Creating a world through the sounds

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Maestro Salvatore Sciarrino [1, 2], an eminent composer (currently the most-performed living Italian composer all over the world), proposes the representation of a sound dimension, in which the manners of composing – whereby sounds arise, develop and interact with each other – create a real environment, a space rich in fascination: a deeply expressive acoustic sphere. We cite, for example, Due notturni crudeli: II Furia, metallo, and Studi per l’intonazione del mare: two compositions, which seem to be very significant by the titles themselves. Our intention is to connect Sciarrino’s innovative position in contemporary musicology to a great line of tradition.

Aristotle [3, 4] had already proposed a classification of the expressive means of animals and human beings, by distinguishing between psóphos (‘sound’), phōnḗ (‘voice’) and diálektos (‘articulated voice’). In times of language science and scientific studies of the acoustic reality, making references to several contemporary theoretical and experimental psychologists is very useful. Among these psychologists, there are also some important authors (E. Brunswik, L. Kardos, H. Werner, and their teacher K. Bühler, director of the École Psychologique de Vienne). From an acoustic point of view, vocal sounds are indeed able to present an incredible richness of timbric colours. If every musical instrument has its own peculiar timbre (this being produced by the resultant between the fundamental sound and its harmonics), the human voice is an even more powerful expressive medium. «To construct an artificial device remotely similar to the vox humana it would be necessary to have all the richness of an organ manual with its ‘registers’» (K. Bühler, Sprachtheorie [5]). So, for example, Sciarrino’s Macbeth shows a paradigmatic use of vocal expressiveness, which the composer displays in all its nuances and potentialities (even the most extreme ones), yet always establishing an absolute, effective correspondence between music and text.

The music score, which is a visual representation of musical signs, is the set of staves, on which symbols representing note’s pitch and duration are drawn; on which dynamic, rhythmic and expressive signs are indicated; whose sequential reading enables us to entirely understand the sound architecture the composer has created. In order to represent his music, Sciarrino invented a diagrammatic system, which only at a later stage turns into a traditional score. These diagrams are a very personal conception invented in order to create a music “of sets”, which proceeds by “sound figures”.
