



A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR MUSIC THEORY

MTO 29.4 Examples: Boyle, Gestural Temporality in Sciarrino's *Recitativo oscuro*

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

<https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.23.29.4/mto.23.29.4.boyle.html>

Example 1. Gesture “X” at the opening of *Recitativo oscuro* (0:00–0:08): the notation conveys two pianistic motions, but the two cells combine into a single aural gesture

♩ = 41 (RAI/Pollini recording)

RH on white keys;
LH on black keys

X as notated (m. 1)

Th.P. ...

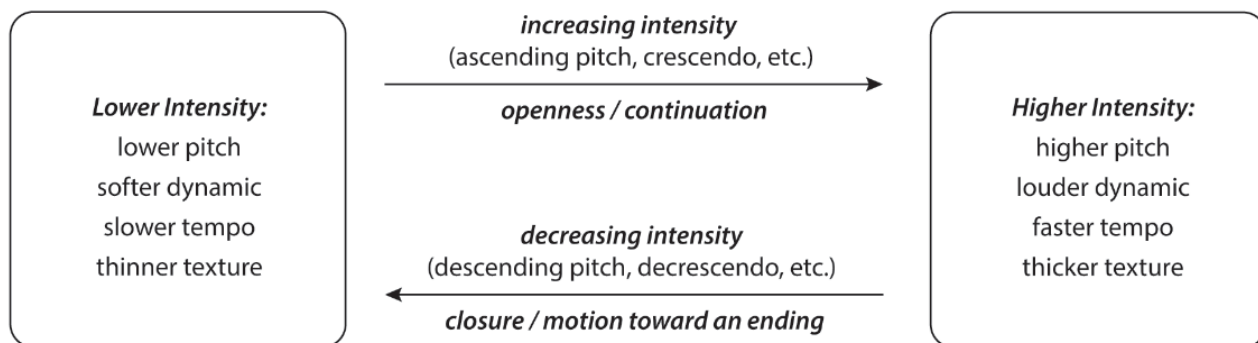
X as heard

two clusters;
highest notes most prominent

faint sympathetic resonance

(notated meter is not always perceptible, but proportional durations are significant)

Example 2. Relationship between intensity change and temporal function, with examples of relative low/high intensity mappings



Example 3. *Recitativo oscuro*, mm. 1–12 (0:00–0:46), piano solo with segmentation (occasional orchestral parts in this section are not shown)

KEY:

- higher-level phrases: boundaries created by repetition (mm. 8–12 is a varied repetition of mm. 3–6) and sometimes supported by longer rests
- phrases: boundaries created by repetition (mm. 8–10 and 11–12 are varied repetitions of mm. 3–5) and usually supported by longer rests
- segments: boundaries created by rests (and occasionally register change)

Example 4. First phrase of the piano solo (mm. 3–5; 0:09–0:19), in which gesture X's original intensity profile is mirrored at both segment and phrase level

clusters of original X (or slight variations) occur at segment endings

overall phrase accelerando created by:
- progressively shorter rests between segments
- shorter durations at end of phrase (circled)

segment dynamic contour

segment pitch contour*

* pitch contour based on highest pitches:

Example 5. *Recitativo oscuro*, mm. 13–16 (0:47–1:03), piano solo only. Gesture X realizes its implicit opening function, continuing with quasi-sequential motion, and leads to a phrase with an inverted intensity profile.

intensity decreases in first half of phrase (descending pitches, softer dynamics)
"sequencing" of X-like segments

intensity increases toward phrase ending (ascending pitches, louder dynamics, shorter durations)

Example 6. Gesture “Y” emerges in mm. 1–12 (0:16–0:24 and 0:37–0:47)

ending of X-based phrase

new X-based phrase

Y (interrupted)

Z

pedal sustain across long rest
connects X-based phrase and Y-based tag

(mm. 9–10, ending of high-register X-based phrase and start of low-register X-based phrase, are omitted)

ending of X-based phrase

Y (sounds complete;
closural shape)

pedal sustain across long rest
connects X-based phrase and Y-based tag

Example 7. *Recitativo oscuro*, mm. 18–21 (1:07–1:21): the third Y-based tag initiates a new phrase, which is interrupted by the start of a large-scale repetition; segmentation criteria conflict around the formal boundary.

ending of X-based phrase

Y initiates new phrase

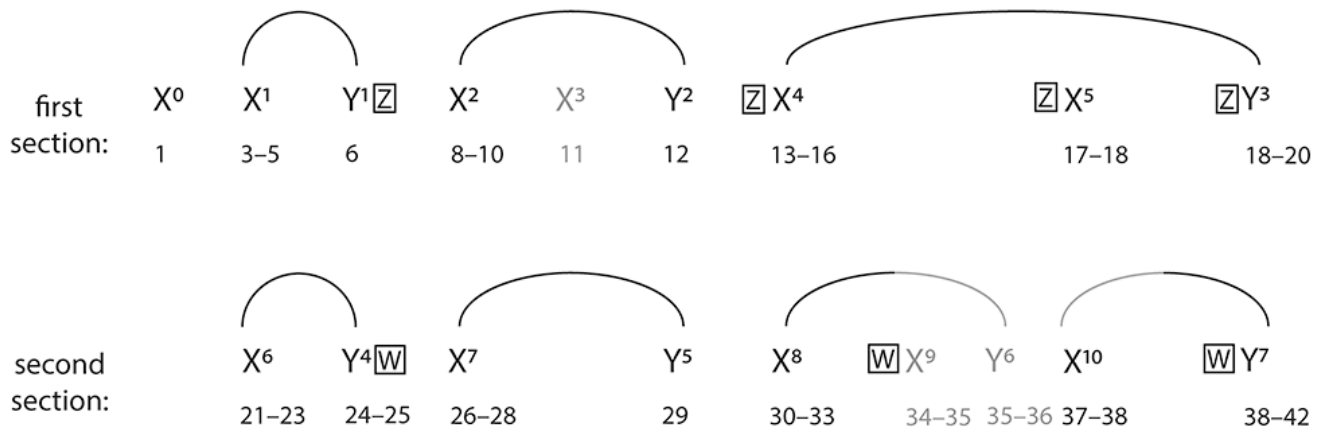
upper-level section boundary suggested by repetition

lower-level phrase boundary implied by rests

X interrupts to begin large-scale repetition of mm. 1–20

ped. *
pedal sustain across long rest connects X-based phrase and Y-based tag

Example 8. Large-scale repetition in the piano solo



KEY:


X^0 opening X gesture

X^1, X^2 etc. X-based phrases

X^3, X^9 etc. phrases not present in both sections

Y^1, Y^2 etc. Y-based tags

Z, W interrupting gestures

 grouping of one or more X-based phrases with a Y-based tag

3-5, etc. measure numbers for phrases

Example 9. Y-based tags in the second half of the piano solo (1:25–1:38, 1:44–1:56, 2:15–2:25, 2:25–2:43)

The image displays a musical score for a piano solo, divided into two systems. The score is annotated with various musical terms and symbols to highlight specific features.

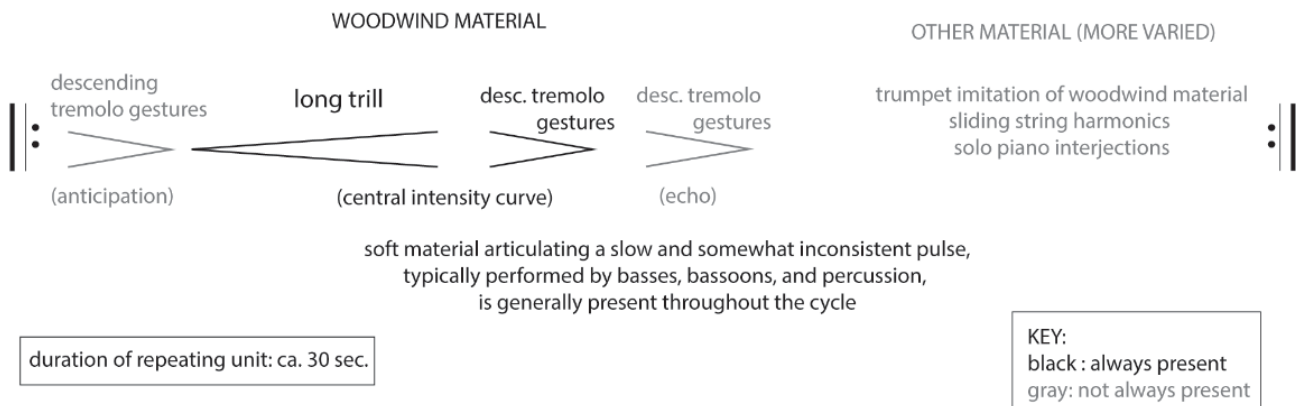
System 1 (Measures 22-36):

- Continuation of X₆:** Measures 22-31, marked with *f* and *ff*.
- Beginning of X₇:** Measures 31-34, marked with *f* and *ff*.
- Y₄:** A red box highlights measures 31-34.
- W:** A blue dashed box highlights measures 31-34.
- Continuation of X₇:** Measures 34-36, marked with *f* and *ff*.
- Y₅:** A red box highlights measures 34-36.
- W:** A blue dashed box highlights measures 34-36.
- Beginning of X₈:** Measures 36-40, marked with *f* and *ff*.
- W:** A blue dashed box highlights measures 36-40.

System 2 (Measures 37-50):

- Continuation of X₉:** Measures 37-46, marked with *f* and *ff*.
- Y₆:** A red box highlights measures 37-46.
- W:** A blue dashed box highlights measures 37-46.
- Beginning of X₁₀:** Measures 46-49, marked with *f* and *ff*.
- Y₇:** A red box highlights measures 46-49.
- W:** A blue dashed box highlights measures 46-49.
- Continuation of X₁₀:** Measures 49-50, marked with *f* and *ff*.
- X-like ending to piano solo:** A red dashed line indicates the end of the solo at measure 50.

Example 10. Elements of the cycle in *Recitativo oscuro*, which repeats with variations and occasional disruptions approximately mm. 49–184 (3:00 to 14:47). The accompanying audio excerpt is from 4:09–5:49 and includes three repetitions of the cycle.



Example 11. Diatonic and quasi-diatonic piano part in the first outburst passage, mm. 98–99 (refer to Audio Example 1 to hear this excerpt in context)

98

mf *ppp* *mp* *f* *mp*

99

f *pp* *p* *pp* *pp* *mp* *p* *mp* *f* *p* *mf* *fff*

8va 8va-1 8va

Example 12. Solo piano in mm. 113–114 takes on greater continuity of orchestral cycle. Audio excerpt (8:20–8:40) begins in the previous measure, when the piano still punctuates each cluster with an individual decrescendo as in the solo, and continues into the woodwind trill that follows.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The top system is for the piano, and the bottom system is for the woodwinds. Both systems are in 2/4 time and cover measures 113 and 114.

Piano Part (Top System):

- Measures 113 and 114: Complex rhythmic patterns consisting of groups of three and five notes, often beamed together. Dynamic markings include *pppp* (pianissimo) and *f* (forte).
- Measure 115: Continuation of the rhythmic patterns, with dynamic markings *ppp* (pianissimo) and *pp* (piano).
- Measure 116: Final measure of the excerpt, featuring a trill-like figure with dynamic markings *ppp* and *pp*.

Woodwind Part (Bottom System):

- Measure 113: Starts with a trill figure, marked *ff* (fortissimo).
- Measures 114 and 115: Continuation of the trill figure, marked *pppp* (pianissimo).
- Measure 116: Continuation of the trill figure, marked *p* (piano).

(a) *ff* tenuto prima, più a mezzo *ff* nel registro grave senza)

Example 13. Dialogues between piano and orchestral instruments. Audio excerpts are from 9:13–9:25 and 10:13–10:32.

Call-and-response with trumpets, mm. 122–124

This musical score illustrates a call-and-response sequence between the trumpets and the piano. The trumpets in C (top staves) play a rhythmic motif consisting of eighth notes, starting with a dynamic of *ad* (piano) and moving to *d* (mezzo-forte). The piano (bottom staff) responds with a similar rhythmic pattern, starting with a dynamic of *adadad* (piano) and moving to *adadad* (piano). The piano part includes a *Non ten.* (non-tenuto) marking. The score is in 2/4 time and spans measures 122 to 124.

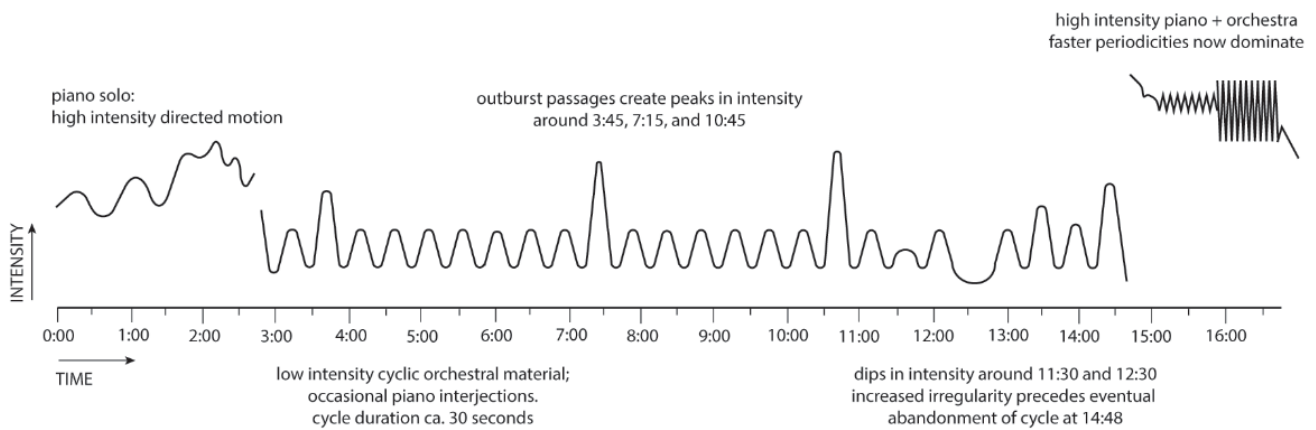
Call-and-response with woodwinds, mm. 133–136

This musical score illustrates a call-and-response sequence between various woodwind instruments and the piano. The woodwinds (top staves) include Flute 1, Flute 2, Flute 3, Clarinet in Bb 1, Clarinet in Bb 2, Alto Flute, and Bass Clarinet. The piano (bottom staff) provides the response. The woodwinds play a rhythmic motif starting with a dynamic of *ad* (piano) and moving to *d* (mezzo-forte). The piano responds with a similar rhythmic pattern, starting with a dynamic of *adadad* (piano) and moving to *adadad* (piano). The piano part includes a *Non ten.* (non-tenuto) marking. The score is in 2/4 time and spans measures 133 to 136.

Example 14. A dialogue between solo cello and solo bass in the *sillabazione scivolata* style (mm. 183–185). Audio excerpt (14:36–14:48) includes this soft material in context, bracketed by louder piano material and the explosive start of the final section.

Musical score for Solo Cello and Solo Bass, measures 183–185. The score shows two staves with dynamic markings: *p*, *pp*, *mf*, *f*, and *mp*. There are also slurs and accents over the notes.

Example 15. Visual representation of intensity and cyclic material in *Recitativo oscuro* as a whole: form mirrors inverted arch shape of individual phrases from the opening piano solo



Example 16. The clearest reference to X and Y material after the solo occurs in the final moments of the concerto (solo piano, mm. 207–208; audio excerpt, 16:19–16:34, continues to ending in m. 209)

Musical score for piano, measures 206–209. The score shows two staves with dynamic markings: *p*, *mf*, *f*, *p*, *mp*, *p*, *pp*, *mf*, *pppp*. Annotations include: "final cell of X" (measures 206–207), "Y material" (measures 207–209), "orchestra continues pulsation" (measures 206–207), "pedal sustain connects X and Y material" (measures 206–207), "orchestra crescendoes" (measures 207–208), "piano mostly obscured" (measures 207–208), and "orchestra drops out for final piano flourish" (measure 209).