
ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES

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HARMONIC LANGUAGE AS A GENERATOR OF MEDIATION BETWEEN CONTRASTING MEANINGS IN THE POST-TONAL CONTEXT

Abstract: This paper examines the influence of harmonic language on the narrative processes in post-tonal music. The main assumption is that the phenomenon of *mediation*, expounded on by David Lidov on the examples of music of Classicism and Romanticism, is quite similarly manifested when the major-minor system is suspended. Mediation, according to Lidov, implies cancelling opposition or blurring opposed semantic categories, which can be achieved by various music means. In music that emerged after the suspension of tonality, especially in authors who have not opted exclusively for either of the two opposed ways of harmonic thinking, the tonal or the atonal, harmonic language remains a significant factor in generating narratives. They play a key role in forming transitional categories between contrasting meanings within a binary opposition, that is to say, in emphasising the process of mediation. Departing from these views, the paper analyses the

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role of specific manifestations of the tonal vertical in forming meaning in the second movement of *Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta* by Béla Bartók (1881–1945).

Key words: music space, mediation, narrative, Béla Bartók, harmonic language

In post-tonal¹ music, which emerged after the suspension of Classical-Romantic tonality, harmonic language remains one of the key factors in generating semiotic and narrative processes in some authors' works.² The expressive devices are considerably enriched, the tonal space is vastly expanded, while an entirely new, atonal way of thinking is introduced. The heterogeneity of musical works in this historical period, differences in the treatment of the tonal vertical in particular, raises a number of theoretical questions and presents provocative analytical challenges, that is to say, according to David Fanning: "That commentators should have been perplexed in the face of a language which is sometimes tonal, sometimes modal, sometimes somewhere in between, and sometimes outside the bounds of either, is understandable."³

One of the possible approaches to the harmonic language of post-tonal music is re-examination of the *music space* formed after the major-minor system has been abandoned. Extremely important in that regard are works of the authors who have not opted exclusively for either tonal or atonal way of composing are considered, so their expressive devices fluctuate in an extremely delicate "interspace" indicated by Fanning. One of the reasons why such complex spatial circumstances arose in the post-tonal context in the first place is certainly the specific status that tonality as a system of organisation of tonal content retains in

¹ In broadest terms, all musical works created after the tonal era can be characterised as post-tonal, regardless of the relationship they form with tonality itself. Certain authors, who lay emphasis on 20th-century avant-garde music, associate the term post-tonality with atonal music to some degree. According to this paper, post-tonal works are those in which residues of tonality have been placed in a new, modern framework; works that, despite their consequential status with regard to the era of tonality, still preserve certain links to it, and survive in its 'orbit' (not unlike the relationship between postimpressionism and impressionism, post-modernism and modernism, etc.).

² The meaning of the term *narrative* in this paper is axiomatically associated with the term *story*. The analysis shows how different semiotic units (meanings, actors, spaces) can only form a narrative flow by being intentionally made to establish firm causal relationships, with a clear goal-oriented direction.

³ Fanning David, "Introduction. Talking about Eggs: Musicology and Shostakovich", in: *Shostakovich Studies*, edited by David Fanning, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 8.

20th-century music. Namely, although major-minor scales are being superseded and a new atonal and twelve-note order is being introduced, much of the corpus of musical works sees residues of traditional tonality still coexisting simultaneously with the new forms of constituting harmonic flows. Such a symbiosis of contrasting principles inevitably leads to forming new spatial categories which mediate between remote spatialities – tonality and atonality.

There are four basic categories of music space that can be articulated in the post-tonal context: modified tonality, tonicality, multitonicity and atonality. The main criterion for defining a certain music space as (*modified*) *tonality* in 20th-century music is the presence of a system of relationships between tonal elements, tones or chords, which generates a tendency towards a tonal centre – the tonic. In this form of manifestation of the tonal vertical a prominent role is always performed by the generic code which steers the chordal content in keeping with the functional systemic direction (tonic–subdominant–dominant–tonic). By abandoning major and minor tonalities, the system is gradually modified through the use of different individual techniques, introduction of new specific scale constructions and exploration of unexpected chord progressions. Regardless of the degree of modification, three key aspects are always manifested in tonality: a system of relationships, gravity and centre.

Tonicality appears in situations where there are no clearly defined systems of tonal organisation, that is to say, where there is insistence on a specific tonal centre using different means. It should be stressed that the process of abandoning the system is a gradual one, which is why it is not always possible to determine with absolute accuracy whether tonality has been suspended or whether some of its elements have been retained, all of which affects the forming of a particular transitional zone between the two main categories. Such a music space preserves some of the characteristics of tonality but differs considerably in terms of sound and, consequently, comes to play a significant part in creating a contrast in the music flow. Tonicality may have different forms of manifestation, but there is always some musical component (or a number of them) that helps emphasise a centre of gravity. Most commonly these are the melodic or the metro-rhythmic component, or the use of pedals. Regardless of the structure of the vertical and the chordal composition, insistence on a particular tone, harmonic interval or chord makes the listener perceive a certain tone quality as the centre of gravity.

The third spatial category, *multitonicity*, which particularly enriches the music space between tonality and atonality, takes form when both the system of relationships and the other aspect of tonality, i.e. gravity, are cancelled. The specific harmonic colouring is due to the absence of direction of the music flow towards a global centre, although signs of brief tonal footholds can still be dis-

cerned. In that regard, multitonality represents an extremely fast alternation of microtonal associations with different centres, none of which is manifested transparently enough, making it impossible to form a gravitational force towards a certain foothold. The most common microtonal associations are fifth-fourth or third leaps which suggest a centre of gravity, but their presence is so fleeting that the tonal space 'vibrates' between a large number of merely suggested centres. In addition to the rapid alternation, the relationship between the successively alternating tonal centres is itself wholly incompatible, based primarily on second or tritone relationships, making it impossible to form authentic, plagal or mediant relationships.⁴ It can be observed that the idiosyncratic multitonal frequency, which covers a relatively wide range, from very slow to extremely intense, is a combination of these two factors.

The cancellation of the last aspect of tonality, i.e. tonal centre, means that the most remote, atonal music space, has been reached. Spatiality without a system of relationships, gravity or tonal foothold has been characterised as free *atonality* and was gradually arrived at in the works of composers of the Second Viennese School. An artist's natural disposition to invention and seeking out new expressive modalities led to an even use of all the twelve tones of the chromatic scale and to a complete "emancipation of dissonance". In addition to free atonality, 20th-century music witnessed the emergence of a new, twelve-tone system, whose primary goal was to suppress gravity and eliminate the tonal centre in an organised, systemic manner.

A particularly significant category of music space arises out of a *vertical combination of different forms of spatiality*. If different types of tonal organisation are exposed simultaneously within two independent orchestrational-textural layers, the overall sound effect results in a unique spatiality produced by combining multiple layers. In order to be able to form this kind of bispatiality, it is necessary to create a relationship of equality between spatial layers according to most key musical parameters such as texture, orchestration, dynamics and timbre. It is likewise necessary to carry out the procedure consistently within a long time frame, which enables the listener to perceive a complex harmonic phenomenon.⁵

⁴ Should a combination of related centres arise in multitonal circumstances, there is a high likelihood that one dominant centre of gravity will be formed, while the others will start to gravitate towards it (they will function as tonic, subdominant, mediant, and the like), thus opening up the possibility of forming a transitional category between multitonality and tonality.

⁵ For more detail on music space in the post-tonal context, see: Atila Sabo, *Posttonalni kontekst i narativna funkcija harmonskog jezika u muzici Šostakoviča, Hindemita i Bartoka*, doktorska disertacija odbranjena na Katedri za teorijske predmete Fakulteta muzičke umetnosti u Beogradu (*The Post-tonal Context and the Narrative Function of Harmonic Language in the*

Defined music spaces are vital to forming narrative configurations of certain post-tonal works. An exceptionally striking feature of theirs is the part they play in the process of *mediation* between contrasting meanings, which was established by David Lidov modelling himself on Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009). Analysing works from the eras of Classicism and Romanticism, Lidov points out how significant the process of mediation is for understanding a musical text. Borrowing the term from Lévi-Strauss, he underscores the importance of abandoning de Saussure's (1857–1913) logic, which relies heavily on the binary opposition model. Although he uses binary opposition categories in his myth analyses, Lévi-Strauss does so “with special attention to those elements that refuse easy accommodation”.⁶ It is worth stressing that “mediation, besides occurring as a syntactic feature that resolves opposition, also appears as a semantic content.”⁷ The functioning of opposition can be observed on many levels, while, according to Lidov, “the cancellation of oppositions or blurring of categories”⁸ can be designated by a general term mediation. In a post-tonal context, moving between different spatialities performs a major function in the process of mediation. Transfer of certain signs from one music space into another, specifically the exchange of spatial attributes between contrasting meanings in a binary opposition, can be crucial for generating a narrative flow. The varying and highly effective changes of a music space can be tracked by processes of engagement⁹ and disengagement, systematically elaborated by Eero Tarasti in his *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*.¹⁰

Music of Shostakovich, Hindemith and Bartók, doctoral dissertation defended at the Department of Music Theory of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade) 2018, 45–65.

http://fmu.bg.ac.rs/dokumentacija/doktorske_studije/atila_sabo/Doktorska%20disertacija%20-%20Atila%20Sabo.pdf (last accessed on 20th September 2018)

⁶ David Lidov, *Is language a music?: writings on musical form and signification*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, 21.

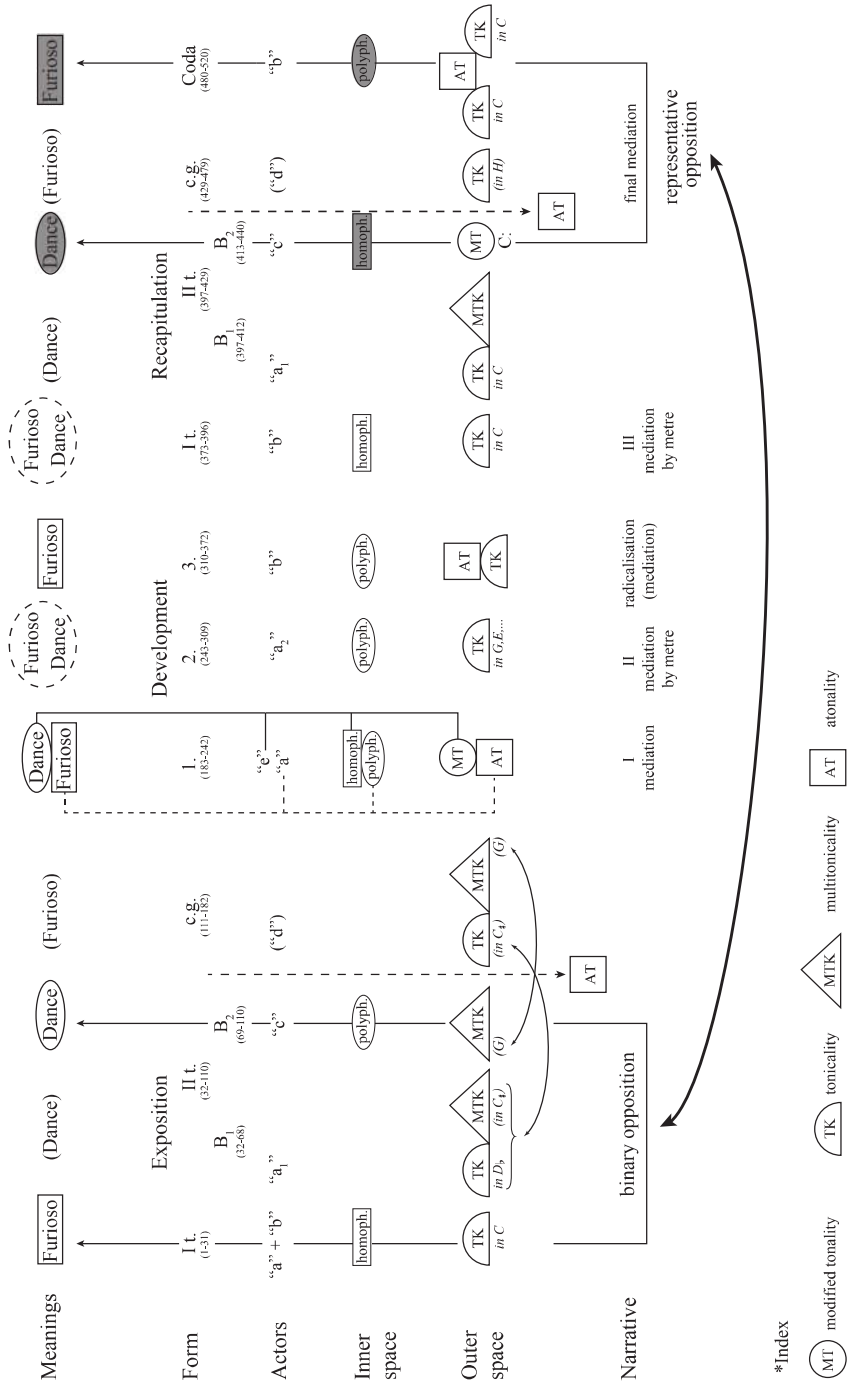
⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 55.

⁹ According to a semiotics developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992), “the concept of *débrayage/embrayage* disengagement indicates a moving away from (*débrayage*) and a return to (*embrayage*) the centre”, meaning that any departure from the starting position (a tonic chord or a principal key) may be treated as disengagement, while a return to the starting position constitutes engagement. Such a concept, although developed in the context of the major-minor system, can be adapted to a post-tonal one, and some of its universal principles can be used in narrative analysis. For more detail, see: Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, Bloomington – Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1994, 79.

¹⁰ For more detail on the relationship between spatial categories and the narrative aspect of post-tonal works, see: Atila Sabo, *op.cit.*, 205–228.

Example 1: Béla Bartók, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, second movement



The influence of spatial categories on the process of mediation is particularly prominent in the second movement of Bartók's *Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta* (Example 1). An extremely developed sonata form, positioned in the central movement of the cycle, following a much shorter, light, introductory first movement, is used to build a complex narrative flow in which two principal meanings, *furioso* and *dance*, engage in specific forms of interaction in different ways. The marked complexity is further enhanced by a relatively large number of different actors¹¹, five in total, whose motion through contrasting music spaces dynamizes the semiotic processes.

The dramatic *furioso* meaning is related to the sphere of the first theme that features actors "a" and "b" (Example 2).¹² The movement begins by exposing the first actor "a" in the second orchestra, characterised by quaver arpeggiation in an even pulse, in octave unison, in pizzicato, with a striking upward glissando (see bars 1–19).¹³ This thematic material does not have any typical dramatic features, but rather represents a specific opening preparation for the main entrance of the theme. Nonetheless, the even rhythm and stable tonical space, within a clear homophonic texture, are the key parameters of *furioso*, so that the initial actor "a" fits entirely into the semiotic context of the first isotopy. The key actor of the first theme ("b") appears as the next motif in the first orchestra (bars 5–7), in which dramatic elements are prominent. The sixteenth-note rhythm within conjunct chromatinized motion, which becomes particularly prominent during the development of the motif (bars 8–15), as well as the use of a dotted figure at the beginning, helps to build up considerable tension. Unlike actor "a", which possesses a specific *perpetuum mobile* orientation, actor "b" imparts rhythmic diversity and a change in articulation (semiquaver legato as opposed to quaver staccato). Despite the dotted figure, which reminds somewhat of *dance*, the explicit *furioso* character is realised at the moment when an even sixteenth-note pulse is established (bars 11–15). Thus is defined the first member of the binary opposition, which is characterised by chromatinized melody, fast (relatively even) rhythm, reduced monophonic texture and a stable tonical (*in C*) music space (Example 2).

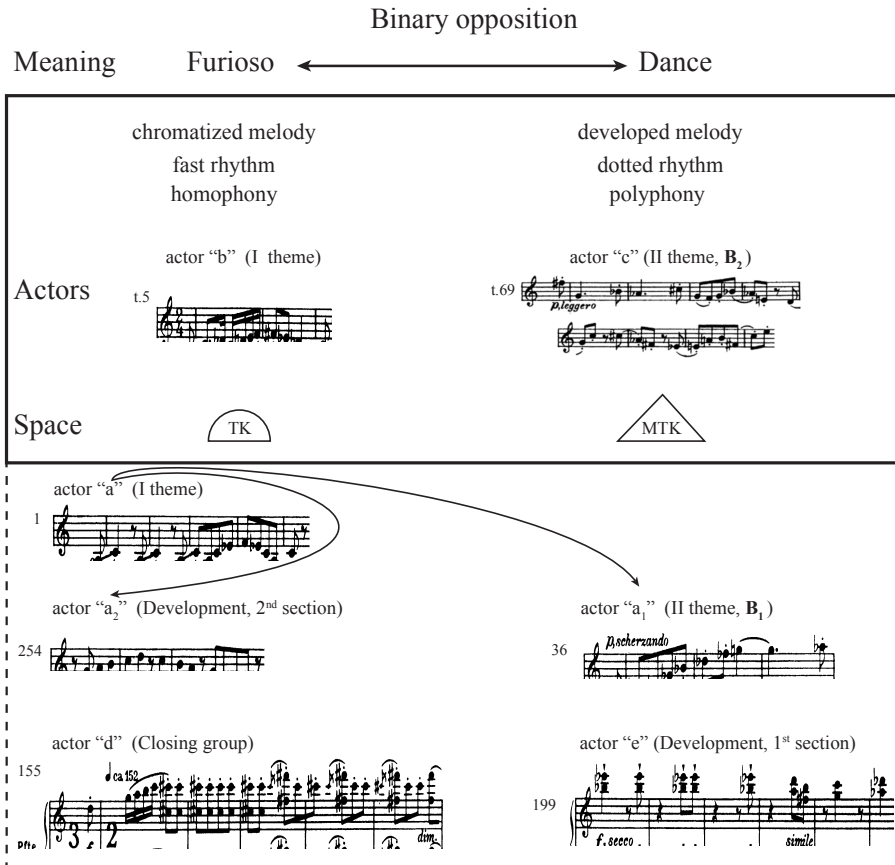
In opposition to the *furioso perpetuum mobile* meaning, a contrasting *dance* character is formed within the second theme. The sonata form is realised by applying a somewhat traditional approach which implies a relatively discrete con-

¹¹ The term *actor* is used as a borrowed, foreign term, which refers to the actorial level of meaning, formulated by Tarasti in imitation of Greimas's generative model (Eero Tarasti, op. cit., 47–49).

¹² Actors are marked by lower-case Roman letters according to the order of their appearance in a movement.

¹³ The following score was used in the analysis: Béla Bartók, *Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta*, Universal Edition, Wien–London.

Example 2: Actors in binary opposition



trast within the second theme’s first section (**B₁**), whereas a genuine ‘dissonance’ is formed in section **B₂**. In narrative terms, this is achieved by transferring actor “a”, which, as mentioned above, occupies a relatively neutral semiotic position, to a new *dance* isotopy (see Example 2 and bars 31–38 of the score). Section **B₁** is based on a thematic material that grows out of the quaver arpeggiation immanent to actor “a”. The upward melodic motion is still present and the thematic potential ever more striking, leading to the conclusion that actor “a₁” (section **B₁**) is more distinct than the predominantly figurative character of actor “a” from the opening of the first theme. The music space remains the same, but the centre of gravity has been changed, so that the fundamental melodic line is exposed in the first viola part within *in D flat* tonality (bar 32). The very end of section **B₁** sees the establishment of a multitonality which functions as preparation for the crucial contrast in section **B₂** (see Example 1 and bars 41–66).

The representative manifestation of *dance* does not become apparent until the second theme's section **B**₂, which features a clearly recognisable multitonal melody, that is, the second key actor "c" (see Example 2). The multitonality arises out of a large number of different melodic microtonal associations with mutually contrasting tonal centres. The distinct dotted rhythm at the opening (bars 69–70) and huge melodic leaps produce a change in meaning, while the succeeding quaver rhythm (bars 71–77) is occasionally punctuated by rests, creating an impression of metrical instability. A change in acoustic dynamics (*p*) marked *leggiero* further underscores the manifestation of *dance*. It is worth calling attention to the fact that this isotopy, too, features elements that defy to an extent the universal perception of the *dance* meaning, such as the relatively unstable, multitonal music space and the contrasting (non-imitative) polyphony, although the *furioso*–*dance* opposition is extremely prominent (Example 2). The most transparent tension, in addition to the rhythmic-melodic (temporal-actorial) one, is generated on the level of spatiality, inasmuch as the homophonic and relatively stable tonal *furioso* opposes the polyphonic multitonal *dance*.

Upon the second theme's completion there ensues a gradual establishment of atonality that serves to radicalise the semiotic process (see Example 1 and bars 94–110). Given that the relationship between the two main meanings (*furioso* and *dance*) relies heavily on two opposing music spaces, the tonal and the multitonal, such a significant change of spatiality as this one has the effect of transferring the music flow into a new spatial domain, effecting a heightening of tension and opening up a possibility of steering the narrative further. Moreover, atonality is realised in a constant quaver pulse punctuated by rests and accents, resulting in the cancellation of the *dance* character and the reestablishment of the dramatic *furioso*.

Following the presentation of *dance*, a new actor, "d", is stated within the closing group. The even quaver pulse and the repetition of the "C sharp" tone (Example 2, bars 155–159) are what primarily defines the fundamental tonal centre (*in C sharp*) and to some extent affirms the *furioso* elements. The new actor does not possess representative *furioso* features but nonetheless plays an important part in the narrative as it engages inner spatiality and brings it into the sphere of tonality. The harmonic content is, however, much more unstable compared to the circumstances in which the *furioso* from the beginning of the movement is manifested, since an unexpected minor seventh chord (G-B flat-D-F) is formed within the accompaniment (the second orchestra part). The function of this chord, which is in a tritone relationship to the tonal centre, is certainly coloristic and represents a critical dissonance used to heighten the tension (bar 157).

Looking at all the harmonic and semiotic processes in the exposition of this movement leads to the conclusion that the key opposition is formed between ac-

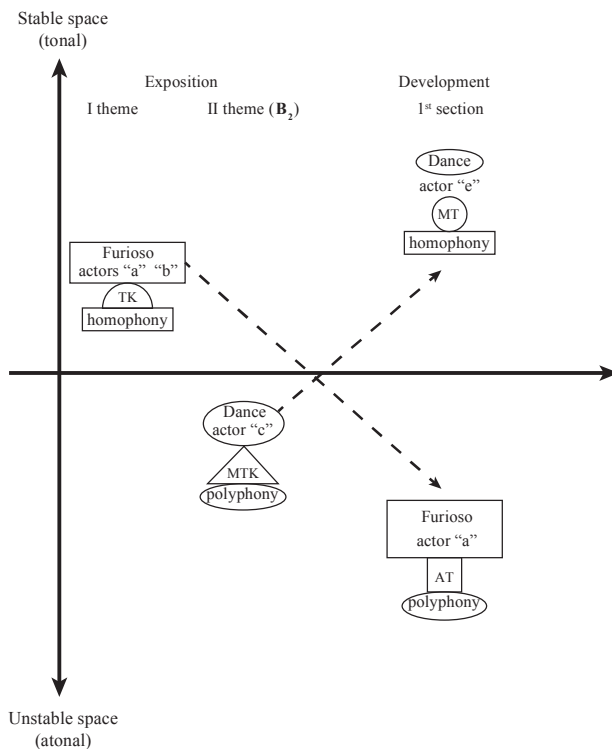
tor “b” (the first theme) and the tonical music space, on the one hand, and actor “c” (the second theme’s B_2) on the other, which belongs in multitonical spatiality. The two main meanings, *furioso* and *dance*, do not come into direct contact; rather, the contrast between the two is mediated by interpolating the second theme’s section B_1 which already carries slight suggestions of *dance*. Upon the second theme’s completion, *dance* is eliminated through a closing group, which likewise does not feature any representative characteristics of *furioso*, so that in some ways the binary opposition is attenuated by the appearance of these two sections (the meaning shown in the brackets, Example 1). The significance of the narrative flow’s spatial dimension becomes especially evident in this context, since the sections with poorly articulated meanings (B_1 and the closing group) are furthermore characterised by tonal instability, in other words, they are realised within two music spaces – the tonical and the multitonical. The second theme begins *in D flat* but the exposition of actor “a₁” is followed by the establishment of multitonicity. A similar situation occurs in the closing group. Actor “d” is in the same, enharmonically notated *C sharp* centre, while the entire exposition ends in multitonicity. It can be deduced that representative meanings in this context are manifested within one fully rounded music space, while the other segments of form feature much bigger spatial motions.¹⁴

The development is characterised by a highly extensive and layered process of mediation between the two contrasting meanings. The greatest interaction is achieved within the first stage of development, by directly superposing *furioso* and *dance* in different textural layers. Through the application of combined spatiality, the music space produces a direct effect on generating mediation (Examples 3 and 4).

All first orchestra parts, supported by the piano, realise a harmonic progression based on sequencing major sixth chords. The use of a triad invariably brings to mind the unambiguous reference to the major-minor system, the end result of which is modified tonality. Despite the fact that relationships between conjunct

¹⁴ From a tonal perspective, the sphere of the second theme, in keeping with traditional expectations, reveals a high degree of homogeneity. B_1 is a tonally rounded-out section as tonality *in D flat* is followed by centralised multitonicity *in C sharp*. Despite the fact that this comes to affect a Phrygian sphere that is very distant from the movement’s fundamental centre, the second theme is nevertheless positioned in an utterly Classical way, in other words, on the dominant pitch. The representative *dance* (section B_2), although possessed of typical multitonical features, begins *in G*, while the exposition, having swept through several different music spaces, ends up in the same tonal centre (*G*). All this points to the conclusion that, in a post-tonal context, the relationship between tonal centres, which in this particular situation corresponds to the traditional tonic-dominant one, is not in fact primary in the form-building sense, but rather that the fundamental correlation of thematic spheres is established on a spatial level.

Example 3: First mediation (Development, 1st section)



chords are often modal in origin, for example, the use of the second and the seventh of the Phrygian and the Lydian scale respectively, in this context (Example 4), Bartók executes an especially free modification and to some extent evokes mediant relationships. The beginning (bar 199) sees the use of sixth chords at the sixth and seventh degrees of the broadly understood modified tonality *in E flat*. A major triad on the leading note (D-F sharp-A) and a variant sixth degree (B-D-sharp-F sharp ~ C flat-E flat-G flat) together form mediant relationships, followed by major sixth chords on the sixth and the natural seventh degree. The result is a second harmonic inversion based on a peculiar departure from the tonic (I – VII – VI) and a return to the root position (VI – VII – I). It can thus be said that 'low' and 'high' variants of the seventh and the sixth degree are used here (marked by an arrow in the example), whereby chromaticization is eschewed and, at the same time, a completely unexpected functionality is achieved. The tonal centre is incredibly pronounced and the allusion to major-minor tonality most striking. In formal terms, the chords could be marked as a mediant of the dominant and a submediant, low and high (alternative figuration, Example 4), but

Example 4: First mediation (Development, 1st section)

199 actor "a₁" (A- $\tilde{C}\sharp$ - \tilde{E} -G-B \flat)

3. Vl.
4. Vl.
2. Vle. Arpa
2. Vlc.
1. Cb.
2. Cb.

(E \flat -G-B \flat -D \flat -F \flat)

AT

actor "c"

1. Vl.
2. Vle. Pfte.
1. Vlc.
1. Vlc.

f, secco *simile*

E-flat T⁶ ———— | VII⁶ VI⁶ | VI⁶ | VII⁶ T⁶ ————

($\bar{M}\bar{D}$ $\bar{S}\bar{M}$ $\bar{S}\bar{M}$ $\bar{M}\bar{D}$)

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E-flat T⁶ | III⁶ | III⁶ F-sharp T⁶ ———— | II⁶ | III⁶ | III⁶ | II⁶ T⁶

such an interpretation would contradict the very process of emphasising second relationships. In other words, mediant chords are very seldom in first inversion (sixth chord); rather, their root positions serve to underscore the (chromatic) tertian relationship. The essence of mediant chords in late Romanticism implies a close and direct relationship with the tonal degree towards which they gravitate, while the inversion illustrated on Bartok's example actually eliminates such progression. Opting for inversion in a three-part writing allows the root to be accentuated in descant, meaning that melodic devices are also used to lay additional emphasis on the tonal centre.¹⁵

The distinctive modified tonality and its remarkably light major colour become particularly evident when combined with the atonal layer in the harp part along with a complete duplication of the second orchestra. At the same time, the

¹⁵ The illustrated thematic material represents a model that becomes transposed as the music flow progresses (bars 210–216), the end result being an almost classic development section of form. The thematic material is transposed through tertian relationships, so a minor-third mediant circle with a skipped tone appears (*in E flat* – bar 199, *in F sharp* – bar 210, *in A* – bar 220, and *in E flat* – bar 237).

arpeggiation of two major ninth chords in quaver pulse, which are at a distance of a tritone, creates an impressive dissonant tension in the accompaniment. At the very beginning (bar 199), the lowest-part ninth chord (~ E flat-G-B flat-D flat-F flat) coincides with the fundamental tonal centre *E flat*, which will once again appear upon the completion of the mediant circle at the end of this stage of development (bar 237). To some extent it could be said that the accompanying ostinato layer is formed by the tonic and polar ninth chord of the opening and closing tonal centres, yet the absence of their functional direction is unambiguous. The significance of these chords is primarily colouristic, and their use such as to help create an impressive dissonant atonal layer, which stands in sharp contrast to the modified tonality.

Upon examination of the relationship between the spatial and actorial dimensions of the excerpt illustrated, the inevitable conclusion is that each fundamental meaning takes on the attributes of its opponent almost completely. Actor “a”, presented in the exposition within a tonical music space (*in C*), is disengaged towards an extremely remote atonal spatiality by means of imitative polyphony (see bars 186-196 of the score). This way *furioso* acquires the primary characteristics of *dance* on the level of outer spatiality (polyphony) and radicalises inner space by extending into atonality. A reverse spatial disengagement is articulated within *dance* (see Example 3). The multitonal space within the contrasting polyphony, in which the representative *dance* character (actor “c” in the second theme’s section **B**₂) was immanently manifested, becomes replaced with an incredibly stable modified tonality in isorhythmic homophony. This kind of mediation, however, is not complete as a new actor, “e”, is introduced. The compact chords in the piano and first orchestra parts (Example 4) are realised in a particularly unstable quaver-crotchet pulse, punctuated by frequent rests. The *dance* character is achieved by a specific destabilisation of metre and by shifting accents in two-four time. The introduction of a new sign (actor “e”) performs the function of intensifying the semiotic process, so that mediation steers the narrative flow further still. The blurring of categories is consistent on both outer and inner spatial levels, so that *furioso* emerges owing to the return of actor “a”; however, it is realised in a polyphonic-atonal space. *Dance* is actorially enriched with a new protagonist, in a very stable modified tonality and isorhythmic-homophonic texture (Examples 3 and 4). The foregoing leads to the conclusion that at this point a rather specific radical mediation takes place with an intense divergent disengagement of inner spatiality, clear confirmation of the significance of interspace in a polyspatial music universe.

The process of mediation continues within the second stage of the development, but the activity of the spatial plan is significantly decreased (bars 243–309). The thematic material being developed is based on conjunct quaver

motion. The constant rhythmic pulse resembles a *perpetuum mobile*, which indicates a melodic transformation of actor “a” (see Example 2). The main factor of mediation in the second stage of the development is an unstable metre, which brings the *furioso* thematic material taken from actor “a” closer to the meaning of *dance*. This results in a situation in which the symbiosis of meanings is, in a way, taken to a new level compared to the first mediation within the first stage. Unlike the superposition of *dance* and *furioso* in two differentiated textural-or-orchestration but, above all, spatial layers, a subtler combination occurs within the second mediation, in which the two meanings act simultaneously.

The third stage of development sees the formation of a significant atonal segment, which radicalises the process of mediation (see bars 310–372 of the score). A return of the fundamental actor “b” leads to the formation of a representative *furioso*. Unlike the primary, tonical environment in which this material appears, bispatiality plays a prominent role in the third stage. Although it does not have the representative features of superposing two different spaces, as was the case in the first stage, combining imitative-polyphonic atonality over a stable pedal tone in the timpani part creates a very striking effect. Given the context, it can be said that *furioso* is placed in an unstable music space, which represents an immanent characteristic of *dance*, thereby continuing the process of mediation in the same way as it was begun in the first stage. In such circumstances the effect is far more powerful due to the use of actor “b”, much more distinctive than actor “a”, which has been transformed several times. It is important to note that the mediation of *furioso* through the spatial characteristics of *dance* (unstable space and polyphony) leads to the crystallisation of this meaning, that is, to a specific accentuation of the dramatic character, particularly at the moment of reaching spatial saturation, caused by the participation of an increasing number of voices in the imitation process (bars 332–338). At this point the dotted figure is gradually abandoned, the rhythmic pulse becomes increasingly even, while the *furioso* character fully escalates and reaches its first culmination point just before the recapitulation.

Even though it achieves a certain resolution of tensions in the formal sense, the recapitulation of the sonata form further deepens the process of mediation. There is a return to the main tonal centre *C* and a homophonic texture identical to that from the beginning of the movement is established, pointing to the conclusion that a spatial engagement has been carried out on both inner and outer levels. The radicalisation of the narrative process, resulting from the introduction of atonality at the end of the development, has exhausted the spatial processes and created conditions for ‘a return to the beginning’. However, a certain modification is carried out on the actorial level. The absence of actor “a”, which was frequently used in a transformed shape within both meanings, leads to a

specific accentuation of the immanent content of *furioso* – actor “b”. Somewhat similarly to the second stage of development, unstable metre is the only element of mediation. Constant changes in metre and the introduction of a complex five-eight time bring the two opposed meanings much closer together, giving *furioso* a *dance* character. Like in the middle stage of development, the two opposed meanings are integrated into a very harmonious whole.

Section **B₁** of the second theme is recapitulated in a reduced form within an identical tonical-multitonal spatial order, but the movement’s fundamental tonal centre *C* is used, in keeping with the sonata norm. This segment is followed by a recapitulation of section **B₂** and a return of the key *dance* actor “c”. The second theme’s melody, entrusted to the first violin part, has undergone profound melodic and metro-rhythmic changes. If a comparison is drawn between the exposition and the recapitulation (bars 68–86 and 412–428), it can be observed that the even, march-like two-four rhythm is transformed into a dance-like three-eight one. The introduction of ornaments helps to better accentuate the character of the theme, while the removal of rests leads to a greater fluidity of the music flow. Certain relative melodic changes are also made, which serve to neutralise the multitonal potential of the theme. The central change has been made on the spatial level by placing the entire recapitulation section **B₂** in the extremely stable framework of modified tonality. The tonic and the dominant function alternate on the dominant pedal tone. There is a striking indeterminacy of mode caused by a clash between the tonic third in the melody and the chord layer (bars 413–416). The minor dominant chord is modified by lowering the fifth and simultaneously using a major and a minor seventh. Although it features many modern procedures, such a harmonic flow generates the most stable music space in the movement. The prominence of *dance* is also brought to the fore by the use of monodic homophony. Eliminating contrasting polyphony from the exposition, which significantly dramatized the entire context, and using a discreet chordal basis in long notes with a static pedal point allow the *dance* character to be profiled in its most representative form. A clear analogy can be drawn between the recapitulation of section **B₂** and the first stage of the development. In both segments there is a prominent spatial mediation resulting from the use of the spatial positioning of *furioso* (a stable, homophonic music space) in *dance* conditions. Moreover, the final mediation in the recapitulation is actorially rounded out, since, unlike the first mediation, where the new actor “e” was introduced, the key representative of *dance*, actor “c”, is placed in the recapitulation in the homophonic modified tonality.

Just like in the exposition, the second theme is followed by an atonal radicalisation, which at this point separates the representative *dance* from the closing *furioso* in the coda. In the closing group, actor “d” is reprised in the identical

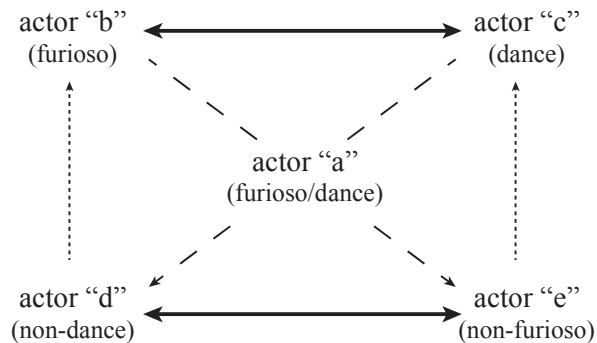
tonical spatial position, with a change of tonal centre (*B*), after which the key actor of the dramatic *furioso* (“b”) appears once again.

The coda begins in the exact same way as the first theme, albeit with an extremely fragmentary and rhapsodic music flow. Ascending and descending fourth leaps affirm the fundamental tonal centre *C*, while the dialogue between the two orchestras, with the use of short motifs in root and inverse positions, heighten the tension (bars 490–494). Next, the dotted rhythm disappears and there is a complete chromaticization of the music flow in a very fast semiquaver pulse (bars 495–508). The harmonic flow becomes unstable, the centre of gravity is gradually suppressed and the only tonal signs are occasional fourth leaps. The abandoning of the tonal centre *C* is realised by introducing a descending fourth “E-B” (bars 502–505) and an ascending tritone “F sharp-C” (bars 503–504), which leads to the formation of atonality. Although this music space has been used several times as a factor in radicalising the narrative flow, this is the first time that one of the main actors has reached the most unstable spatial point. The high level of acoustic dynamics, the dense texture which creates the impression of a high degree of polyphonization – due to the intense distribution of the material between opposing orchestras – and the constant semiquaver pulse all result in the most representative form of *furioso*. The drama comes to a halt with a sudden disengagement of outer music time, and the slowing down and changing of tempo (bar 509), which is followed by dilution of texture (bars 513–516). The harmonic flow is gradually stabilised and directed towards the fundamental tonal centre. There is a particularly striking breaking of motifs in the first orchestra parts (bars 509–512), based on tones “B-F sharp-D flat-C”. The melodic motion is highlighted by crotchet note values, while its repetition in quaver rhythmisation with the use of accents adds to its expressive potential. Although the environment is very atonal, these tones can be interpreted as the lower and upper leading notes for the tonic (“B” and “D flat” for “C”), that is, as the leading note for the dominant (“F sharp” for “G”), making this segment the beginning of a specific cadential process. The application of a condensed motif in four violin parts (bars 513–516) is followed by a resolution of tension through centralisation *in C* created by the use of a fourth leap “G-C”. Since an ascending fourth has figured as the key factor in establishing tonality from the very beginning of the movement, it can be concluded that it represents the tonal centre. In a post-tonal context, the role of gravitational centre is often assumed by an interval rather than a triad, which is undeniably confirmed here by the use of leading notes towards a centralised fifth, which perform a ‘dominant’, that is, kinetic function.

Independently of harmonic-spatial processes, which represent a key factor of mediation in the presented work, the relatively complex relationships between the actors also have a significant influence on the narrative flow. Their effect is

closely related to the functioning of music space, but it can also be viewed separately within Greimas's semiotic square (Example 5). Recognising the importance of these units leads to the unequivocal conclusion that the key opposition is formed by the two main actors "b" and "c". They generate the *furioso*–*dance* opposition, which is the foundation for constructing the narrative. A significant role is also performed by actor "a", which appears in several variants in different positions. In that sense, its function can be characterised as that of a refrain and its meaning as relatively neutral, which is why it is not strictly defined in the semiotic square. The remaining two actors have an episodic character. This is particularly true of actor "e", which appears only once and in a very significant moment, when the process of mediation begins. Its role is to create a contradiction with the dramatic *furioso*, thus implying *dance* to a certain degree. An identical function is fulfilled by actor "d", which attenuates the opposition in the exposition, while serving as a kind of transition between two categories in the recapitulation. It plainly contradicts *dance* and announces the return of *furioso*.

Example 5: Relationships between actors in a semiotic square



Examining the narrative flow of the second movement of *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* inevitably leads to the conclusion that the very intense and multi-layered process of mediation in this movement functions in a highly idiosyncratic manner. The very setup of the binary opposition at the beginning of the movement is somewhat specific (Example 1). As previously mentioned, the basic meanings, *furioso* and *dance*, rather than being in direct conflict, are separated by the interpolated section B_1 , which only somewhat implies *dance* on the modified actor "a". This segment almost seems like mediation, because it uses both spaces from the binary opposition, the tonical and the multitonical, while reinterpreting the *furioso* actor "a" into a *dance* context. Naturally, such an interpretation is logically impossible, since mediation can only begin once

the binary opposition has presented itself. A similar situation is also realised in the closing group, where actor “d” is introduced, but the meaning is much closer to *furioso*, so it can be concluded that these segments of the form merely suggest the main meanings and thus attenuate the opposition.

Following three different mediations within the development and the recapitulation of the first theme, and a significant radicalisation of the semiotic processes conducted by atonal segments, comes the final mediation at the end of the movement. Such an ending to the narrative opens up the possibility for an atypical interpretation of the very process of mediation. As David Lidov points out, the principle of mediation implies *cancellation* of the binary opposition, that is, *blurring* of categories. The essence of this process implies bringing closer different meanings which ultimately assume attributes from their opponents, thereby transferring the narrative context to the level of abstraction. However, in the analysed example, mediation serves as a means of crystallising the primary meaning and its intense use leads to the formation of a representative opposition at the end of the movement. *Furioso* and *dance* gradually ‘interweave’ their characteristics, but, almost paradoxically, in the whole process this brings each one closer to its purest nature. Only when actor “c”, as the key bearer of *dance* potential, achieves complete transcendence to a stable music space close to *furioso* (recapitulation **B**₂) is the representative *dance* formed. In the coda, actor “a”, liberated from the dotted rhythm, finally expresses its full potential in an extremely *furioso* chromatised manner and in spatial circumstances which reach atonality. The representative meanings are exposed completely transparently, without the interpolation of semiotically less determined segments, which leads to the conclusion that mediation is a factor in the radicalisation of the binary opposition. It seems that the process in question is reverse to the one demonstrated by Lidov, in other words, that the narrative flow moves from abstraction to the real opposition.

Béla Bartók’s harmonic language in the analysed work encompasses the broadest music space possible, from relatively traditional modified tonality to very severe atonality. The interaction of strongly opposed compositional principles and their striking coherence are made possible by the extremely purposeful use of harmonic means aimed at generating the process of mediation. Examining spatial categories and their role in forming the narrative opens up new perspectives on research into music of the post-tonal context.

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Summary

In this paper the influence of harmonic language on the narrative processes in post-tonal music was examined. Concept of *mediation*, expounded on by David Lidov on the examples of music of Classicism and Romanticism, is used in circumstances when the major-minor system is suspended. Mediation, according to Lidov, implies cancelling opposition or blurring opposed semantic categories, which can be achieved by various music means. In music that emerged after the suspension of tonality, especially in authors who have not opted exclusively for either of the two opposed ways of harmonic thinking, the tonal or the atonal, harmonic language remains a significant factor in generating narratives. They play a key role in forming transitional categories between contrasting meanings within a binary opposition, that is to say, in emphasising the process of mediation.

In order to comprehend compound harmonic relations in 20th-century music four categories of musical space are established: modified tonality, tonicality, multitonicality and atonality. Also, specific interaction of different musical spaces, combined within two contrasting layers of texture, is presented. The main criterion for defining a certain music space as (modified) tonality in post-tonal music is the presence of a system of relationships between tonal elements, tones or chords, which generates a tendency towards a tonal centre – the tonic. In this circumstance a prominent role is always performed by the generic code which steers the chordal content in keeping with the functional systemic direction (tonic – subdominant – dominant – tonic). Tonicality appears in situations where there are no clearly defined systems of tonal organisation, that is to say, where there is insistence on a specific tonal centre using different means. It should be stressed that the process of abandoning the system is a gradual one, which is why it is not always possible to determine with absolute accuracy whether tonality has been suspended or whether some of its

elements have been retained, all of which affects the forming of a particular transitional zone between the two main categories. Multitonicity, which particularly enriches the music space between tonality and atonality, takes form when both the system of relationships and the other aspect of tonality, i.e. gravity, are cancelled. The specific harmonic colouring is due to the absence of direction of the music flow towards a global centre, although signs of brief tonal footholds can still be discerned. In that regard, multitonicity represents an extremely fast alternation of microtonal associations with different centres, none of which is manifested transparently enough, making it impossible to form a gravitational force towards a certain foothold.

The main conclusion is that Béla Bartók's harmonic language in the second movement of *Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta* encompasses the broadest music space possible, from relatively traditional modified tonality to very severe atonality. The interaction of strongly opposed compositional principles and their striking coherence are made possible by the extremely purposeful use of harmonic means aimed at generating the process of mediation. Examining spatial categories and their role in forming the narrative opens up new perspectives on research into music of the post-tonal context.