

Editorial

Narrative is a timely theme. It is ‘in the air’ of late; it is part of the current *Zeitgeist*. As a result, we find discussion of ‘narrative’ becoming increasingly prevalent in theory and literature in a remarkably broad range of fields, across the humanities, the sciences, and the fine arts. It is hardly surprising, then, that the sonic arts are no exception.

Conceptually, this is perhaps nothing new for our field; what *is* new, however, is a noticeable shift in nomenclature. Current and recent studies of sonic narrative are firmly rooted in the work of some of our most important theorists: Luc Ferrari, Denis Smalley, Trevor Wishart, Simon Emmerson and Leigh Landy have all offered seminal work on the subject. It is noteworthy, however, that, despite its now central role, the word ‘narrative’ is nearly entirely absent from these earlier writings. Is this simply a matter of terminology? Or does it mark a more significant conceptual shift?

The ‘narrative turn’ in the sonic arts began, perhaps, with Katharine Norman. It was Norman who first put narrative front and centre in sonic arts theory; for example, in her articles ‘Telling Tales’ (1994) (although here she uses ‘story-telling’ rather than ‘narrative’), ‘Real-World Music as Composed Listening’ (1996), and ‘Stepping Outside for a Moment: Narrative Space in Two Works for Sound Alone’ (2000), and perhaps most notably in her landmark book *Sounding Art: Eight Literary Excursions through Electronic Music* (2004). Following Norman’s formative work, narrative has come to be of increasing importance in discussions of the sonic arts. Narrative is the explicit focus of recent and ongoing research by some of the contributors to this volume, as well as, among others, Bill Brunson (2012), John Young (2009) and Elizabeth Hoffman (2013). Narrative has begun to be included as a key component in broader works on electroacoustic music and the sonic arts; for example, in Curtis Roads’s recent book *Composing Electronic Music: A New Aesthetic* (2015), in which narrative is accorded its own chapter, thereby adding it to a list of essential parameters that was historically dominated by the more purely ‘musical’ qualities (pitch, rhythm, etc.).

Among the advantages, but at the same time the primary challenges, of narrative as a theoretical and conceptual tool, are its breadth and flexibility. ‘Narrative’ is a familiar enough concept, yet it is notoriously difficult to define with any useful degree of precision; it is perhaps for this reason that the term was largely avoided by earlier theorists. Attempts to define

narrative quickly reveal an alarming diversity – although, again, this can be looked on as either a blessing or a curse: useful for its flexibility, or rendered useless by its accompanying lack of clarity and precision.

The articles in this issue are an excellent case in point, and certainly provide proud testimony to narrative’s theoretical potential. A broad range of interpretations of the ‘narrative’ theme is in evidence:

- narrative as a synonym for ‘story’ or ‘story-telling’;
- narrative as intrinsically linked to the voice and orality, or, on the other hand, as intrinsically textual;
- narrative as a fundamentally multimodal experience;
- broader concepts of narrative as a means of sense-making;
- narrative as a fundamental aspect of self, or, on the other hand, as a fundamental aspect of community.

This issue therefore offers an excellent testing ground for the question posed above: is this breadth evidence of the richness and enormous potential offered by ‘narrative’ as a theoretical concept? Or, is this breadth a symptom of a crippling lack of common territory and shared criteria? Either way, it is both exciting and gratifying to find that the theme has elicited such strong and diverse offerings.

Anil Çamcı offers a rare example of a practical, experiment-based examination of narrative reception of electronic music. The article begins by laying out the details of the study and its results, and then uses these results as the basis for an admirably in-depth analysis of narrativity in electronic music.

My own article focuses more specifically on acousmatic music, proposing ten narrative ‘modes’ that can be distinguished as relevant aspects of the acousmatic listening experience. These modes can be engaged or activated singly, in parallel, or in tandem.

Steven Naylor’s article focuses on the use, experience and interpretation of the human voice in electroacoustic music. Focusing primarily on fixed media, Naylor considers a number of complementary angles, with a range of narrative implications.

Panos Amelidis explores the creative potential to be found at the confluence of oral story-telling and acousmatic music. Amelidis proposes a new resultant genre, taking his own work as an example, but uncovers roots among key predecessors from the electroacoustic repertoire.

Tullis Rennie's and Isobel Anderson's collaborative contribution offers a unique perspective on questions of sonic narrative, taking as their subject the narrative implications of the relationship between field recordings and recordist. More specifically, they examine the presence of the recordist within field recordings, and the creative potential that is sparked by the celebration of this presence, rather than its denial.

The compositional practice of Yannis Kyriakides combines sound, text and visuals, often in parallel, rather than collaborative, presentation. This results in a somewhat unique narrative situation, as these three sets of materials – with very different modes of narrative reception and weighting – interact, conflict or even contradict one another.

Sara Pinheiro tackles a subject that has always struck me as long overdue for analysis: a comparison of the narrative capacities of acousmatic music on the one hand, and foley art and sound design on the other. These close sonic siblings have so much in common, but set to very different ends. Pinheiro brings the two together, to develop and propose a very original conception of sonic dramaturgy.

In a refreshing departure from the fixed-media forms prioritised in the other articles in this collection, Franziska Schroeder examines narrative as a component of live sonic experience. Schroeder incorporates space, place, improvisation, site-specificity, activism, community and participation, with an urgency and relevance that is invigorating and strikingly original.

Finally, Marinos Giannoukakis revisits the writings of Bayle, Wishart, Petitot and Thom, in a densely rewarding examination of the relationships between morphology, gesture, structure and form, at a number of levels, and the sense of narrative that can result. Giannoukakis demonstrates this with an in-depth analysis of Diego Garro's multimedia work *Patah*.

What is made clear across the excellent work offered by each of these authors is that narrative is not going away anytime soon: its role in sonic arts theory has

blossomed at a remarkable rate, and it has claimed a place in our theoretical toolkit. The articles in this collection offer a sampling of current approaches to the subject; however, it is unlikely that this will be the final word. Sonic narrative is in the full throes of development, both artistically and theoretically; we can look forward to following its future transformations and metamorphoses with eager interest. In the meantime, the articles collected here offer a rewarding snapshot of the current state of narrative in the sonic arts.

James Andean
(james.andean@dmu.ac.uk)

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