

Cultural expression and semiotic adaptation: Tarasti's framework in the study of modern music

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DOI 10.12975/rastmd.20251341 Submitted February 13, 2025 Accepted October 1, 2025

Abstract

This article applies Eero Tarasti's semiotic framework to analyze the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of contemporary music, demonstrating its relevance in understanding the multifaceted meanings embedded in modern compositions. Grounded in the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, and further developed by Tarasti, this study employs a qualitative methodology that integrates theoretical analysis, case studies, and interdisciplinary perspectives. By examining works such as Max Richter's *Sleep* (2015), Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace* (2000), and John Luther Adams' *Become Ocean* (2013), the research highlights how music functions as a dynamic system of signs within evolving technological, cultural, and global contexts. This study explores how contemporary music reflects complex meanings shaped by globalization, technology, and interdisciplinary practices. Using Eero Tarasti's semiotic framework, it applies a qualitative approach combining theoretical analysis with case studies. Focusing on the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, the research examines works like *Become Ocean* by John Luther Adams and *DAMN.* by Kendrick Lamar. The findings show how these compositions interact with cultural and technological contexts, revealing the evolving semiotic roles of music in the 21st century. The analysis reveals that syntactic innovations—including minimalist repetition, hybrid instrumentation, and algorithmic processes—challenge traditional musical frameworks, creating new structural paradigms. Semantic exploration uncovers how composers embed cultural hybridity, symbolic narratives, and emotional depth within their works. Pragmatic analysis demonstrates the transformative role of digital platforms, participatory cultures, and globalized performances in shaping audience engagement and interpretation. By situating contemporary music within interdisciplinary intersections of technology, media, and cultural studies, this research underscores the enduring relevance of semiotics in decoding how compositions reflect and influence societal, technological, and cultural transformations. The study concludes that semiotic analysis enhances our understanding of music's communicative power, affirming its critical role as a medium for cultural dialogue, technological innovation, and social commentary.

Keywords

contemporary music, Eero tarasti, interdisciplinary musicology, musical semiotics, syntactic innovations

Introduction

The semiotics of contemporary music provide a crucial foundation for interpreting how compositions function as dynamic systems of signs within the rapidly changing cultural, technological, and global contexts of the 21st century. Drawing on the foundational theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1931), further refined by Eero Tarasti (2002, 2017), musical semiotics examines the intricate relationship between structure, meaning, and context in music. In an era where technological advancements reshape the processes of

creating, distributing, and experiencing music, and where cultural hybridity transcends traditional genre boundaries, semiotic analysis offers an unparalleled lens to understand the mechanisms of musical meaning-making.

This study explores how modern compositions integrate syntactic innovation, semantic depth, and pragmatic engagement to produce intricate works that resonate with diverse audiences. By employing Tarasti's triadic framework—syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions—this research underscores music's versatility as a medium

of communication. The syntactic dimension focuses on elements such as melody, rhythm, and instrumentation, investigating how these components evolve through technological integration and cross-cultural exchanges. It also considers how musical structures symbolically represent and convey complex narratives and emotional themes crafted by composers. The pragmatic dimension, in turn, analyzes how listeners interact with and interpret music within participatory and digitally mediated contexts.

Examples of contemporary works include Max Richter's *Sleep* (2015), Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace* (2000), and John Luther Adams' *Become Ocean* (2013). Richter's minimalist approach redefines syntactic conventions by creating soundscapes that immerse listeners in meditative and reflective experiences. Jenkins' fusion of global musical traditions narrates a vision of universal peace, rich with symbolic meaning. Adams' orchestral exploration of ecological interconnectedness highlights the power of music to address pressing global concerns. These examples illustrate the value of semiotic analysis in understanding how contemporary music reflects and adapts to its cultural and technological environment.

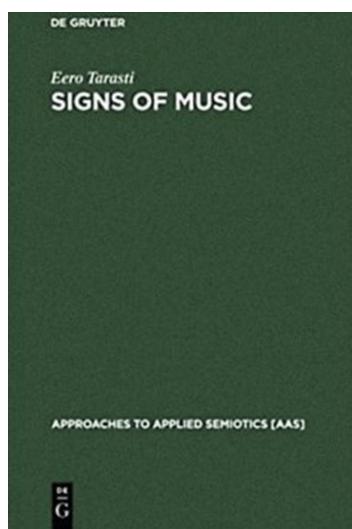


Figure 1. Cover of Tarasti's book titled *Signs of Music* (Web 1)

John Luther Adams' *Become Ocean* offers a compelling example of how contemporary music can be examined through Tarasti's semiotic framework. Syntactically, the piece is characterized by slowly shifting textures and layered orchestration, creating a sense of fluid, continuous movement that mimics the ebb and flow of the ocean. The repetition and gradual transformation of musical motifs function structurally to suspend traditional narrative progression, aligning with the syntactic codes of ambient and ecological music. Semantically, the work evokes themes of nature, environmental awareness, and human insignificance in the face of vast natural forces. These meanings are not conveyed through lyrics or explicit program notes, but through the immersive sonic environment, suggesting a symbolic link between musical sound and ecological consciousness. Pragmatically, *Become Ocean* influences how audiences engage with time and space—both within the concert hall and in personal listening contexts. The slow unfolding and expansive scale of the piece encourage introspection and meditative listening, promoting a form of ecological awareness that aligns with broader cultural discourses on climate change and sustainability. In this way, the composition exemplifies how musical works can function as semiotic texts shaped by, and responding to, contemporary global concerns.

Additionally, developments such as algorithmic composition, streaming platforms, and participatory culture have transformed the ways music interacts with its audiences. Platforms like Spotify and YouTube create algorithm-driven listening experiences, while TikTok fosters remix cultures that extend the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of music (Morris & Powers, 2021; Sanfilippo & Whiting, 2019). This study situates contemporary music within these broader frameworks, demonstrating how semiotics bridges traditional musicological approaches with the dynamic realities of modern composition and consumption.

Through the analysis of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic layers, this research reveals contemporary music's transformative role as a medium for cultural expression, technological innovation, and social engagement. The findings contribute to the growing discourse on musical semiotics, offering insights into how compositions not only create meaning but also emerge from and shape the world they inhabit.

Literature Review

The field of musical semiotics has gained significant traction in contemporary scholarship as it addresses the increasingly intricate ways in which music functions as a system of signs within dynamic cultural, technological, and global contexts. Based on the foundational work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), Charles Sanders Peirce (1931), and further refined by Eero Tarasti (2002, 2017), musical semiotics focuses on music as a communicative medium through its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. This framework has been instrumental in exploring both traditional and modern interpretations of music, offering a robust lens for examining its multilayered nature. With advancements in digital technology, globalization, and interdisciplinary research, the field continues to evolve, shedding light on new ways music is created, experienced, and contextualized.

Eero Tarasti's contributions have been pivotal in developing a systematic methodology to understand the signifying potential of music. In *Signs of Music: A Guide to Musical Semiotics* (2002), Tarasti outlines a triadic model of musical meaning: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. The syntactic dimension pertains to the internal grammar of music, encompassing elements like melody, harmony, rhythm, and form. The semantic dimension explores music's ability to evoke emotions, ideas, and cultural meanings, while the pragmatic dimension focuses on the context in which music is experienced and interpreted by listeners.

Tarasti's later work, *Semiotics of Classical Music* (2017), expands this model by incorporating existential semiotics, where music is viewed as a medium for human expression and temporal experience. This approach introduces the concept of *Dasein*—borrowed from Heidegger—to explain how individuals interact with music as part of their lived experience. By emphasizing the temporality and subjectivity of musical interpretation, Tarasti highlights the dynamic interplay between the listener, the music, and its broader cultural context. His framework is versatile, enabling analysis across classical compositions and modern musical practices.

Tarasti's semiotic model has been widely applied to contemporary research exploring the evolving nature of musical signification. For instance, Gritten and King's *Music and Meaning* (2017) examines how modern technologies, particularly digital platforms, impact the syntactic and semantic dimensions of music. Their research emphasizes the growing prominence of nonlinear structures, loop-based compositions, and algorithmic techniques, which challenge traditional notions of musical syntax.

In *The Musical Topic* (2010), Monelle complements Tarasti's semantic dimension by investigating how musical elements serve as cultural signifiers, referencing themes like hunting, pastoral life, or military traditions. This approach is particularly relevant in analyzing hybrid genres, where cultural references are often layered or reinterpreted to generate novel meanings.

The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized the creation, distribution, and consumption of music, presenting both challenges and opportunities for semiotic inquiry. Born (2011) highlights the transformative role of digital platforms in reshaping the production and reception of music. Streaming services, algorithm-driven curation, and participatory platforms like YouTube and TikTok allow listeners to engage

with music in unprecedented ways, shifting the pragmatic dimension of music from passive reception to active interpretation and creation.

[The integration of recent research on user behavior is essential for a more nuanced understanding of the pragmatic dimension within music semiotics, particularly as it relates to digital platforms. Contemporary listening practices—mediated by streaming services, social media, and interactive technologies—play a critical role in shaping the ways in which musical meaning is produced, interpreted, and circulated. By examining these user-centered dynamics, the study expands the semiotic analysis beyond compositional structures and symbolic references, foregrounding the active role of audiences in co-constructing meaning within the digital music ecosystem.]

Cook's *Beyond the Score* (2013) underscores how digital media enhances music's multimodal experience by integrating auditory, visual, and textual elements. For instance, music videos and live performances now include interactive components that engage audiences on multiple sensory levels, creating rich, layered narratives. Similarly, Kjus (2016) examines how algorithmic personalization in streaming platforms influences listener behavior, fostering individualized interpretive contexts that mediate the relationship between music and its audience.

Globalization has amplified cross-cultural exchanges in musical styles, leading to the rise of hybrid genres that challenge traditional semiotic paradigms. Feld's *Sound and Sentiment* (2012) offers an ethnographic perspective on how cultural narratives shape music's semantic dimension, particularly within world music. Similarly, Taylor's *Global Pop* (2020) explores the semiotic processes underlying the global circulation of genres like K-pop, Afrobeat, and reggaeton, illustrating how these genres blend diverse musical traditions to construct identities and foster transnational cultural dialogues.

Recent research has bridged semiotics with neuroscience to uncover new insights into how musical signs are perceived and processed. Meyer and Bicknell (2019) examine the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying musical interpretation, providing empirical validation for the pragmatic and semantic dimensions of Tarasti's framework. By integrating neuroscience, their research reveals how listeners consciously and subconsciously decode complex musical structures and construct meaning.

Tagg's *Music's Meanings* (2012) further highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, particularly in understanding music as a multimodal sign system. His analysis of audiovisual media demonstrates how sound interacts with imagery and text to produce layered meanings—a practice increasingly evident in contemporary music videos, advertisements, and digital installations.

The literature reveals a dynamic and evolving field of musical semiotics, deeply rooted in Tarasti's theoretical framework. Recent scholarship demonstrates the adaptability of this model in addressing the syntactic innovations, semantic reinterpretations, and pragmatic transformations introduced by digital technology, globalization, and interdisciplinary research. By integrating these perspectives, the study of musical semiotics continues to offer valuable insights into how music functions as a complex and dynamic system of signs, shaping cultural identities and individual experiences in the 21st century.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach that combines theoretical analysis with in-depth case studies to examine how Eero Tarasti's semiotic framework can be used to interpret the complex meanings found in contemporary music. By analyzing music through its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, the research explores how factors such as

globalization, technological innovation, and interdisciplinary developments are reshaping the way music is created and understood in the 21st century.

The study employs an exploratory and interpretive design to uncover the transformative processes shaping modern musical signification. The objectives are to:

- Examine the application of Tarasti's semiotic model to contemporary music practices, particularly in digital and global contexts.
- Analyze the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of music to identify innovations in structure, meaning, and audience interaction.
- Incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives, including cultural studies, media theory, and digital musicology, to provide a comprehensive semiotic analysis.

To support the analysis, the research combines primary and secondary data from diverse sources:

Primary Data Sources:

Musical Works: Representative compositions from classical, hybrid, and AI-generated music are analyzed for their structural, symbolic, and contextual features. Examples include algorithmically generated compositions, Afrobeat, and works with globally recognized cultural and technological influences.

Multimodal Artifacts: Music videos, digital performances, and multimedia installations are examined to understand the interplay of sound, imagery, and textual elements.

Digital Platforms: Streaming services like Spotify, YouTube, and TikTok are explored to assess how algorithmic curation and participatory culture shape music's pragmatic dimensions.

Secondary Data Sources:

- Scholarly research on semiotics, digital music practices, and interdisciplinary approaches to music analysis.
- Industry reports and studies addressing global music consumption, AI in music production, and the socio-cultural dynamics of modern compositions.

The analysis is guided by Tarasti's triadic semiotic framework, augmented by contemporary theoretical perspectives. It is structured into the following dimensions:

Syntactic Analysis:

- Explores rhythmic, melodic, and structural innovations, particularly in algorithmic compositions, loop-based music, and hybrid genres.
- Highlights how works like Brian Eno's Bloom and Max Richter's Sleep challenge traditional syntactic norms through generative and minimalist structures.

Semantic Analysis:

- Investigates the representational and emotional depth of music, emphasizing cultural symbolism and narrative meanings.
- Examines hybrid genres like Afrobeat for their layered semantic interpretations and analyzes multimedia works for their interconnection of sound and imagery.

Pragmatic Analysis:

- Evaluates audience engagement in digital contexts, focusing on algorithmic curation, participatory culture, and user-generated content.
- Studies examples like Billie Eilish's Happier Than Ever and participatory practices on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube to understand music's evolving role in audience interaction.

Case studies are chosen to highlight specific semiotic phenomena, with criteria including:

- **Genre Diversity:** Showcasing a wide range of musical styles, including classical, popular, experimental, and genre-blending works.
- **Technological Relevance:** Highlighting pieces that integrate artificial intelligence, multimedia components, or modern digital production methods.
- **Global Impact:** Featuring works that hold cultural significance across different regions and have a broad international reach—examples include *Become Ocean* by John Luther Adams and *DAMN.* by Kendrick Lamar.

To ensure the reliability and credibility of the findings, the study employs the following measures:

- **Triangulation:** Cross-references musical works, scholarly literature, and digital artifacts to strengthen interpretations.
- **Peer Review:** Engages with academic critiques to refine analysis and align theoretical insights.
- **Transparency:** Clearly documents methodologies and analytical processes to enhance replicability and foster trust in the conclusions.

While comprehensive, the methodology acknowledges certain constraints:

- **Subjectivity:** As an interpretive study, results may reflect the researcher's perspectives. Mitigation includes consulting diverse viewpoints and corroborating findings.
- **Scope:** Case studies are illustrative rather than exhaustive, limiting generalizability.

- **Technological Bias:** A focus on digital and AI-driven practices may overshadow traditional forms, necessitating a balanced perspective.

Analysis

The application of semiotic studies to contemporary music provides valuable insights into how compositions act as systems of signs, conveying layered meanings. Rooted in the foundational theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1931), semiotics has developed to address music's unique nature as a non-verbal yet profoundly expressive medium. Eero Tarasti's work, particularly his triadic framework encompassing syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, serves as a comprehensive tool for exploring the complex meanings embedded in modern music (Tarasti, 2002).

This analysis emphasizes the importance of semiotic studies in understanding the structural, representational, and contextual aspects of contemporary compositions, especially as they adapt to technological innovations, cultural blending, and interdisciplinary practices.

Modern compositions often transcend traditional musicological frameworks by integrating innovative structures and diverse cultural elements. Semiotics serves as a critical bridge, connecting the structural analysis of music with its interpretive possibilities.

Syntactic Innovations: Composers like Max Richter (*Sleep*, 2015) and Steve Reich (*Different Trains*, 1988) employ minimalist techniques, repetitive patterns, and non-linear narratives. These methods necessitate semiotic exploration to decode how patterns and processes convey meaning beyond conventional harmonic and melodic systems. For instance, Richter's *Sleep* relies on cyclical motifs and sustained harmonies to create a meditative soundscape, demonstrating the creative potential of minimalism (Collins, 2018).

Semantic Depth: Semiotics investigates how music conveys emotions, cultural narratives, and conceptual ideas. Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace* (2000) juxtaposes the peaceful "Benedictus" with the intense "Charge!" to depict a narrative arc from conflict to reconciliation. The recurring motif of *L'homme armé* acts as a historical and symbolic signifier, connecting medieval contexts with modern calls for peace (Feld, 2021).

Pragmatic Adaptability: Music's pragmatic dimension examines its interaction with audiences, cultural environments, and performance settings. For example, Björk's *Biophilia* (2011) incorporates multimedia elements and app-based experiences, redefining the listener's role from a passive observer to an active participant in meaning-making (Sanfilippo & Whiting, 2019).

Semiotics of music extends beyond traditional boundaries, requiring an interdisciplinary approach to account for the complexities of modern compositions.

Technological Integration: Technological advancements, including algorithmic and AI-driven music, have introduced new syntactic paradigms. Works such as Brian Eno's *Bloom* (2008) and Holly Herndon's *Proto* (2019) challenge traditional notions of authorship and structure. Semiotic studies analyze how these technologies foster dynamic systems of evolving musical meaning (Herndon & Hetherington, 2022).

Cultural Hybridity: In today's globalized world, composers like Tan Dun (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000) and Unsuk Chin (*Alice in Wonderland*, 2007) blend Eastern and Western traditions. Semiotic analysis explores how these works use musical elements as signs to construct cultural identities and foster cross-cultural dialogues (Taylor, 2020).

Multimodality: Contemporary music often incorporates visual and performance art. For instance, Ryoji Ikeda's *datamatics*

(2006) combines sound and digital imagery to explore data as an aesthetic concept. Semiotics examines how such multimodal compositions generate meaning across different sensory experiences (Tagg, 2012).

The digital age has revolutionized how music is consumed and understood, offering new contexts for semiotic interpretation.

Streaming Platforms and Algorithmic Curation: Streaming services like Spotify and YouTube utilize algorithms to tailor music recommendations based on listening habits. Semiotic analysis investigates how these algorithms shape the pragmatic aspects of music, influencing how compositions are experienced and interpreted (Morris & Powers, 2021).

Participatory Culture: The participatory nature of contemporary music is evident in works like Billie Eilish's *Happier Than Ever* (2021) and interactive platforms like TikTok. Semiotic studies reveal how such engagement transforms compositions into collaborative cultural artifacts, with listeners contributing to their evolving semantic and pragmatic dimensions (Kjus, 2016).

Modern compositions often engage with critical ethical and cultural themes, highlighting music's capacity for social advocacy and commentary.

Environmental Awareness: John Luther Adams' *Become Ocean* (2013) uses orchestral textures to evoke the vastness and fragility of nature. Semiotics explores how its harmonic language and dynamic shifts symbolize ecological interconnectedness and serve as a call for environmental action (Feld, 2021).

Cultural Diplomacy and Identity: Global artists like BTS (*Love Yourself*, 2018) and Yo-Yo Ma's *Silk Road Ensemble* demonstrate how music fosters cross-cultural understanding and dialogue. Semiotics deciphers how these works construct and communicate cultural meanings, promoting global harmony (Taylor, 2020).

Semiotics broadens musicology by integrating insights from cultural studies, communication, and media theory.

Music as a Cultural Artifact: Kendrick Lamar's DAMN. (2017) addresses systemic issues of race, identity, and resilience. Semiotic analysis explores its layered narratives, connecting musical syntax with broader sociopolitical themes (Morris & Powers, 2021).

Cross-Disciplinary Applications: Semiotics enhances interdisciplinary research by providing tools to analyze how music interacts with visual art, literature, and technology. This adaptability underscores its value in both academic and creative contexts (Born & Devine, 2015).

Semiotic analysis illuminates the intricate ways in which music constructs and conveys meaning in a rapidly changing cultural and technological landscape. By addressing syntactic innovations, semantic richness, and pragmatic transformations, semiotics highlights the multifaceted roles of music as a medium of communication. Its interdisciplinary adaptability makes it indispensable for understanding the evolving dynamics of music in the 21st century.

Results

This study employs a qualitative approach that combines theoretical analysis with in-depth case studies to examine how Eero Tarasti's semiotic framework can be used to interpret the complex meanings found in contemporary music. By analyzing music through its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, the research explores how factors such as globalization, technological innovation, and interdisciplinary developments are reshaping the way music is created and understood in the 21st century. The findings emphasize the following key insights:

This study reveals the transformative role of semiotic analysis in uncovering the evolving complexities of contemporary music. By

applying Eero Tarasti's triadic framework—syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions—the research demonstrates how modern compositions serve as dynamic systems of signs, shaped by advancements in technology, cultural hybridity, and interdisciplinary creativity. The findings emphasize the following key insights:

Contemporary music reflects a significant departure from traditional syntactic conventions, embracing innovative structures that prioritize process, fluidity, and adaptability over fixed forms.

Algorithmic and Generative Structures: Works like Brian Eno's Bloom (2008) and Holly Herndon's Proto (2019) employ algorithmic methods, creating dynamic patterns that challenge classical linearity and emphasize emergent, real-time musical structures.

Repetition and Minimalism: Max Richter's Sleep (2015) demonstrates the power of cyclic motifs, using repetitive syntax to evoke immersive, meditative experiences that engage cognitive and emotional processes.

Cultural and Instrumental Hybridity: Compositions such as Karl Jenkins' The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace (2000) blend diverse musical traditions by incorporating global instruments like the duduk and tabla, illustrating the adaptability of syntactic frameworks to cultural hybridity.

The semantic dimension of contemporary music is enriched by its ability to convey complex emotions, cultural narratives, and symbolic meanings.

Cultural Significance: Works like Jenkins' The Armed Man and Tan Dun's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon soundtrack (2000) integrate historical and cultural motifs to construct universal narratives that resonate across diverse audiences.

Abstract Representations: Pieces such as John Luther Adams' Become Ocean (2013) and Björk's Biophilia (2011) encapsulate abstract

themes like ecological interconnectedness and biological phenomena, revealing how harmonic and textural elements shape meaning.

Multimodal and Intertextual Dimensions: Multimedia compositions, such as Ryoji Ikeda's datamatics (2006), leverage the interplay between auditory and visual elements to create layered, multisensory narratives, expanding the semantic range of music.

The pragmatic dimension highlights how digital platforms and globalized contexts have redefined audience interaction with music.

Participatory Culture: Digital tools like TikTok and YouTube empower audiences to reinterpret music through remixes, covers, and other user-generated content, as seen in the cultural impact of Billie Eilish's Happier Than Ever (2021).

Personalized Listening Experiences: Platforms like Spotify and YouTube curate music algorithmically, reshaping listener perceptions and fostering deeply personalized experiences that align with individual preferences and emotional states.

Cultural Dialogue: Global works like BTS's Love Yourself series (2018) and Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble illustrate music's role in facilitating cross-cultural exchanges, using hybrid narratives to engage audiences in meaningful dialogues.

Contemporary compositions often transcend aesthetics, becoming platforms for social commentary and ethical reflection.

Environmental Advocacy: John Luther Adams' Become Ocean conveys ecological interconnectedness and vulnerability through sonic depictions of natural phenomena, symbolizing environmental awareness.

Social Justice Narratives: Kendrick Lamar's DAMN. (2017) uses layered musical and lyrical semiotics to explore themes of

identity, race, and systemic inequality, engaging global audiences in conversations about justice and resilience.

The study underscores the interdisciplinary adaptability of semiotic analysis in contemporary music research.

Music and Technology: Algorithmic compositions challenge traditional notions of authorship and structure, with semiotics providing a framework for understanding these technological shifts.

Cultural Studies: Semiotic tools decode how contemporary music negotiates cultural identities and integrates diverse traditions, offering insights into global hybrid genres.

Media Theory: By analyzing the fusion of music with visual and digital media, semiotics reveals the expanded communicative potential of multimodal compositions.

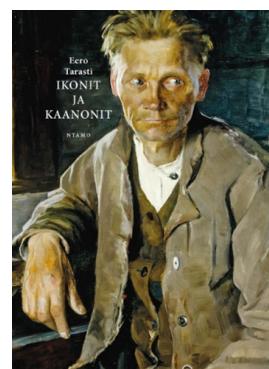


Figure 2. Book cover of Ikonit ja kaanonit by Eero Tarasti (Web 2)

Professor Eero Tarasti, after his Wagner dissertation Myth and Music (1978), has published several works including A Theory of Musical Semiotics (1994), Existential Semiotics (2000), Signs of Music (2002), Semiotics of Classical Music (2002), and Sein und Schein.

This research reaffirms the enduring relevance of Tarasti's semiotic framework in understanding the complexities of contemporary music. The findings illuminate how syntactic innovations, semantic richness, and pragmatic transformations

contribute to music's evolution as a dynamic system of signs. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how music serves as a critical medium for addressing cultural, ethical, and global issues, affirming its vital role in communication, cultural expression, and social change in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This research highlights the critical role of semiotic analysis in unraveling the intricacies of contemporary music. By applying Eero Tarasti's triadic framework—spanning syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions—the study demonstrates how modern compositions operate as adaptable systems of signs, shaped by advancements in technology, globalization, and interdisciplinary innovation.

The syntactic evolution in contemporary music reflects a shift from traditional structures, as evident in minimalist works, algorithmic compositions, and hybrid instrumentation. These innovations move beyond linear narratives, emphasizing the generative and dynamic nature of musical syntax. Semantic analysis unveils the richness of contemporary music's representational and emotional layers, where cultural hybridity, intertextuality, and multimodal approaches expand its interpretive possibilities. On a pragmatic level, the digital age has transformed how audiences engage with music, fostering participatory practices, personalized listening, and opportunities for cultural diplomacy and social advocacy.

This study underscores music's capacity to address global challenges, from environmental sustainability to social justice, and to promote cultural dialogue. Examples such as John Luther Adams' *Become Ocean* and Kendrick Lamar's *DAMN.* illustrate how music transcends aesthetics to serve as a medium for ethical and cultural reflection. Moreover, the interdisciplinary scope of semiotics establishes it as a vital tool for exploring connections between music, technology, media, and cultural studies.

In summary, the semiotic analysis of contemporary music enhances our understanding of its meanings while affirming music's role as a powerful medium for communication, cultural expression, and social transformation in the 21st century. As music continues to evolve, semiotic insights will remain invaluable in navigating its complexities and unlocking its transformative potential.

Finally, as an Ethical Consideration, this study does not involve human participants. All musical works and digital platform content analyzed are used under fair use for scholarly and critical purposes. Care has been taken to ensure accurate representation of copyrighted materials, and all sources are properly cited in accordance with academic standards.

Recommendations

In light of the findings presented in this study, several promising avenues for further scholarly inquiry are recommended. First, the theoretical potential of Tarasti's semiotic framework would be significantly enriched through application to a broader and more diverse corpus of musical traditions—including non-Western, popular, and emergent digital genres. Such expansion would not only test the adaptability of the model but also contribute to a more inclusive global discourse on musical meaning.

Second, this study highlights the value of cross-disciplinary engagement between musicology and literary studies. Future research may fruitfully pursue comparative semiotic analyses of musical and literary texts, examining how both forms construct narrative, articulate identity, and mediate cultural expression. These parallels offer fertile ground for expanding shared analytical methodologies and deepening our understanding of symbolic structures across media.

Third, empirical work exploring reception, perception, and interpretation by audiences and performers alike would complement

the theoretical insights developed here. Investigating how meaning is constructed and negotiated in different cultural and listening contexts would provide a richer, more dynamic understanding of music's semiotic functions in contemporary society.

Finally, the integration of computational tools and digital humanities methodologies presents an exciting frontier. Algorithmic analysis, data visualization, and pattern recognition technologies may offer new perspectives on structural and symbolic features in both music and literature—extending the reach of semiotic inquiry into the digital age.

By advancing these directions, future research can further illuminate how music and literature operate not only as expressive forms but as complex, culturally situated systems of meaning—continuously shaped by history, technology, and the human imagination.

Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights into the application of Tarasti's semiotic framework to modern music and its relevance to cultural and literary analysis, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the study is primarily theoretical and interpretive in nature, relying on secondary sources and existing literature rather than empirical data or case studies. As such, it does not include an in-depth, systematic analysis of specific musical compositions, which could provide a more concrete demonstration of the framework's applicability.

Second, the research focuses predominantly on Western musical traditions and theoretical constructs, particularly those rooted in European semiotics. This scope may limit the generalizability of the findings to non-Western musical cultures, where different semiotic systems and cultural contexts may operate.

Third, while the study draws interdisciplinary connections with literary studies, it does so

at a conceptual level. A more integrated comparative methodology—such as parallel analyses of musical and literary texts—could deepen the cross-disciplinary insights suggested here.

Finally, the study does not account for listener or audience reception systematically. Although it touches on interpretive theory, it lacks empirical engagement with how diverse audiences understand or respond to musical semiotics in contemporary contexts.

Future research addressing these limitations—through empirical case studies, cross-cultural analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration—would enhance the scope and impact of Tarasti's framework in both musicological and literary scholarship.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the mentors and colleagues who provided valuable feedback and guidance during the development of this study. Special thanks are extended to the faculty and staff of the Department of Music Education, Faculty of Performing Arts, Indonesia Institute of the Arts of Yogyakarta, whose academic support and intellectual engagement helped shape the direction of this research. However, it is to be noted here that for this research, I have received no financial assistance but from my incentive.

Appreciation is also due to the scholars whose work on semiotics, cultural theory, and musicology laid the foundation for this inquiry, particularly those advancing the application of Tarasti's framework. Their contributions continue to inspire critical exploration at the intersection of music, culture, and meaning.

Lastly, heartfelt thanks to family and friends for their patience, encouragement, and unwavering support throughout the writing process. Very lastly, I should also acknowledge that the English writing and translation of the manuscript were proofread by a Native English colleague of mine.

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Prof. Dr. Triyono Bramantyo is a researcher and lecturer in Musicology, Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinary Arts, and Music Education at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta. He earned his Bachelor of Music from the same institution in 1985, followed by a Master of Education in Music Education from Naruto University of Education, Japan in 1994, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies from Osaka University, Japan in 1997. His academic interests lie at the intersection of music, semiotics, and cultural theory, with a particular focus on how musical forms function as systems of meaning across both historical and contemporary contexts. His work frequently explores the dialogic relationship between traditional musical practices and modern theoretical frameworks, emphasizing the role of music in cultural expression, identity construction, and interdisciplinary discourse. Bramantyo's research explores narrative structures in music, the role of technology in shaping musical expression, and the cross-pollination of music and literature through semiotic frameworks. They have presented at various international conferences and contributed to publications exploring music's role in identity, storytelling, and socio-cultural discourse. In addition to scholarly work, Bramantyo maintains an active engagement with creative and pedagogical practices, aiming to bridge theoretical inquiry with artistic expression. Their current research builds on the semiotic models of Eero Tarasti, examining how composers from Wagner to Glass construct culturally resonant musical narratives.

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