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THE POTENTIAL OF NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AS FACTORS OF THE COMPOSER'S IDIOM

SUMMARY: Among the factors that define a composer's individual style, narrative strategies may be significant as others organising principles. In contemporary works narrative strategies also allow revealing us the musical meaning of new sound orders, their ideological foundations and the evolution of the composer's style and aesthetics. Arguments confirming the above thesis are provided by analyzes of solo concertos by Polish contemporary composers: Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Zygmunt Krauze.

KEYWORDS: narrative strategies, factors of musical style, composer's idiom, contemporary music.

1. Components of Narrative and Methods of Analysing Them

A composer's individual style—as Leonard B. Meyer showed in his book *Style and Music* (1989)—is the result of a choice of specific musical means made by a creator in the process of composing musical works. Meyer's second, significant theory states that the style is determined not only by technique and formal means but also by what was intended to be expressed via these means. For a scholar of musical oeuvres who, guided by Meyer's concept of style, wishes to describe the specifics of a composer's idiom, it will be crucial to identify those factors of the style that appear constitutive for a given oeuvre. Studying

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them allows one to judge the uniqueness of a given body of musical work, its ideological foundations and, consequently, the artistic identity of its creator. The organising principles of a musical work that focus the researcher's attention in such a case are usually tonal and harmonic means, individual composition techniques, metre and rhythm means, textures, sound and form. They are used by most authors of musicological works in order to recognise the unique style of a given composition or musical work. Among the factors that define a composer's individual style, narrative strategies may also be significant.

The methodological potential of musical analyses with a narrative profile became the subject of intensive research already in the last decades of the 20th century. Authors of works in the field of musical narratology, such as Eero Tarasti (1994; 2000), Raymond Monelle (2000), Vladimir Karbusicky (1986), Marta Grabócz (2009), who were inspired by the narrative theories of Tzvetan Todorov (1969), Algirdas Julien Greimas (1970; 1983), Louis Hjelmlev (1971) and others, proposed a number of narrative models used to describe the organization of signifieds in music. Marta Grabócz, who analyzed this trend, concluded: "‘post-classical narratologies’ (in other words, narratologies that emerged after the ‘classical’ theory, i.e., since 1990) imply an almost unlimited openness to new interdisciplinary approaches and definitions" (2016, p. 329).

Marta Grabócz, whose concept of narrative strategies is the most well-known and widespread in the semiotic-oriented musicological community, refers to the term musical narrativity to "the mode of expressive organization of an instrumental piece", thus linking the notion of signification to the notion of musical narrativity. In her analyzes of musical works she has applied "the elements of structural semantics, notably the narrative grammar of Greimas, including the narrative program, the elementary structure of signification, narrative syntax, etc." (2016, p. 331). New methodological concepts of studying narrativity as a component of musical pieces were presented in the first decades of the 21st century by researchers such as Byron Almén, Nicolas Reyland, and Michael Klein.

Narrative analysis began to be used in Polish musicological literature relatively recently. The first monograph devoted to stage music based on a story of Romeo and Juliet is the book by Małgorzata Pawłowska, *Muzyczne narracje o kochankach z Werony. Wprowadzenie do narratologii muzycznej*, which was published in 2016 [Exploring Musical Narratology: the Romeo and Juliet Myth in Music, 2018]. In the area of purely instrumental music, the first work that characterises contemporary compositional work from a narratological perspective is Malwina Marciniak's doctoral thesis, *Pamięć gatunku, nowe idee, nowe narracje w polskich koncertach fortepianowych XXI wieku* [Memory of the Genre, New Ideas, New Narratives in Polish Piano Concertos of the 21st Century] (Marciniak, 2023). This article is an attempt to find arguments confirming the important style-forming function of narrative strategies using the narrative models of the authors cited above and the understanding of the term narrative by Katarzyna Rosner. The presented thesis is provided by analyzes of solo concertos

by Polish contemporary composers: Witold Lutosławski, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Zygmunt Krauze.

Narrative, as one of the key categories of modern humanities, is defined by Polish cultural philosopher Katarzyna Rosner as “the human ability to frame actions and events unfolding within a sequence [...] into comprehensive structures of meaning” (1999, p. 11). Rosner, emphasising the style-forming nature of narrative as a structure of understanding, as well as its broad applications in science, indicates three constitutive components of narrative: (1) temporal development, (2) configurability of ingredients, (3) closure (1999, p. 11). Thus, narrative guides the attention of a scholar of musical works (1) to the way in which the temporal structure of the work of art has been organised, (2) to the relations between the elements of the musical form, (3) to the form itself as a result of the chronological ordering of musical events. Such profiling of musical analysis favours the discovery of the compositional idea of a piece, according to which the work’s form was shaped.

As we know, in the twentieth century, after the rejection of the norms of the major-minor tonal system and the resulting logic of the tonal order of a piece of music, composers searched—and continue to do so—for individual ideas for creating musical narrative. The analyst’s discovery of the relics of classical models of form in such works and the indication of the general principles of the work’s formal construction, such as repetition, contrast and transformation, often prove insufficient to grasp what is idiomatic to a given musical oeuvre. One may risk claiming that the music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which has rejected major-minor tonality, expects an analysis oriented toward its narrative aspect. Michael Klein was among those who have identified the directions for this type of analysis, creating a map of narrative discourses (Klein, 2013, p. 5, Figure 1.1). Among the four types of discourses—narrative, non-narrative, neo-narrative and anti-narrative—three of them (non-narrative, neo-narrative and anti-narrative) allow one to delve into the meanings of works that make use of new means of musical expression and the non-traditional structuring of musical time and space.

Referring once more to Katarzyna Rosner’s theories, we may assume that the specificity of individual discourses stems from the way in which the three narrative components she listed co-create the plot of the work. The first is *time*. As Jonathan D. Kramer wrote in *The Time of Music* (1988), time in music may be perceived as linear or non-linear. Only linear time, filled with a sequence of musical events that leads to a teleological listening, is inherent to narrative works.

The second component—*configurability of ingredients*—encompasses the relations that form between the factors of the musical form on the timeline. They constitute the temporal structure of the meaning of a given composition. Byron Almén arranged the resulting various musical strategies into four narrative archetypes: romance, tragedy, irony and comedy (Almén, 2008). He based these archetypes on two binary oppositions: order vs transgression and victory vs defeat.

As a prerequisite of a narratively shaped musical text, he assumed the occurrence of an act of transvaluation during its course. Another methodological proposal for delving into the significance of narrative strategies used in a work are Nicholas Reyland's narrative negations (2013, p. 35). Reyland's distinction of the four types of "narrative negations"—disnarration, denarration, subjunctive narration and bifurcated narration (2013, p. 35)—give analysts of contemporary works another perspective for interpreting a sequence of musical events as a temporal structure of a musical work.

The third of the constitutive components of narratively shaped texts is the *conclusion*. Narrative is a significant whole that has at least a beginning, middle and an end (Pawłowska, 2018). It is constituted as a "teleological sequence of events linked by some principle of causation" (Reyland, 2013, p. 35), when it is built from a minimum of two separate musical events (Krawczyk, 2007, p. 69).

One may also ask about the oft-disputed issue of a narrator in music. The understanding of a narrator I have adopted in my analyses refers to Marcin Trzęsiok's definition, who wrote "a narrator is a 'hidden' subjective force that organises the formal coherence of a musical work" (2023, p. 178).

The variety of methodological approaches to narrative in a musical work I have recalled here does not exhaust the analytical dilemmas a scholar of contemporary music encounters. There are many conceptions of shaping musical plots in music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Thus, Vera Micznik's theory of degrees of narrativity may be of help in describing the sometimes subtle differences between the various conceptions of shaping the flow of music. According to this theory, a given work may be "closer to, or farther from, the condition of narrative" (2001, p. 244).

Having at one's disposal such a variety of analytical tools for recognising the narrative strategies used in the structure of a musical work, one may take up the task of not only revealing the musical meanings of plots in works based on the non-tonal principles of organising sound material but also—as Leonard B. Meyer postulates—linking these musical elements with their ideological, extra-work meanings. What is more, by analysing the work of a given composer from this perspective, it is possible to attempt to study the evolution of this musical style factor and its relationship with the composer's aesthetic.

2. The Narrative Potential of Concertos

In order to confirm the presented arguments, I will present examples of narrative strategies used in instrumental concertos by three leading Polish musical composers of the second half of the twentieth century: Witold Lutosławski (1913–1994), Krzysztof Penderecki (1933–2020) and Zygmunt Krauze (b. 1938). Their artistic stance and compositional oeuvre became the embodiment of new ideas and means of expression in twentieth-century music. The highlighted works are also linked by a similar time of composition—the 1960s and 1970s. The last

concert discussed was created in the 1990s. In chronological order, the works were created in:

- 1967—Krzysztof Penderecki's *Capriccio per violino e orchestra*,
- 1970—Witold Lutosławski's *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*,
- 1976—Zygmunt Krauze's *Piano Concerto No. 1*,
- 1976—Krzysztof Penderecki's *Concerto per violino ed orchestra*,
- 1995—Krzysztof Penderecki's *Metamorfosen. Concerto per violino ed orchestra No. 2*.

The work of each of the composers listed has seen many descriptions pointing out those factors of musical style that define the idiomatic nature of a given composer's music. Much space is taken up in these considerations by analyses of techniques of organising horizontal-vertical structures, means of sound, metre and rhythm and form seen from the point of view of the structural units that constitute it. From this analytical perspective, I presented extensive characteristics of the above-mentioned concertos in my monograph on the Polish instrumental concerto from the second half of the 20th century (*Współczesny koncert polski. Przemiany gatunku* [Contemporary Polish Concerto. Transformations of the Genre], 1997). These analyses became the basis for the short descriptions of the forms of the above musical works. An examination of the narrative strategies of each concerto thus opens up yet another perspective for characterising the musical style of a given composer.

Krzysztof Penderecki's *Capriccio per violino e orchestra* (1967) was not titled a "concerto", even though it represents the type of concertante music in which the plot is co-created by two opposing musical subjects—the soloist and the orchestra. The soloist's part, operating with twelve-tone material of post-serial provenance, is eminently virtuosic in character. The opposing orchestra has an extensive line-up, which allows it to achieve various constellations of instrumental sounds. Its massive, highly expressive blocks of sonoristic sounds counterbalance the soloist's vigorous phrases. Subsequent episodes of the musical rivalry that develops between the soloist and the orchestra reveal the sense of the course of the music, which is characterised by temporal development, configurability of components and closure. Let us add that we are dealing here with a neo-narrative, as the *Capriccio* was composed using a sonoristic technique. The expressive gestures of opening and closing mark the structural framework of its musical plot.

The *Capriccio* begins with a cluster of brass instruments, which will shortly be overlaid with a cluster of strings, forming, as T. A. Zieliński wrote, "an atmosphere of initial tension" (2003, p. 28). From the point of view of Almén's theory, the orchestra embodies the initial order of the work, its starting state, which is about to be disrupted by the entrance of the soloist—an oppositional, transgressive element. The *Capriccio's* three-phase structure, a representation of

the three-part cycle of a classical instrumental concerto, ends with a cluster performed jointly by the soloist and the orchestra. The soloist's joining of the orchestra in the final cluster hints at Almén's comic archetype underlying the plot—the triumph of transgression (here the soloist) over order (the orchestra) (2008, p. 188).

In the final phase of the piece, the listeners' attention is caught by three episodes of music that parody the waltz (*Tempo di valse*) and the coda, in which the soloist plays five consonant chords that resolve into a final cluster performed jointly by the soloist and the orchestra. According to Nicolas Reyland's "narrative negations", the tonal episodes of the *Capriccio* may be interpreted as "disnarrations" (2013, p. 38). The grotesque parodies of a waltz and consonant triads appear here as an alternative world to sonoristic music, which quickly absorbs this other sonic reality.

In the 1970s, Penderecki made a profound transformation of his musical language. Mieczysław Tomaszewski described this new phase of his work as a "dialogue with a rediscovered past" (2023, p. 13). In the works created since then, including instrumental concertos, the narrative character of the musical form, which features episodes that are a kind of disnarration, has been preserved. The various archetypes of narrative strategies seen in these works confirm the constant presence of this factor of style in the composer's work.

Violin Concerto No. 1 of Krzysztof Penderecki was composed in 1976, i.e., almost a decade after *Capriccio*. It represents a different sound aesthetic, combining romantic expression with the sonic language of contemporary music. The musical themes and motifs are based on an 11-tone series made up of seconds and a tritone. In the melody, these very intervals are accompanied by minor thirds, which are also structurally important. The expanded, multiphase form of this single-movement concerto has been interpreted in various ways.

According to Joanna Wnuk-Nazarowa the basic opposition between the main themes: those of the soloist and the orchestra, and the values they represent can be interpreted in terms of light and darkness, of "chiaroscuro" (1984, p. 83). Mieczysław Tomaszewski also interprets the interaction between these two musical "dramatis personae" as a struggle between the force of light—life (the soloist)—and the side of darkness—death, personified by the collective, i.e., the orchestra (2009, p. 16). The struggle of the second theme performed by the soloist, which is an element of transgression, ends in defeat. The Alménian tragic archetype confirms both interpretations of the concerto's musical plot. The two episodes marked as *Tempo di marcia*, *Scherzando*, which in the second and fourth phases of the *Violin Concerto* disturb the dramatic rivalry between the soloist and the orchestra, serve the same narrative function as the analogous scherzando episodes of the *Capriccio*. They briefly interrupt "the solitary struggle of the individual soloist with time and space".

Violin Concerto No. 2, Metamorphoses of Krzysztof Penderecki is a late piece, completed in 1995. Its grand, monumental form is made up of 7 movements linked by the principle of "dualism of energy and delicate lyricism"

(Zieliński, 2003, p. 124). The agogic and dynamic, as well as textural and motivic contrasts, not only form the basis for the metamorphoses of the motivic and thematic material, but also serve their expressive and melodic transformations. “The dramaturgy of *Violin Concerto No. 2* can be described as supporting the expression” (Janicka-Słysz, 2013, p. 24).

The solemn and emotional phases in the concerto are contrasted with both “moving epic actions” and scherzando episodes, which are part of the strategy of narrative negation (disnarration). In the final act of the musical drama, “[...] the string parts bring back the motif of the main theme [...] and then meet the soloist, pianissimo, on the last *d* note, which constitutes the final point and resolution of the drama” (Zieliński, 2003, p. 124). At this point, Almén’s archetype of romance is fulfilled—order wins over transgression. The final phase of the piece perpetuates the primordial value that is the expression of the lyrical type.

It seems that the changing character of the narrative discourses of the three violin concertos reflects no less than other elements of Krzysztof Penderecki’s musical language, the changes in musical style that have occurred in the composer’s work since the 1970s.

The stylistic distinctiveness of **Witold Lutosławski’s** music is determined by several elements of his musical language. The composer created his own system of pitch organisation of sounds, the technique of controlled aleatoricism organising metre and rhythm structures, and the concept of the two-part form. The composer explained the purpose of his work as follows:

When composing large-scale closed forms, I always remember that what I am principally engaged in doing is organising the process of perception of my work. [...] [The] only problem is to find [...] ways of activating the listener’s memory and anticipation. (As cited in Rae, 1994, 118)

The quoted excerpt from the lecture *Notes on the Construction of Large-Scale Closed Forms* (Rae, 1994, p. 118) highlights the importance of narrative thinking in the composer’s work. This is because, in large-scale closed forms, he based their discursive character on a unique musical idea, which in the resulting work gave a sense of plot to individual musical events. In *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra* (1970), this idea is the principle of conflict between the opposing parts—the cello and the orchestra. The *Concerto* begins with a long introduction—a monologue by the soloist. As the composer explained, “the orchestra provides the element of intervention, interruption, even disruption. [...] The relationship between these two forces undergoes a change in the course of the concerto” (Rae, 1994, p. 119).

The soloist’s struggle with the orchestra intervening in their narrative flow results in expressive transformations of the solo voice. It evolves from *indifferente-grazioso-un poco buffo* in the introduction, through *cantabile* and *scherzoso* in the middle phase, then *precipitato-poco patetico-molto espressivo*, to *furioso* and *molto patetico* in the finale, ending with *dolente*. The result of the soloist’s struggle with the orchestra, which they are ultimately able to overcome (this is

an example of the tragic archetype according to Almén's theory), is also the abandonment of the D note, which serves a centralising function in the initial phases of the piece, and the ending of the passage on an A note. There is no return to the starting point.

The composer's biographer, Charles Bodman Rae, referring to the extra-musical meanings of this piece, reflected as follows:

If one seeks political metaphors, they can easily be found. [Referring to the struggle of the individual against the oppressive Soviet regime]. Yet the strength and potentially universal appeal of this music lies in its independence from such specific interpretations. The powerful drama can be perceived and understood in abstract, purely musical terms. (Rae, 1994, p. 123)

Zygmunt Krauze's musical style was shaped under the influence of artistic impulses stemming from Władysław Strzemiński's Unistic paintings. The artistic credo of Unism is explained by the following excerpt from the composer's statement:

I want calm and organisation in my music. [...] Any changes and movements necessary to maintain the continuity of the music are not contrasting and do not introduce new elements. [...] Everything the listener discovers in the first seconds of a performance of the piece will last until the end. The beginning of the composition immediately reveals the full scale of sounds, so that nothing different, nothing new will appear again. There will be no surprises. (As cited in Tarnawska-Kaczowska, 2001, p. 119)

Although the composer, in creating larger instrumental works, abandoned the non-contrast form, the influence of musical Unism can be seen in the way the temporal structure of a musical work is shaped. Examples of such a narrative flow include *Piano Concerto No. 1* (1976). The segmental structure of the *Concerto* uses three melodic ideas. At their core are small figurative-ornamental motifs "circling" around a selected note. These motifs are not rhythmically synchronised between individual instrumental voices, so their movement, devoid of striving, does not release musical tension. Instead, it contributes to the timbral vibration of the music that fills a given segment of the *Concerto*. The very beginning fragment of the composition is an example of developing a musical flow with a low degree of vitality.

The structural principle of Krauze's *Concerto* is a sequencing of segments, each distinguished by a different selection of orchestral instruments accompanying the soloist. The piano is present almost from the beginning to the end of the composition, constituting the continuity of the musical narrative. Its changing timbral "illumination" in successive segments is the most tangible change in the course of the concerto. This is because there are no connections between the segments of a structure designed in this way beyond the timbre and the melodic material. A meditative and contemplative disposition dominates.

Let us recall the assumptions of Byron Almén's theory of musical narrative who based the archetypes on two binary oppositions: order vs transgression and victory vs defeat. As a prerequisite of a narratively shaped musical text, he assumed the occurrence of an act of transvaluation during its course. In Krauze's *Piano Concerto No. 1*, there is no attempt to transgress the three melodic ideas. Only the orchestral instruments accompanying the soloist in the subsequent segments change. However, these are not sufficient to effect an act of transvaluation, therefore the narrative potential of a musical flow shaped in this way is small.

The bi-tonally juxtaposed chords of A major and B major close this little developed narrative with a distinct dynamic accent [*fortissimo*], thus fulfilling the third condition of the narrative flow—closure.

3. Functions of Narrative Strategies

Determining the narrative potential of the three concertos and the narrative strategies used in them makes it possible to synthetically examine the abovementioned compositions from the perspective of the functions that the three components of narrative identified by Katarzyna Rosner perform in the state of the compositional idiom.

The uniqueness of each of the presented concertos is largely determined by the narrative strategies used. Regardless of the methodology adopted by the analyst, these theories help explain the sense of the musical events laid out on a timeline and their unique composition. Thus, they confirm the goal of compositional activities, which is not to reactivate historical formal models but to develop musical plots based on new structural ideas. The configurability of components, the sense of which is explained by narrative strategies, allows in this case to infer both the individual style of a given musical work and the musical idiom of its creator.

The two remaining components of narrative—temporal development and closure—as factors of the composer's individual style, allow at the same time for the discernment of common elements where stylistic distinctions are generally perceived. The works by Lutosławski and Penderecki presented here may serve as an example. Despite their different sound techniques, both concertos are characterised by the same high narrative potential of the musical plot. In both compositions, there is a clear introduction to the musical action, followed by the formation of various relations between musical events and the closure of the narrative designed in this way. Krauze's *Piano Concerto*, on the other hand, is characterised by a different approach to time and musical form. Its low-development narrative encourages the listener to contemplate the sounds rather than follow the relationships between successive phases of the musical progression.

If we relate the narrative potential of a given work to the dichotomy of narrative form—non-narrative form, and we correlate this dichotomy with a second opposition—traditional forms, developed processually, with a teleological orientation versus forms that prefer musical stasis, characterised by a non-linear ap-

proach to musical time—another convergence of compositional attitudes is revealed. Sonically innovative works, formed from unconventional means of expression and techniques of organising musical matter, such as the Lutosławski and Penderecki concertos discussed here, are often developed processually, according to the principles of narrative forms. The temporal organisation of the musical structures of these concertos shows that they do not abandon such ways of forming the structural coherence of the work as are inherent to large narrative forms shaped by previous generations of composers. These large narrative forms are “ruled” by the principle of teleological organisation of chronologically ordered musical events.

As we remember from history of music, large narrative forms evolved alongside musical genres, such as symphony or instrumental concerto. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the dramatic coherence and musical sense of such forms was based on the tonal logos and the sonata form and cycle. In the twentieth century, when a new musical language was being sought, the classical model of the form began to be reinterpreted or transformed into various formal hybrids. Such concepts of adapting the classical archetype to contemporary means of expression can be observed primarily in works from the first half of the twentieth century, in the compositions of Bartók, Stravinsky, Berg, Shostakovich and others. In the second half of the twentieth century, when the ideas of the second musical avant-garde oriented musical artist vectors towards searching for a new structural coherence of musical works, the attitude of composers towards historical formal models changed. The new nature of a logical relation in works not inspired by historical conventions, such as the cited concertos of Polish composers, is revealed by analyses of their narrative strategies.

In conclusion, it can be stated: The usefulness of analyses studying narrative strategies in works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is therefore not limited to explaining the essence of the compositional idiom of a given artist but may also serve to show changes in the ways in which large narrative forms are constructed in our modern times.

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