14</sup> does not allow the listener to identify a fundamental note, which is essential for the perception of a harmonic context. The

---

<sup>14</sup> The author is referring to the initial chord in the part *Auguries of Spring – Dance of the Youths and Maidens*. The chord is repeated in low key.

chord presents itself to the listener more through its material nature, more through the sound quality that characterizes it, than through any function. What's more, this chord has an interval relationship that is far removed from tonal references, and this interval relationship the listener recognizes is present in a similar way in the sonority of the work as a whole (Zampronha, 2004, p. 77).<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the varied musical characteristics described above, the ballet also presents new performative concepts: contorted, unbalanced bodies, agitated movements, etc. From the point of view of tensive semiotics, the spectator is thought to have experienced a high sensitive impact on the occasion of the work's premiere (1913), that is to say, new discursive elements are presented that we could adjectivize as surprising, unusual, aggressive and so on. However, reports of the audience's reaction to the work's first performance were divided, with some booing and others applauding. In other words, part of the audience, faced with the high impact of the work, appreciated the innovations presented (euphoric values), while another part repudiated these same elements (dysphoric values). Once the initial rapture has passed, the spectator, in a second moment, can try to rationally explain the causes of this attraction or repulsion, by adjectivizing and describing the experience/sensation lived during the performance of the work, which can be: innovative, genius, ahead of its time, a milestone for musical composition, etc. (euphoric values); or, on the other hand, one could classify it as noisy, in bad taste, scandalous, disorganized, etc. (dysphoric values). Note that we are using the experience of appreciation to give some concreteness to the examples, but, strictly speaking, both cases are independent of the actual enjoyment of the spectator. The chosen work is positioned discursively in a passage: it is constructed as sufficiently different and innovative in relation to what had been seen until then, creating within it the prospect of both a euphoric reception of its novelty and a dysphoric one due to the very breach of expectation – the enunciatee, and their judgment, is therefore presupposed by the performative enunciation itself.

In light of this example, some points of the tensive proposal become clearer. Firstly, the impact of a given discursive element does not have an intrinsic value, but rather a value that will be attributed to it when it relates to various factors pertinent to the utterance, such as: presupposed enunciatee, occasion, situation, environment, and so on. Secondly, by attributing a high or low impact to a certain element in the discourse, the relationship with the subject can have both positive (euphoric) and negative (dysphoric) contours, in other words, attraction or repulsion, depending on various factors. Finally, in the relationship between the sensitive and the intelligible domains, the former takes precedence over the latter, *i.e.* sensitivity governs

---

<sup>15</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "Esse breve momento no início da obra [A sacração da primavera] transforma a harmonia em um timbre percussivo, recurso que será retomado de forma variada em diversos momentos da composição. Essa harmonia não é funcional tal como na música tonal. A complexidade intervalar desse acorde não permite à escuta identificar uma nota fundamental, o que é essencial à percepção de um contexto harmônico. O acorde se apresenta à escuta mais através de sua natureza material, mais pela qualidade sonora que o caracteriza, do que por alguma função. Além disso, esse acorde possui uma relação intervalar distante dos referenciais tonais, e essa relação intervalar esse ouvinte reconhece estar presente de forma similar na sonoridade da obra como um todo"



intelligibility. In other words, we first perceive discursive quantities in order to then assign them designations, relationships, descriptions, etc. Or again, “an object looks attractive or repulsive before it looks black or blue, circular or square” (Koffka *apud* Merleau-Ponty, 1958, p. 28).

Sensitive engagement will then guide the subject’s own intelligible organization of the object/event. It is worth remembering that the tensive proposal also aims to capture the movement and instability of discursive values. In this way, a subject who is startled by being surprised in a given circumstance, for example, suffers a heightening of their sensitive perception, an impact. At the moment of being startled, the subject experiences a sensitive impact, and their intelligible perception is still processing what has happened. However, after the moment described, this sensitive impact will probably cool down, diminish, while intelligibility will concomitantly grow and the subject will be better able to formulate what happened, describe it, trace the causes of what happened, etc. In this small illustration, we would then have an opposite movement in the correlation between the sensible and intelligible aspects, that is to say, the sensitive aspect decreases with the passage of time to the same extent that the intelligible aspect of the perception of the object/event increases.

It is interesting that Zampronha, in describing an imaginary listener at the premiere of the ballet *The Rite of Spring*, starting from a different theoretical perspective (Peirce), arrives at a formulation about the relationship between the sensitive and intelligible aspects that is very similar to that of tensive semiotics, including the terminology he uses:

This listener leaves the performance experiencing the strong impact of this work [here we would say the performance of this work]. Basically, they’re trying to better understand what they’ve heard, an attempt they didn’t abandon throughout the performance. But in order to do this, they need to discover other ways of relating in order to build the work’s intelligibility. The references they have, built on previous music, mainly tonal, are not enough (Zampronha, 2004, p. 77).<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, in the illustration above, the sensitive aspect establishes an inverse correlation with the intelligible one. The spectator experiences “a strong impact” and then gradually increases the intelligible aspect in an attempt to understand and describe what happened. To do this, tensive semiotics borrows the notion of field of presence from phenomenology and inserts it into the discourse in order to construct a deictic center, a center of reference oriented by an observer. This observer *tensively* perceives the entry of values into the field, meaning that each quantity will be measured at the intersection of intensity and extensity, correlated and oriented gradients. Zilberberg explains that:

---

<sup>16</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “Esse ouvinte sai da apresentação vivendo o forte impacto dessa obra [aqui diríamos da performance dessa obra]. Basicamente tenta compreender melhor o que escutou, tentativa que não abandonou durante toda a apresentação. Mas para isso ele precisa descobrir outros modos de relação para construir a inteligibilidade da obra. Os referenciais que possui, construídos a partir de uma música anterior, principalmente tonal, não são suficientes”.

(i) tensivity is the imaginary place where intensity, that is, states of mind, sensitivity, and extensity, that is, states of things, intelligibility, unite with each other; (ii) this indefectible junction defines a tensive space of reception for the elements entering the field of presence: by the very fact of its immersion in this space, every discursive element is qualified in terms of intensity and extensity; (iii) in continuity with Hjelmslev's teaching, a founding inequality links extensity to intensity: states of affairs are dependent on states of mind (Zilberberg, 2002, p. 115).<sup>17</sup>

The tensivity (value) of an element, then, is presented to the subject in the relationship between the axis governing intensity (sensibility) and the axis governing extensity (intelligibility), as we developed above. The correlations between intensity and extensity can basically be classified into two types: converse and inverse. In the converse correlation, the growth of one dimension also implies the growth of the other, *i.e.* the more intensity, the more extensity. In the inverse correlation, the opposite occurs, *i.e.* the more intensity, the less extensity, and vice versa. We illustrated the latter above, both in the case of the person who is startled and the spectator at the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, as described by Zampronha.

On the other hand, in the converse relation, the understanding of the discursive elements, their directions, their characteristics, etc., also leads to an increase in the subject's sensitive engagement. In other words, there is an increase in the axis of intensity (sensitive) while there is also an increase in the axis of extensity (intelligible). In a classical sonata, for example, the first movement is formally structured in sonata form in the vast majority of cases. Then, after the thematic exposition, we come to what is generally called the development. At this point, the listener, recognizing the repetition of motifs previously presented, now in new tonalities, transposed, varied, allied to the harmonic instability of this section, among other musical elements, has their sense of expectation, of waiting for resolution, increased, that is, the sensitive impact increases to the extent that they understand the musical construction that is taking place and the intelligibility increases. In other words, it is because motive patterns, compositional techniques, harmonic instabilities, etc. are recognized that the subject is able to engage sensitively in terms of commotion, surprise, depreciation and so on. However, it is worth pointing out that this will be possible if this intelligible perception is within the universe of possibilities of the listener, in the case of the example above. Otherwise, the object itself may not even be perceived. As Carolina Lindenberg Lemos explains:

The entry of an object into a subject's field of presence is largely conditioned by their disposition towards it. A magnitude that is far outside the possibilities of

---

<sup>17</sup> Translated from French: "Translated from French: "(i) la tensivité est le lieu imaginaire où l'intensité, c'est-à-dire les états d'âme, le sensible, et l'extensité, c'est-à-dire les états de choses, l'intelligible, se joignent les uns les autres ; (ii) cette jonction indéfectible définit un espace tensif d'accueil pour les grandeurs accédant dans le champ de présence : du fait de son immersion dans cet espace, toute grandeur discursive se trouve qualifiée au titre de l'intensité et de l'extensité ; (iii) en continuité avec l'enseignement de Hjelmslev, une inégalité créatrice lie l'extensité à l'intensité : les états de choses sont dans la dépendance des états d'âme".

comprehension/apprehension will go unnoticed – it less than unstressed, it may simply be non-existent for the subject (Lemos, 2021, p. 79).<sup>18</sup>

Zilberberg (2002) presents the following graphs to illustrate tension correlations, with the horizontal axis being that of extensity and the vertical axis that of intensity:

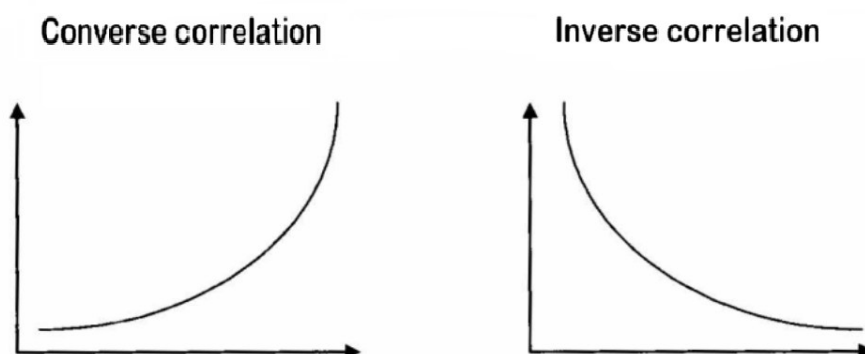


Figure 3: Converse and inverse correlation between the intensity and extensity axes  
(source: Zilberberg, 2002, p. 118)

The theoretical consequences of these correlations can be explored further, but for now it is enough to bear in mind that these movements through the axes of intensity and extensity can be interchanged in a text, *i.e.* they don't necessarily follow just one movement and one direction. This is an operational aspect of graphs, which can be used to describe the presence of discursive objects for the subject.

Graphs, in a way, make explicit what the tensive perspective has to offer in tracing the movements of discursive objects rather than capturing their specific points, *i.e.* "objects 'tend towards' other objects and not just oppose or resemble them"<sup>19</sup> (Tatit, 2019, p. 13). In addition, it can be seen from the above that the essential force in these movements of meaning and, consequently, in the observer's own organization/selection of the object/event, is due to their sensitive perception of discursive objects, the governing axis in the intensity vs. extensity interrelationship.:

<sup>18</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "A entrada de um objeto no campo de presença de um sujeito está condicionada, em grande medida, à sua disposição em relação a ele. Uma grandeza que esteja muito fora das possibilidades de compreensão/apreensão passará despercebida – menos que átona, simplesmente inexistente para o sujeito".

<sup>19</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "as grandezas 'tendem a' outras grandezas e não apenas se opõem ou se assemelham a elas".

Instead of just valuing the content analyzed as positive (euphoric) or negative (dysphoric) from an individual or community point of view, phoria is now treated as the central force mobilizing aspectual variables (Tatit, 2019, p. 17).<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Tempo and tonicity

We have seen so far that every discursive object always has its value established, within the tensive proposal, in terms of intensity and extensity, more precisely, in the correlation between the two valences. Thus, the subject's affective disposition, their affective "measures", will govern the categories of enunciative temporality and spatiality in the construction of meanings in the utterance. In other words:

If intensity portrays our subjective world, our affective "measures" (our states of mind, in the terms of semiotics), extensity refers, in principle, to the outside world, to the quantity of the elements involved (the states of affairs), or, more precisely, to the degree of comprehensiveness of the facts addressed (Tatit, 2019, p. 17).<sup>21</sup>

In order to refine the correlations between the two tensive valences, Zilberberg proposes dividing the axes of intensity and extensity into internal categories, *i.e.* each of these axes has two sub-dimensions. As the author explains: "From the point of view of terminology, intensity and extensity take the position of *dimensions*; tempo and tonicity, on the one hand, temporality and spatiality, on the other, take the position of *sub-dimensions*"<sup>22</sup> (Zilberberg, 2002, p. 116, highlights by the author).

The axis of extensity, which we have been referring to as the intelligible aspect, is also given other descriptors in semiotic literature, some of which are "state of affairs", "outside world", "scope of the facts addressed" and "quantity of elements involved". Each designation mentioned may be more enlightening in relation to the type of explanation made by the semiotician. However, they all refer to the subject's perception of the categories of enunciative temporality and spatiality.

In this way, the perception of the categories of time and space of the utterance (extensity) is conditioned, in the tensive proposal, by the affective disposition of the subject of the enunciation, that is, at the intersection with the axis of intensity, where the affective "measures" of the subject are calculated. In other words, "spatiality and temporality do not concern the

<sup>20</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "Em vez de apenas valorizar como positivos (eufóricos) ou negativos (disfóricos), do ponto de vista individual ou comunitário, os conteúdos analisados, a foria passou a ser tratada como força central de mobilização das variáveis aspectuais".

<sup>21</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "Se a intensidade retrata o nosso mundo subjetivo, nossas "medidas" afetivas (os nossos estados de alma, nos termos da semiótica), a extensidade refere-se, em princípio, ao mundo exterior, à quantidade dos elementos envolvidos (aos estados de coisas), ou, mais precisamente, ao grau de abrangência dos fatos abordados".

<sup>22</sup> Translated from French: "Du point de vue terminologique, l'intensité et l'extensité prennent rang de *dimensions*, le tempo et la tonicité d'une part, la temporalité et la spatialité d'autre part, rang de *sous-dimensions*."

concreteness and succession of events in the world itself, but rather the subject's perception of events and objects"<sup>23</sup> (Lemos, 2021, p. 81).

The sensitive values (intensity) will then be described in terms of tempo and tonicity. It should be noted that although the concepts of tempo and tonicity are familiar to musicians, since Zilberberg used musical concepts to formulate his proposal, here they have broader meanings, different from their musicological meanings. When we use these terms to describe the intensity of a discursive quantity, we are referring to tensive tempo and tonicity, as we will illustrate below. In this context, tempo and tonicity are measures used to describe the movements of the soul, using semiotic terminology.

The tempo category plays an important role in Zilberberg's reflections and in the formulation of his tensive scheme. The author tells us that "tempo is the master of both our thoughts and our affections, since it despotically controls the constitutive ups and downs of our experiences"<sup>24</sup> (Zilberberg, 2002, p. 114). Thus, as seen in the quote, the relationship between the tensive tempo, which will be described in terms of acceleration and deceleration, aims to describe the subject's affective disposition and will govern the subjective perception of time and space in the utterance.

The parallel with the musical meaning of the term can be elucidating when we consider the ability of the tempo category to describe passionate configurations in the musical universe. This is because in music, tempo is largely responsible for the affective relationships attributed to a given piece or excerpt. In other words, velocity and affect are generally closely related. This relationship can be corroborated by the very terminology used to describe this category in music, *i.e.* designations such as *allegro*, *andante*, *largo*, etc. are usually accompanied by passionate descriptions such as *giocoso*, *furioso*, *appassionato* and so on. As Tatit explains:

All these Italian expressions, universally adopted as a standardization of musical metalanguage, show that variations in velocity account for a large part of the affective modalities disseminated in a given piece (Tatit, 2019, p. 70).<sup>25</sup>

However, in the case of the tensive tempo, the relationship between acceleration and deceleration is responsible for a greater or lesser sensitive engagement of the subject, *i.e.* the greater the acceleration, the more intense the passionate emotion and, on the other hand, the less acceleration, the less intensity. Carolina Lindenberg Lemos explains as follows:

---

<sup>23</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "espacialidade e temporalidade não dizem respeito à concretude e sucessão de eventos no mundo propriamente, mas à percepção que faz o sujeito dos eventos e objetos".

<sup>24</sup> Translated from French: "Le tempo est maître aussi bien de nos pensées que de nos affects, puisqu'il contrôle despotiquement les augmentations et les diminutions constitutives de nos vécus."

<sup>25</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "Todas essas expressões italianas, adotadas universalmente como padronização de uma metalinguagem musical, demonstram que as variações de velocidade respondem por boa parte das modalidades afetivas disseminadas numa determinada peça."

The subjective nature of tempo is easy to transpose, because in some way it already announces a mood. The subjective acceleration of a fright, of a surprise, shortens our perception of time and makes us perceive the chain of events as an acceleration or a leap: as if the objective events had passed like an accelerated movie, in fast tempo. On the other hand, the doldrums of everyday life, in which we wait quietly for what is familiar to repeat itself, seem to make the clocks go backwards and the facts of the world run together in slow tempo (Lemos, 2021, p. 79).<sup>26</sup>

The intensive syntax here, for the tempo category, takes place in terms of accelerations and decelerations. Movements that, above all, support the perception of the fluctuations of objects in the utterance, in other words, the vectors that point in a certain direction. An accelerated tempo, in its high sensitive impact, can generate different relationships with the categories of temporality and spatiality (extensity), *i.e.* an accelerated tempo does not necessarily have to create a perception of temporal brevity for the subject, and can even generate the opposite perception, *i.e.* a widening in the perception of time. Let's illustrate.

In a hypothetical everyday situation, let's imagine that two soccer teams (the red team and the blue team) are playing in the final of a championship. Let's assume that for the red team to be champions, they need to win by a single goal. For the blue team to be champions, all they need is a draw. The score is 1-0 to the red team and, if the match ends that way, they will be champions. There are still approximately fifteen minutes to go. From the perspective of the red team fan, who is fervently hoping that his team will be champions, *i.e.* has a high level of sensitive engagement (fast tempo), these fifteen minutes seem to take forever. This fan wants the match to end as soon as possible, and thus to clinch the championship in his team's favor. On the other hand, the fan of the blue team, who also has a high level of sensitive engagement (accelerated tempo), wants his team to score a goal to become champions. However, the perception of the time remaining seems to be accelerating. With each unsuccessful attack by his team, time seems to run out. Naturally, if the blue team scores a goal in the final moments of the match, perceptions of time will change. In this example, we have the two types of correlation between the intensity and extensity axes: inverse and converse. For the red team fan, there is a converse correlation, since the accelerated tempo (intensive subdimension) implies a temporal extension (extensive subdimension). For the fans of the blue team, however, the same accelerated intensity implies a short time span, in other words, an inverse correlation is established.

To illustrate with a musical situation, let's think about a solo classical guitar performance by a student of the instrument. The performer plays "Asturias" by Isaac Albeniz, one of the most

---

<sup>26</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "O caráter subjetivo do andamento é de fácil transposição, pois, de alguma forma, já anuncia uma disposição anímica. A aceleração subjetiva de um susto, de uma surpresa abrevia a percepção do tempo e nos faz perceber o encadeamento de eventos como uma aceleração ou um salto: como se os acontecimentos objetivos tivessem passado como um filme acelerado, em tempo presto. Inversamente, o marasmo do cotidiano, em que esperamos sem sobressaltos pela repetição do conhecido, parece fazer os relógios andarem para trás e os fatos do mundo se encadearem em tempo largo."

played pieces in the classical guitar world, both by amateurs and professionals. For a spectator unfamiliar with the classical guitar repertoire, who nevertheless appreciates the instrument but has never heard this piece before, the sensitive engagement must be high, since the piece offers a series of virtuosic effects in the performance. The performance seems to end in the blink of an eye. For a listener who has heard this piece on several occasions with different high-level performers, the engagement will probably be lower. During the performance, this viewer may even formulate a series of criticisms about the problems with the performer's execution. In other words, they won't really be emotionally engaged with the work, but will instead be more intellectually evaluative. For this spectator, the performance seems to take a long time to finish. Here, the relationship between intensity and extensity is inverse. A fast pace means a short time; a slow pace means a longer time.

The relationship between tense tempo and spatiality is similar and can be described in terms of sorting and mixing, *i.e.* within a continuum between the closure of space (focused on a particular spatial element) and openness (dispersion of spatial elements). Reiterating that this is the subject's spatial perception, therefore a subjective space, as Tatit illustrates:

But the semiotician is more interested in the subjective space available to the human being who, faced with the impact of an unexpected event (positive or negative), is overwhelmed by the overpowering presence of the object. In this (almost) completely occupied space, there is no room for the modalities that guarantee the subject's response and action (reaction) (Tatit, 2019, p. 69).<sup>27</sup>

As with temporal relationships, the correlation between tempo and spatiality can acquire different configurations, both in levels of gradation and in converse and inverse correlations. In the performance of Arthur Kampela's "Percussion Study II", the guitarist starts the song with a spoon (figure 5), in short back and forth movements, quickly "scraping" the guitar strings. Both the use of the spoon and the sounds produced by it are unusual and surprising, from the point of view of a subject who is used to a repertoire in which the guitar is played in a conventional way. In this context, the surprise in the performance produces an accelerated tense tempo in the spectator (surprise). Given all the space visually available to the enunciator (scenery, stage, other spectators, instrument and all the elements that make up the space of the musical performance), this element (the spoon) occupies the subjective space of the listener, that is, their attention is largely focused on this surprising element in the performance. Although objectively visible, the other elements disappear from the subject's field of attention in favor of a concentration on the spoon driven by surprise.

---

<sup>27</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "Mas ao semioticista interessa mais o espaço subjetivo do ser humano que, diante do impacto de um acontecimento (positivo ou negativo) inesperado, surge tomado pela presença arrebatadora do objeto. Nesse espaço (quase) totalmente ocupado não há lugar para as modalidades que garantem a resposta e a ação (reação) do sujeito."



Figure 4: Arthur Kampela playing *Percussion Study II* (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqAMtjwaWF0>)

On the other hand, in a performance where the enunciatee has low sensitive engagement (slow tempo), *i.e.* without surprises, commotion, fright, strangeness, etc., the space seems to grow. For this spectator, at the moment of the performance, no one element of the musical realization seems to catch his attention. In this way, his focus on spatial perception is diluted. At the end of the day, given the spectator's lack of interest in the elements of the musical performance, any spatial element can have as much relevance (or irrelevance) as the performative act itself, in other words, their focus in spatial perception can be directed towards the scenery, the other spectators, their watch, the window, etc.; the performance is just one more element among many others in that environment.

The syntax for the tempo category, oscillating between accelerations and decelerations, due to its dynamic and continuous nature, helps the analyst to describe more precisely how discursive objects are constructed or diluted, in short, how their movements occur. In other words, this theoretical category provides criteria for analytically observing an abrupt entry of an element into the field of presence (a sudden acceleration)<sup>28</sup> or, on the contrary, a gradual construction of the value in the field of presence (a gradual acceleration).<sup>29</sup>

The other category, or sub-dimension, which, along with tempo, makes up the axis of intensity, is tonicity. Its syntax works in terms of stressedness and unstressedness, *i.e.* it describes discursive protrusions as well as their absences. Tempo and tonicity are always correlated in a convergent movement: the more acceleration, the more stress. However, although it may initially seem like a redundant category on the intensity axis, tonicity helps us to specify the emphasis or importance attributed to a given element (Tatit, 2019, p. 74-75). In this sense, identifying main and secondary stresses reinforces the explicitness of the

<sup>28</sup> In semiotic terminology, this constitutes the mode of *survenir* (to arise suddenly). In Zilberberg's words, "if an element is installed with no expectation, denying ex abrupto the anticipations of reason, the minute calculations of the subject, we will have the mode of *survenir*" (Translated from Portuguese: "se a grandeza se instala sem nenhuma espera, denegando ex abrupto as antecipações da razão, os cálculos minuciosos do sujeito, teremos a modalidade do sobrevir", Zilberberg, 2007, p. 18).

<sup>29</sup> In semiotic terminology, this constitutes the mode of *parvenir* (to arise gradually).



relationship between parts of the discourse, as well as between the parts and the whole. In other words, by accentuating or emphasizing a certain element, we are also highlighting “the vigor of the elements that surrounds it”<sup>30</sup> (Tatit, 2019, p. 73).

The discursive elements that cause stress and lack thereof then work within a logic very similar to what has been explained so far about the tempo category, since the two sub-dimensions always work in converse correlation, as mentioned above. In this sense, the examples given for the tempo category could just as well be used to illustrate tonicity. Note that in explaining the impact of the magnitudes on the intensity axis, Mancini takes advantage of the mutual reinforcement of the two categories, rather than outlining their specificities:

Everything that is presented suddenly, causing strangeness, ambiguity, commotion, surprise, fright, a breach of expectation, produces a stress, offers itself through intensity, creates tone and builds perceptual salience in moments of impact. At the other extreme, everything that is presented as predictably chained and demarcated, with the senses reverberating the constructions of the social imaginary sedimented in praxis, is constructed by the implicative style, by the decelerated pace, which creates unstressedness in the sensitive interface of the work (Mancini, 2020).<sup>31</sup>

In fact, the correlation between the two categories (tempo and tonicity) is very effective from an operational point of view. This is because, through the tonicity category, the analyst can see the main and secondary stresses in the discourse. The idea is not to create a complete topology of all the possible stresses, but stresses make it clear where the objects converge; they guide us in terms of directionality. The tempo category, on the other hand, has a syntax that manages to trace movements more efficiently (accelerations and decelerations) and thus highlights the oscillations that connect the stresses, in other words, they make explicit the process by which these stresses are constructed.

To illustrate the importance of tonicity (stressedness/unstressedness), let's take the case of preparing a musical performance. One of the interpreter's main tasks is precisely to find the main stresses of the work, the intermediate entanglements and its culmination. It is true that different performers can come to different conclusions about these points and still be coherent in their discursive projects. However, despite the different interpretative conceptions, what is at stake is the discursive mobilization that will be made precisely to emphasize these elements (in the case of musical performance, elements such as agogic, dynamics, timbre, etc.), that is, the rhetorical dimension of the discourse. In other words, by identifying the stresses (main and secondary), as well as the mobilizations made to get to and/or from them, we include in the debate “the emotional

---

<sup>30</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “o vigor das grandezas que o circundam”.

<sup>31</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “Tudo aquilo que se apresenta subitamente, provocando estranheza, ambiguidade, comoção, surpresa, susto, quebra de expectativa, produz acento, se oferece pela intensidade, cria tonicidade e constrói saliências perceptivas nos momentos de impacto. No outro extremo, tudo que é apresentado como previsivelmente encadeado e demarcado, com os sentidos reverberando as construções do imaginário social sedimentado na práxis, constrói-se pelo estilo implicativo, pelo andamento desacelerado, o que cria na interface sensível da obra o inaccento”.

and persuasive resources [...], especially the melodic inflections that wind behind the lines linking the supposedly neutral information to the intentions of their subjects” (Tatit, 2019, p. 75-76).<sup>32</sup>

In addition, driven by the syntax of increases and decreases in the intensity dimension, stressedness and unstressedness function within a continuum of possibilities, which favors understanding the directionality of the discourse, that is, the stress highlights the lack of stress that preceded and/or followed it, as well as the unstressed portions explain the role of the stress that they surround. In Tatit’s words:

The stress zone, with its implosive character, indicates that the additions have already reached (or are about to reach) their limit and will inexorably move on to a stage of decline. Similarly, the unstressed zone, conceived as an explosive stage, tends to avoid extinction, replacing the excess of less with *less less* and moving towards a new stress phase (Tatit, 2019, p. 160-161, highlights by the author).<sup>33</sup>

This procedural character of the tensive directions, the movements between stressed and unstressed elements as well as the gradations in more (*mais*) and less (*menos*) of the functioning of the intensive syntax, are well illustrated by the diagram below, drawn up by Luiz Tatit:

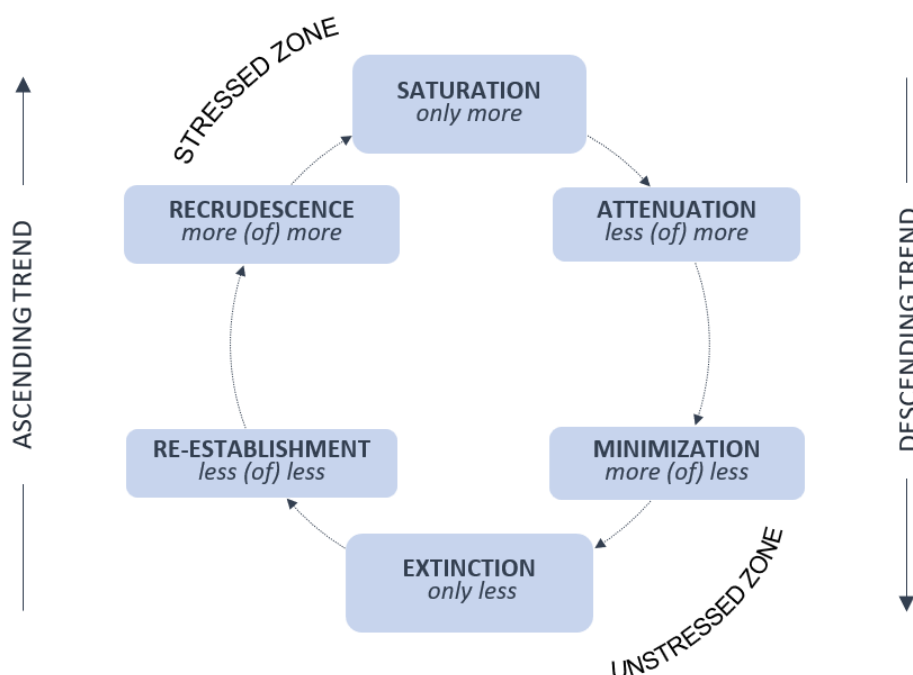


Figure 5: Tensive directions and stressed and unstressed zones  
(source: adapted from Tatit, 2019, p. 154)

<sup>32</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “os recursos emocionais e persuasivos [...], especialmente as inflexões melódicas que serpeiam por trás das falas vinculando as informações pretensamente neutras às intenções dos seus sujeitos”.

<sup>33</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “A zona do acento, com seu caráter implosivo, indica que os acréscimos já atingiram (ou estão prestes a atingir) o seu limite e que, inexoravelmente, passarão para uma etapa de declínio. Do mesmo modo, a zona do inaccento, concebida como etapa explosiva, tende a evitar a extinção, substituindo o excesso de menos por menos menos e se dirigindo a uma nova fase acentual”

The syntax of the tonicity category (more and less), as well as the implied directionality relations, are familiar to musicians, as we saw in the case of performance preparation. To reiterate, this is precisely the work that the performer does when mobilizing sound elements to emphasize a certain part(s) of the composition, in other words, to give the music directionality. This also applies to the elements surrounding these main stresses and, more generally, to the work's microstructures (cells, motifs, phrases, periods, etc.), since it is a totality of meaning, with its relationships between the parts and between the parts and the whole. This is because more explicitly codified elements (in the score, to a large extent) are thus valued, emphasized or faded and made more subtle depending on the choices made by the interpreter. The use of tone categories and their syntax is the element of the theory that can describe precisely these interpretative movements.

Carmo Jr. (2007) draws a parallel between the interpretations of pianist Martha Argerich and a Logic Audio computer program of Chopin's "Prelude Op. 28, n. 4". In short, Argerich greatly manipulates the sound elements (tempo, dynamics, and timbre) giving directionality to the musical realization, while with the Logic Audio program this type of mobilization is not done, that is, the tempo is precisely the same from start to finish, the dynamics are the same and so on. The author comes to the conclusion that there is an enunciative insufficiency in this lack of manipulation of sound elements. This flat treatment on the level of expression (sound materiality) even makes it difficult to understand the work intellectually (level of content), the beginnings and endings of phrases, climaxes, formal articulation, etc. Tatit makes a similar observation when he says that:

If we didn't intuitively grasp the stress points that characterize the protasis<sup>34</sup> and it wasn't defined by its final (and main) stress that justifies the meaning - or direction - of the previous melodic segments, the intonations would always be unstressed, literally monotonous, and wouldn't arouse our attention to what is being said. In fact, they would make it difficult to understand the intellectual content itself. It is the stresses that point us in the main directions, ascending and descending, followed by the intonation and which, and, therefore, place it in a project of meaning (Tatit, 2019, p. 77-78).<sup>35</sup>

We can see that both in a musical performance and in everyday speech, discursive directionality brings into the discussion notions such as strategies, rhetorical resources, ethos, diction, etc. As Tatit points out in the quote above, also in agreement with Carmo Jr. (2007), if we spoke without dynamic variations, without variations in tempo, always with the same rhythm

---

<sup>34</sup> Protasis phonetically refers to a melodically ascending intonational arch of an utterance. It is opposed to the apodosis, which corresponds to the descending melodic part of an utterance.

<sup>35</sup> Translated from Portuguese: "Caso não depreendêssemos intuitivamente os pontos de acento que caracterizam a prótase e esta não fosse definida por seu acento final (e principal) que justifica o sentido – ou a direção – dos segmentos melódicos anteriores, as entoações seriam sempre átonas, literalmente monótonas, e não despertariam nossa atenção para o que está sendo dito. Aliás, dificultariam a própria compreensão do conteúdo intelectual. São os acentos que nos apontam as principais direções, ascendentes e descendentes, seguidas pelo curso entoativo e que, portanto, o inserem num projeto de sentido"

and so on, communication would be monotonous and would make it difficult for the enunciatee to understand its content, a consideration that we can extend to the case of musical performance.

#### 4. Phoremes<sup>36</sup>

We have seen that discursive elements do not have value in themselves but values are constructed in the enunciation itself, and it is with this in mind that we say that, in addition to recognizing and measuring the impact of a discursive element, we are interested in tracing its movements, how it is constructed, how it develops, how it dissipates or gains even more strength. In the words of Zilberberg (2006, p. 60), “the variations and vicissitudes of all kinds that affect meaning derive from its immersion in the ‘moving’ (Bergson), in the unstable and unpredictable, in short, from its immersion in *phoria*”.<sup>37</sup>

In this sense, we will briefly present the phoremes proposed by Zilberberg, since they are the next step in the refinement of the tensive categories, allowing for greater detail in the analysis process.<sup>38</sup> There are three phoremes: *elan* (presupposed), *direction* and *position* (presupposing). In general terms, *elan* is the sensitive basic disposition that runs through the discourse, the reference on which the other phoremes will be based; the *direction* refers to the changes (accelerations/decelerations, accentuation/attenuation) made to the *elan*; and the *position* refers to the final stage of a change, which is therefore apprehended as a sudden transformation of the base of the *elan*, in other words, these changes are not perceived gradually; their effect is like a leap from an initial position to the final position.

Phoremes, therefore, function as referential marks that help us to better understand and qualify discursive movements. The use of phoremes shows that accelerations and decelerations (*tensivee tempo*), for example, construct different meanings when we consider where they start from and the path they take. In the musical context, we generally tend to associate a chord (or some dense sound texture) played at *fortissimo* with a value that has a lot of impact. So, within a context in which this chord is just one of many other chords played at *fortissimo*, that is, in a musical structure that starts from the reiteration of chords played at *fortissimo*, a sensitive base with a lot of impact is suggested. In this case, an even greater acceleration or accentuation of this base could be less effective, from the point of view of creating discursive salience, *i.e.* causing surprise, than if, for example, a chord were suddenly played in *pianissimo*. It may seem contradictory, but a more powerful impact, in terms of surprise and contrast, is created by a sudden deceleration than by the acceleration of an

---

<sup>36</sup> From the Greek form *phoria*, which means “state” or “tendency”, and the linguistic concept of “sememe”, which designates a unit of meaning, *i.e.* a tendency of meaning, what or where meaning tends towards.

<sup>37</sup> Translated from French: “Les variations et les vicissitudes de tous ordres affectant le sens découlent de son immersion dans le ‘*mouvant*’ (Bergson), dans l’instable et l’imprévisible, en un mot de la *phorie*.”

<sup>38</sup> For an application of these tools in the analysis of musical performances, see Lemos (2019) and Lemos & Lemos (2023).

already accelerated context. It is necessary to think about the relationships and movements that underlie a given discursive element, and not to propose fixed tension figures. This is where the use of phoremes in tensive analysis comes in handy.

In this example, considering only the element illustrated, that is, dynamics and musical texture, the *elan* would be precisely the basis on which the path is built, that is, in this case, a context of very strong chords (accelerated tempo and high tonicity). If a dynamic decrease (a *decrescendo*) began to occur from this *elan* (presupposed), we would have a change in the direction of this element. In this case, as illustrated, if a sudden *pianissimo* occurred, we would have a change of position. Obviously, this is a very crude illustration, as several other factors are also at play. However, it shows us the benefit of phoremes for more detailed analysis.

We could make similar illustrations for various other musical and visual parameters of a performance, in the analysis of variations in tempo, timbre, articulation, gestures, etc., but what interests us above all in this study is an integrative look at musical performance, in other words, the combination of these elements, syncretism. Naturally, in the course of analysis, the investigation with the phoremes can give a more specific focus to a certain element, as well as pointing out convergences or divergences between the elements involved, depending on what one wants to demonstrate.

In addition, one can think of phoremes, as well as the correlations between intensity and extensity, in a broader perspective from a temporal point of view. In other words, instead of thinking about a specific musical performance, as we have illustrated in the examples so far, we can consider characteristics of musical performances over time. A possible analytical perspective in these terms could be the investigation of a certain performative use at different historical moments, such as comparing recordings that are temporally distanced. For example, a recording of a guitarist from the beginning of the 20th century and one from the beginning of the 21st century playing the same piece. Despite the differences in the technological resources available for each recording (instruments, strings, microphones, etc.), many of the choices in performance are available to both performers, such as variations in tempos, phrasing, articulations, etc. With this, it is possible to glimpse the elements that are maintained or contrasted in these performances and, thus, deduce the tensive impacts encoded therein and the vectors of gain and loss of tensive intensity over time. In this case, a performative element may be used for the first time in the recording from the beginning of the 20th century (high impact), while this same element in the recording from the beginning of the 21st century may be considered a common use (low impact).<sup>39</sup>

In this way, putting two praxis into perspective can elucidate how a given discursive element relates to the act in which it is inserted and also its relation to other praxis. Thus, the element called upon in discourse can be a commonplace, an innovative usage, an unusual form, an element that

---

<sup>39</sup> For more examples of the use of phoremes in analyses of musical elements through time, see Lemos & Lemos (2023).

is falling into disuse, etc. This being said, it is incoherent to judge a particular praxis based on the values of another. Coming back to the example of comparing two recordings from different periods, it would be like using the same evaluative criteria assigned to a recording from the beginning of the 21st century to appreciate recordings from the beginning of the 20th century. If, for example, one were to listen to Andrés Segovia, an icon of the 20th century solo guitar, believing you were listening to a contemporary guitarist, one might judge his performance to be anachronistic.

Thus, when contextualizing a given performance in its historical moment, its enunciative scene, the analyst will consider the basic values that organize this performance (its *elan*). In the same way, when considering the gains and losses in intensity of some performative use over time, one has the perspective of these vectors on a broader scale, *i.e.* whether this use has had a gradual (direction) or sudden (position) gain in intensity over the course of history and is incorporated into the praxis; or, on the contrary, whether the use has had a gradual or sudden loss of intensity and has fallen into disuse in a given praxis, has become obsolete. Ultimately, by tracing these vectorial movements of a practice over time, the very movement of its base values (*elan*) is also made explicit, as Fiorin (2010, p. 64) explains, “praxis regulates, in synchrony and diachrony, the elements manipulated in discourse”.<sup>40</sup>

As we have been suggesting in the examples, phoremes are related to the two dimensions and their sub-dimensions – intensity (tonicity and tempo) and extensity (temporality and spatiality) and unfold as in the table below:

dimensions	intensity		extensity	
sub-dimensions	tempo	tonicity	temporality	spatiality
phoremes				
direction	acceleration vs deceleration	tonification vs atonization	focus vs apprehension	opening vs closing
position	advancement vs retardation	superiority vs inferiority	anteriority vs posteriority	exteriority vs interiority
elan	speed vs slowness	tonicity vs atonality	brevity vs longevity	displacement vs rest

Table 1 – Relations between three phoremes and four subdimensions  
(source: adapted from Zilberberg, 2002, p. 120)

<sup>40</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “a práxis regula, na sincronia e na diacronia, as grandezas utilizadas pelo discurso”.

By crossing phoremes and dimensions, the table above provides a detailed model of description that seeks to capture the dynamics, instabilities, perspectives, and movements of meaning, as can be seen by considering the possibilities at the intersection of the sub-dimensions of intensity (tempo and tonicity) and extensity (temporality and spatiality) with the three phoremes. Certain descriptors may be more or less pertinent depending on the research proposal and the language(s) in question.

Let us go back to the example given earlier, about a compositional passage with repeated chords played in a dense texture, played in strong dynamics, now with the visual scheme shown in the table above. In the relationship between the sub-dimensions of intensity (tempo and tonicity) and elan, we have the values speed and slowness (tempo), as well as tonicity and atonality (tonicity), *i.e.* its tensive velocity and tonicity. In our example, as we have already pointed out, the musical excerpt would then start from an elan of high tensive tonicity and velocity. In the relationship with the direction, this velocity and tonicity is mobilized through acceleration or deceleration and also through the process of tonification or atonization. To reiterate, the sub-dimensions of intensity (tempo and tonicity) are always correlated in a convergent movement. Here, the possibility of a gradual process of altering the composition's sensitive base, its elan, is created, which can occur through a dynamic crescendo or decrescendo, by altering the musical texture, denser or thinner, among various other possibilities such as harmonic, rhythmic, and instrumental technical alterations, depending on the categories considered in the analytical path.

Two points are worth emphasizing here. The first is that the categories presented above were considered separately only to facilitate exposition. However, the analyst must consider their object as a whole, that is, in the vectorial resultant of the elements listed as pertinent. This is because, in this example, in the combination of the categories mentioned above (texture and dynamics), their variations don't necessarily have to converge, they can also be divergent, *i.e.* a dynamic crescendo and a gradual dilation of the texture, or the opposite, that is without considering other instances that could also be relevant in the analysis of the object. In this case, for a more comprehensive consideration that takes in the meaning as whole, we would need more analytical context, such as the relationship of this excerpt with the entirety of the composition, the possibility of considering other elements/matters pertinent to the analysis, in addition to the analyst's own intentions, what they are seeking to describe.

The other point concerns how tensive movements create discursive salience (greater or lesser salience, abrupt or gradual shift). This is because it is not necessarily the case that there will be a greater impact, from the point of view of surprise, breaking expectations, commotion, through greater acceleration and tensional toning. As we have already mentioned, it will be necessary to consider their base values, *i.e.* accelerating a quantity that is already accelerated (recrudescence) is quite different from accelerating one that is decelerated (re-establishment).

The same goes for decelerations, *i.e.* decelerating the accelerated (attenuation) is not the same as decelerating the decelerated (minimization – see Figure 5 above).

Finally, in relation to position, there is the effect of advancement and retardation on velocity, being ahead or behind the base velocity or, in terms of tonicity, the effect of superiority and inferiority, having higher or lower values of the base tonicity. This is the case where we consider a sudden piano to occur in our example, that is, a sudden change in the base values considered (chords played in strong dynamics). Here we would have an abrupt slowing down of tensile velocity and, in convergent correlation, an abrupt lowering of tonicity. In terms of discursive salience, considering the terminology presented in Tatit's chart (2019) (Figure 5), there would be a sudden attenuation.

In the possible correlations between phoremes and the sub-dimensions of extensity (temporality and spatiality), the considerations will be similar to those seen so far, in other words, there are base values (elan), gradual changes (direction) and abrupt changes in these base values (position), but now with descriptors pertinent to spatial and temporal perception in enunciation. From a temporal point of view, there is a continuum of possibilities between the perceptions of brevity vs. longevity (elan), focus vs. apprehension (direction), and anteriority vs. posteriority (position). In enunciative spatial perception, the descriptors will be displacement vs. rest (elan), opening vs. closing (direction), and exteriority vs. interiority (position). It is worth reiterating that the axis of extensity is governed by that of intensity. Thus, as we saw in topic 3, enunciative spatial and temporal perception will be conditioned by the relationship/tension established with the axis of intensity, in other words, this perception will occur according to the sensitive engagement of the subject of enunciation.

The table above seeks to trace the movements of meaning regardless of which language (considered here as any form of manifestation) is in focus, *i.e.* it is a project that investigates the possibilities of meaning from a greater degree of abstraction. In this way, it is expected that certain manifestations will construct their meanings with a predominance in enunciative perceptions of space and/or time, or even in the pertinence of investigating only one or the other. In the case of music, for example, if we only consider the sonic aspect of a musical performance, the temporal perception of the enunciation may be more pertinent in an analytical description in these terms, although we can argue for the category of space as well. However, if we consider a performance beyond the musical sounds, also taking into account body gestures, facial expressions, gazes, the environment in which the performance takes place, among other categories, the spatial issue could be just as relevant as the temporal one in terms of the overall apprehension of the meaning of the utterance, in other words, in treating the musical performance as a syncretic object.

Although the descriptors presented in the table give us a general idea of the possibilities for evaluating oscillations in meaning, we need to take into account the specificities of the



manifesting language in question, since languages are built on different spatial and temporal paradigms. In this sense, the attribution of the sensitive impacts of discursive elements and the qualification of their movements invariably also depend on the specificities of a given language. Herein lies, in our view, one of the great contributions of the tensive project. This is because the tensive perspective will not dictate how a particular language creates discursive impact, for example. It will only be possible to assign the discursive values of that language based on its specific tools for analysis. We can thus imagine that, if in musical language changes in dynamics produce variations in impact, in painting this same type of fluctuation in intensity can be achieved by working with colors, for example. Fernandes (2014) comments assertively on this when he points out the benefits of bringing semiotics and music closer together. However, we could extend these considerations to the encounter between semiotics and any other language.

Music semiotics does not therefore need to reinvent musical analysis and musicology, as if it were founding a new and unprecedented science. Rather, from our point of view, there is much more to be gained by allying with the sciences that seek to uncover the meaning of objects than by moving away from them. For music, semiotics can be a powerful tool for understanding discourse, but it will never replace the study of harmony, form, counterpoint, among other non-competing but complementary areas (Fernandes, 2014, p. 77).<sup>41</sup>

In this way, the tensive schema and metalanguage are combined with the analytical tools already established in music theory to offer a means of detailing aspects previously left in the relative background of music scholars concerns.

## Final remarks

Having presented the foundations of tensive theory and the viability of its approach to musical performance, more specifically the correlations between intensity and extensity in the composition of discursive quantities, it is true that we could extend the considerations to further detail the theoretical conceptions presented so far, as well as discuss other propositions pertinent to discursive movement that we have not included in the debate. However, our main objective was not so much to give an account of the minutiae of the tensive model as to present the minimum conditions for operationalizing this theoretical-methodological perspective applied to musical performance.

The performance categories listed throughout the text could also be further explored and deepened, both if considered in isolation and within a common framework of comparison and

---

<sup>41</sup> Translated from Portuguese: “A semiótica musical não precisa, portanto, reinventar a análise musical e a musicologia, como que se fundasse uma nova e inédita ciência. Antes, do nosso ponto de vista, há muito mais a ganhar aliando-se às ciências que procuram desvendar o sentido dos objetos do que afastando-se delas. A semiótica pode ser, para a música, uma ferramenta poderosa para a compreensão do discurso, mas nunca substituirá o estudo da harmonia, da forma, do contra-ponto, entre outras áreas não concorrentes, mas complementares.”

relationship between different aspects of performance, a perspective that highlights the benefits of using a common metalanguage for the different performance categories and levels of analysis, as well as accounting for synchronic and diachronic aspects of the utterance. Even so, the instruments of analysis are highlighted which, together with the tools already used in the musical field, form a consistent theoretical-methodological basis available for the most varied demands/problems in the musical field. Finally, the arguments for the pertinence and operability of the tensive instruments applied to musical performance seek to strengthen the very constitution of a scientificity in the musical area in line with the new investigative demands of a complex and dynamic object such as musical performance.

## References

BARROS, Diana Luz Pessoa de. *Teoria semiótica do texto*. São Paulo: Ática, 2005.

CARMO JR., José Roberto. *Melodia e prosódia: um modelo para a interface música/fala com base na análise comparado do aparelho fonador e dos instrumentos musicais reais e virtuais*. 2007. 192 f. Tese (Doutorado em Semiótica e Linguística Geral) – Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2007. Available at: <http://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8139/tde-12112007-141109/fr.php>. Accessed on: 27 set. 2024.

CÉSAR, Marina Maluli. *Texto sonoro e partitura gráfica: aspectos intersemióticos e enunciativos*. 2017. 241 f. Tese (Doutorado em Semiótica e Linguística Geral) – Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2017. Available at: <https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8139/tde-07062017-083301/pt-br.php>. Accessed on: 27 set. 2024.

FERNANDES, Cleyton Vieira. *Semiótica musical: princípios teóricos e aplicações sobre o discurso musical, sua produção e recepção*. 2014, 205f. Tese (Doutorado em Semiótica e Linguística Geral) – Departamento de Linguística da Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2014. Available at: [https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8139/tde-02062015-165108/publico/2014\\_CleytonVieiraFernandes\\_VOrig.pdf](https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8139/tde-02062015-165108/publico/2014_CleytonVieiraFernandes_VOrig.pdf). Accessed on: 27 set. 2024.

FIORIN, José Luiz. Práxis enunciativa. In: PERNAMBUCO, Juscelino; FIGUEIREDO, Maria Flávia; SALVIATO-SILVA, Ana Cristina (org.). *Nas trilhas do texto*. Franca: Universidade de Franca, 2010.

FONTANILLE, Jacques; ZILBERBERG, Claude. *Tensão e significação*. São Paulo: Humanitas, 2001.

GREIMAS, Algirdas Julien. *Semântica estrutural*. São Paulo: Cultrix/Edusp, 1973 [1966].

LE MOS, Caio Victor de Oliveira. Performance musical como discurso: proposta de análise. *Revista Vórtex*, v. 7, n. 1, p. 1-31, 2019. Available at: <https://periodicos.unespar.edu.br/vortex/article/view/2687/1783>. Accessed on: 19 jun. 2024.

LE MOS, Caio Victor de Oliveira; LEMOS, Carolina Lindenberg. A práxis da performance violonística: três gravações de “Omaggio a Boccherini”, de Tedesco. *Revista Vórtex*, Paraná, v. 11, n. 1, p. 1-38, 2023. Available at: <https://periodicos.unespar.edu.br/vortex/article/view/7440/5402>. Accessed on: 19 jun. 2024.

LE MOS, Carolina Lindenberg. A transversalidade das categorias tensivas no tratamento da expressão. In: SCHWARTZMANN, Matheus Nogueira; PORTELA, Jean Cristtus; DONDERO, Maria Giulia (org.). *Linguagens sincréticas: novos objetos, novas abordagens teóricas*. Campinas: Pontes, 2021, p. 67-86.

MANCINI, Renata. Condições semióticas do sensível: aprofundamentos da abordagem tensiva – aula 2. 2020b. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQyhsIKh\\_k0&t=1612s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQyhsIKh_k0&t=1612s). Accessed on: 20 jun. 2021

MERLEAU-PONTY, M. *Fenomenologia da percepção*. 2 ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1999.

TATIT, Luiz. *Passos da semiótica tensiva*. Cotia: Ateliê, 2019.

ZAMPRONHA, Edson. A construção do sentido musical. In: SEKEFF, Maria de Lourdes; ZAMPRONHA, Edson (org.). *Arte e cultura III: estudos transdisciplinares*. São Paulo: Annablume; Fapesp, 2004.

ZILBERBERG, Claude. *Elementos de semiótica tensiva*. Tradução de Ivã Carlos Lopes, Luiz Tatit, Waldir Beividas. São Paulo: Ateliê, 2011.

ZILBERBERG, Claude. Louvando o acontecimento. *Galáxia*, n. 13, p. 13-28, 2007.

ZILBERBERG, Claude. Síntese da gramática tensiva. *Significação*, v. 25, São Paulo, 2006, p. 163-204.