The Persona in Instrumental Rock

by

Andrei Sora

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Music and Media

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Supervisors:
Prof Simon Frith
Dr Tom Armstrong

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Andrei-Ionuț Sora
18 October 2018
Abstract

There seems to be agreement, in both academic and lay thought, that music is a medium where artists express themselves (Karl and Robinson 1995, Cochrane 2008, Robinson and Hatten 2012). However, there is no agreement on how this is done. The starting question of the thesis is how one analyses the expressivity of music, particularly of the instrumental variety. I propose that the best-suited analytic tool for tackling this question is the notion of persona. Regardless of how close to the real person, this persona is never coextensive with the artists that we listen to. The notion has been heavily problematised in the context of vocal music (Cone 1974, Frith 1996, Auslander, 2009, Moore 2012), and I argue that, even in the absence of lyrics, valuable lessons can be learned by making the assumption that popular music reception is intimately tied in with the notion of musical persona. This thesis proposes a model for the (de)construction of the persona in instrumental rock, by focusing on the music of four of the most renowned and technically accomplished contemporary rock guitarists: Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Guthrie Govan.

I review established models of persona deconstruction and argue that a fractured persona is a more lucrative perspective from which to analyse instrumental rock. I develop a protagonist/environment approach that draws on parallels with film in order to go beyond the main persona of the composer/lead performer and also analyse the distinct personae of the various instruments/musicians heard on a recording, building upon notions of vocality and musical prosody. In the latter part, I capture the tension between the artists’ own image as music-makers (discourses on self-expression, uniqueness, vocality) and the findings illustrated in the first part, focusing on whether these guitarists see their music as self-expressive or as involving constructed personae. Contradictions are addressed in the conclusion, which also offers potential avenues for future research.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the many academics I have interacted with during the writing of this thesis. I thank Prof Simon Frith, Dr Tom Armstrong, and Prof Allan Moore for their invaluable help in shaping my project. I also thank Prof Jason Stanyek and Dr Olguţa Lupu for their constant support and guidance throughout my Bachelor and Master studies.

I could not have completed this thesis without the emotional and financial support of my family, friends, and Maecenases: Alin Stancu, Eugen Stancu, Horia Stancu, Marina Juverdeanu, Dan Juverdeanu, Florin Stan, and Florin Vișan.

I am most grateful to Cristina Juverdeanu for her support during the entire process of writing this dissertation, for keeping me on track both emotionally and academically, and even more so for being an amazing human being in general.

Finally, and above all, I am eternally grateful to my mother, Luminiţa Sora, without whom none of this would have been possible, for more reasons than I can fit into the word limit of a PhD.

Dedicated to Constantin Stamatiade
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INTRODUCTION

Any curious bystander waiting for the bus at Hammersmith Station in London on December 2nd, 2012 would have noticed a slightly younger version of myself nervously walking up and down Kings Street, eagerly anticipating a Steve Vai concert at the Apollo Theatre. It was my first Vai show. The excitement was tremendous, and so was the concert. His performance of ‘Whispering a Prayer’ (2001) seemed to me both breath-taking and genuine. The music, the playing, the facial expressions, the movement of the fingers on the fretboard, the way Vai touched every note made the performance seem as a direct expression of his inner most feelings. It was as if I took part in Steve Vai’s praying ritual. The following research is a direct consequence of that night. It made me want to explore expression not only in Vai’s music, but also in the work of fellow ‘guitar heroes’ such as Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Guthrie Govan, whose music I also found particularly moving.

I embarked on a search for the essence of these guitarists’ music in hopes that I would reach the unmediated emotional space where their musical ideas emerge, mainly from a naive belief that self-expression and authenticity go hand in hand. The very first day of my research demolished this entire premise, of course. I stumbled upon a YouTube video that featured a rundown of Steve Vai’s gear and guitars. After describing his array of pedals, Vai went on to declare: “I can pretty much do without any piece of gear here if I had to do a gig. But the one thing I can’t do without is this right here, my fan. (...) First and foremost, it keeps me cool; not just cool temperature-wise, but it makes me look cool. Because, you know, you get your hair blowing and all this stuff and… come on… isn’t that what it’s really all about, looking cool? You know that I’m a poser from way back, so let’s not kid anybody here!” (Vai 2009).

Humour aside, the sentiments expressed in the video made me wonder: if the fan was there for entertainment value alone, were other elements of the performance there just for Vai to ‘look cool’? Was he expressing something deep and personal or was he just playing a series of notes to cash a cheque at the end of the gig? There seemed to be a rift between what I perceived to be the real emotions of Steve Vai (the real Steve Vai) and how he presented himself (the poser from the 80s). My mind then wondered to Shel Silverstein’s ‘Underface’ and I realised that what I interacted with during his performance (or when listening to one of Vai’s recordings for that
matter) was a persona. It was blatantly obvious that the Steve Vai on stage was not the same as the Steve Siro Vai born on June 6, 1960 in New York City (Vai and Prato n.d.), and what I experienced that night was not the direct expression of Vai the person, but Vai the persona.

This thesis will approach the question of expressivity through the concept of musical persona, which, for the purpose of this dissertation, functions as an analytic tool. This is a novel approach in instrumental rock. While there seems to be agreement, in both academic and popular discourse, that music is a medium where people express themselves, there is certainly no consensus on how this is done, particularly in instrumental rock, where the subject remains unexplored. I believe that the notion of persona is ideal for analysing instrumental rock, as I shall show below. As case studies, I focus on the music of four guitar players: Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Guthrie Govan. I limit my research to four because I feel that less would not be a large enough sample, given the stylistic differences of the players, and more would be unmanageable, given the hundreds of songs the four guitarists have put out throughout the past decades. I offer a more detailed reasoning for my choice in the methodology chapter (Chapter III), along with a detailed description of the means used to analyse their personae on both musical and discourse levels.

This introduction provides a narrative regarding the thesis’ contribution to knowledge by exploring what instrumental rock, persona and expression are and how they are intertwined, why notions of persona and expression in instrumental rock are important, and how instrumental rock expression can be analysed through the prism of the persona. After looking over the research question, I will sketch a framework that expands from the specific music to be studied and the rationale for choosing it. I build on existing research on expression and persona (detailed in Chapter II, the literature review), and then develops the methodology for the investigation of persona and expression, elaborated in Chapter III.

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1 “Underneath my outside face/There's a face that none can see./A little less smiley,/A little less sure,/But a whole lot more like me” (Silverstein 2011).

2 Exceptions exists, of course. For instance, recall Stravinsky’s statement that “music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood” (White and Stravinsky 1966, 520). I am also aware of the wealth of literature on the pure and program music divide, from the writings of Hoffmann and Wagner to the more recent books by Young (2014) or Kregor (2015), but the implications of this conceptual conflict are irrelevant to my overall argument and method, as will become apparent later.
Research question and need for research

Creating “a face to meet the faces that you meet” (Elliot 1915) seems to be Vai’s goal, at least onstage. Once the face to be musically expressive has been created, the question then becomes what these guitar players want to express. My original interaction with ‘Whispering a Prayer’ (2001) led me to believe the track’s meaning was left in plain sight: Vai expressing religious sentiments through his guitar in a track that I felt could transcend the boundaries of any one religious belief. While this might not be a particularly novel topic to explore musically, the fact that it is presented in an instrumental setting puts his and similar artists’ work under a completely different light. Moreover, Vai’s attitude towards his performances makes finding a definitive meaning to a track is nigh impossible. These guitarist want to express ideas, thoughts, concepts, and even narratives, but, given the fact that the genre of instrumental rock lacks lyrics, the communication between composer and listener differs from the standard pop exchange through singer and words.

Consequently, what is expressed becomes a less interesting question. How something is expressed, on the other hand, becomes a much more fruitful research avenue. I do not focus on the real human being producing the music, and neither on the persona of the performer onstage. Instead, the thesis will focus only on a sonic instrumental persona. The way artists modulate factors such as timing, intensity, articulation, and timbre is what creates individual expression on an instrument (Keller, 2014; Cochrane, 2008). These variations are further amplified by recording techniques (Zak 2001, Frith and Zagorski-Thomas 2012) to form unique instrumental personae. Moreover, I subscribe to Zak’s (2001, 51) belief that a “recording musician’s task is to pass on his or her musical persona” onto a track/album, to create an “electronic persona” (13). It is this persona I will be focusing on for the rest of this dissertation. Thus, the question this thesis attempts to ask is: what is the role of persona in the expression of meaning in instrumental rock?

I now need to tackle the ‘so what?’ question, the one “which directs the trajectory of all critical enquiry” (Moore 2012) - and the thesis’ potential contribution to already existing knowledge in the field. Why is the notion of instrumental persona essential to the understanding of rock? What can it tell us about musical expression? There are a few answers to these questions.

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3 Such modifications are sometime seen in relation to either a real or a hypothetical score (particularly in the realm of rhythm and timing) (Clynes, 1987; Clarke, 1989; Feldman et al 1992; Gabrielsson, 1999; Sundberg and Verillo, 1980; Todd, 1985, 1992; Cochrane, 2008; Wesolowski, 2016).
I believe that valuable lessons can be learned by assuming that popular music is intimately tied in
with the notion of persona.\textsuperscript{4} This strand of instrumental rock – ‘guitar hero’ rock – is ideal for an
analysis of expression and persona, as it sees the integration of performer/composer in
musicmaking (as opposed to classical music) and puts emphasis in individual expression (rather
than collective expression) and results in an instrumental music by personalities. My enquiry
paints a somewhat different picture of rock, drawing attention to the peculiarities of instrumental
rock as a popular music form, not least in its elevation of other sounds/instruments over the voice,
while retaining a similar account of stardom. Instrumental stardom and the self-expression that
seems to be endemic to these guitar heroes’ work create a sphere of music that is ripe for analysis,
particularly with the analytical tool of the concept of persona.

\textbf{Instrumental rock, the guitar, and instrumental expressivity}

I do not think a simple, static definition of instrumental rock would be able to encompass
every listener’s understanding of the style, and I share Moore’s (2001, 1) belief that “all readers
will bring with them common-sense, and highly diverse, understandings of what [instrumental]
rock is to them”.\textsuperscript{5} A simple definition would be: rock music sans vocals, but this reductionist
view does not offer a clear picture of the various nuances the genre can take. As Agawu (2004,
271) points out, there is “no final state to hearing, only the latest state”, which in this case means,
as Moore (2001, 4) suggests, that the process of defining instrumental rock is an ongoing one,
and no possible formulation could be considered authoritative.

The reason for choosing instrumental rock rather than vocal rock is precisely because the
genre is not song based, so explorations of the persona are both novel and extremely fascinating.
Granted, the most obvious choice for an instrumental repertoire to study would have been either
classical music or jazz. However, approaches to expressivity in classical orchestral music involve
the complexity of the composer-conductor-performer relationship. Whose expressivity is being
analysed? Does the soloist have one persona and the orchestra another? Is it the group that has a
persona? Instrumental rock is chosen, in part, to avoid the complexities here (discussed in the
literature review, Chapter II). Moreover, classical music has been previously analysed through

\textsuperscript{4} Of course, this is not unarguably the case, as plenty of listeners, including musically astute ones, would disagree.
\textsuperscript{5} It is true that while listeners might not be able to articulate genre/stylistic differences, they will still be able to
“cognize distinction between styles through recognizing difference in the articulation of musical sound” (Moore
2001, 3).
the prism of personae. Berliner (1994) and Keller (2014), for instance, focus on individual and collective expression (in jazz) and Cochrane (2010) explores the relationship between expression and cognition and the connection between the emotion of the music and the emotion of the performer (in classical music). Scholars such as Karl and Robinson (1995), Cochrane (2010), Robinson and Hatten (2012), or Young (2014) have tackled the notion of the persona in their research, but have focused on classical music and more on the emotions that the persona was presumably expressing. Karl and Robinson (1995), for instance, argue that music can express complex emotions, not just simple sad/happy binaries, an idea also explored by Cochrane in his analysis of jealousy in the music of Piazzolla and Janáček. In their study on Bach and Brahms, Robinson and Hatten (2012) argue that the emotions expressed in music can sometimes be heard as the emanations of a persona.

Why then not choose jazz as the focus, given that, as Samples’ (2018, 133) study on playing-style identifiability shows, both it and rock form “the dominant genres, together making up 70 percent of responses” of his survey? This again links to a research gap, as jazz scholarship has focused on how jazz puts an emphasis on the expression of musicians (Berliner 1994, Heble 2000, Cochrane 2008, Biggs 2014), whereas research on rock has not. Finally, rock (and its various subgenres) still is one if not the most ubiquitous genres on the planet (Mobertz 2013, Buskirk 2015). Both jazz and classical music, even though consumed by an impressive percentage of the world’s population, still fare below rock (again, also accounting for its subgenres). Consequently, from a sociological point of view, it makes more sense to focus on the instrumental music most relevant at the time of writing.

The thesis focuses only on official studio recordings (with occasional references to live albums). The fact that rock is primarily a recorded music makes it easier to handle when compared to the complexities of the score of classical music on one hand and the jazz preoccupation with improvisation on the other. Finally, given the primacy of the electric guitar

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6 It is true that improvisation relevant in instrumental rock music, given the liberating power of the guitar solo (Walser 1993). Rock guitarists by and large tend to improvise, especially in live performances, where it is unlikely that they will perform solos as they were recorded. Some only keep the main themes and general structure of tracks and improvises much of everything else. As listening to multiple live versions of the same track shows, these improvisations are rarely just reutilizations of already-memorized licks and runs and represent newly created material. However, since I concentrate on instrumental rock recordings, the issue of improvisation become less relevant for my purposes. While improvisation has been a mainstay in music studies, from musicological to scientific papers (Boulez 1976, Pressing 1988, Clarke 1989, Boulez et al 1991, Berliner 1994, Murphy 1998, Johnson-Laird’s 2002, Kenny and Gellich 2002, McClary 2004, Limb and Braun 2008, Caravalho 2010, Hargreaves 2012, Nichols 2016), the issue falls outside the scope of this thesis. A future research could cover the
in instrumental rock, I should also note that an important factor in my choosing instrumental rock is because this is where my expertise lays, both as a performer and music lover. I am aware of both the technical aspects of guitar playing and performing, as well as the recording, and mixing techniques specific to the guitar, something I cannot claim for any other instrument commonly found in rock recordings. I might not be able to distinguish between Mike Portnoy’s and Mike Mangini’s drumming styles, but I am able to do so between Steve Vai’s and Steve Howe’s with ease, and will use these skills to my advantage in this research. Nonetheless, the methodology can still be applied to other instruments, an issue I will eventually return to in greater detail in the future research section of my conclusions.

Instrumental rock came into existence due to the advent of the electric guitar, which is why I shall be focusing exclusively on it throughout the rest of the thesis. The electric guitar, particularly the way it is used in rock, is by its nature a composite instrument, involving all the various means of electronically changing its sounds. The role of electronic amplification implies a focus on sonic (rather than melodic or rhythmic) analysis. Guitars and their relationship to technology create a complex set of sound possibilities. This manipulation can be electronic or can be achieved by certain guitar techniques, which allows for a multitude of unique aural fingerprints to emerge, which will be thoroughly explored in Chapter II.

Secondly, and as a direct consequence, the electric guitar can bridge the gap between instrument and voice, either through aforementioned electronic means (effects pedals and racks etc.) or through certain techniques such as bending, sliding, trilling, hammering on and pulling off. The vocality of the guitar sound is a fundamental component of my model of personae, as Chapter III will show. The (lead) guitar occupies the same level of centrality in instrumental rock as the voice does in vocal rock. Neal (2018, 48), for instance, argues that the “an emphasis on each note’s upper partials” through amplification, distortion, and pick usage, creates the characteristic ‘twang’ that made electric guitars perfect substitutes for vocalists. In vocal music, as Tagg (1999) observes, the lead singer becomes the figure with which the audience is expected to identify, mostly because of the presence of the vocal strand and the fact that the voice is the carrier of words, often seen as carriers of meaning. It is also normatively placed in the center of what Moore and Dockwray call the sound-box, the “virtual space within which sounds can be

relationship between persona and improvisation in both studio and live environments.
located through” (2010, 181), in the middle of a recording’s stereo field. In instrumental rock, we may interpret the lead synth sound as a substitute vehicle for conveying meaning, as it is not only firmly placed in the centre of the sound-box, but it is also treated similarly in terms of compression and EQ-ing, with a focus on getting the guitar to sit in-front in the mix, in terms of dynamics and frequency spectrum. The lead guitar thus transforms “into a singing voice that wishes to remain wordless” (Cone 1974, 78). Consequently, we can look to analytical tools developed in conjunction with vocal music and apply them in an analogous manner to instrumental works in synthwave, which is the focus of Chapter II.

A key issue here concerns instruments and their implicit expressivity. It seems to be the case that some instruments are heard as more expressive than others (Samples 2018). The most expressive are those that are most voice-like in the range of sound effects they can produce, so that the guitar is obviously a more expressive instrument than a drum kit, for instance. On the other hand, particularly in discussions on jazz, fans and critics clearly believe that drummers can have distinct musical personae (an issue explored in other mediums as well, such as the 2014 film Whiplash). Consequently, in classifying musical instruments as expressive, there is a continuum rather than a clarification of expressive and non-expressive. Jazz studies also show how the expressivity of instruments can be affected by technological change, not just the development of electrical amplification, but modern designs/material for instruments affect the sound-range a player can access, with the history of the trumpet providing a good example for such an expansion (Yanow 2001, Barnhart, 2008, Charters 2009).

**The persona: how it is understood throughout**

My overview of the literature, presented in Chapter I, seems to suggest that other people also hear music through the lens of a persona. Berliner (1994), Budd (1995), or Heble (2000) essentially adopt the motto of “the music sounds the way the emotion feels” (Cochrane 2008, 329). As Cochrane (2010, 265) points out, if one grants the premise that music is expressive, one should also grant that “emotions necessarily imply the presence of persons who experience them”. He goes on to point out that even though it is by no means unequivocal to assume the presence of a persona in music, since “only psychological beings possess emotions”, it is natural for us to presume, given that we are pattern-seeking creatures, that what we hear in music is the result of a psychological being (Cochrane 2010, 264). Frith also points towards the tendency of
listeners to experience the “sound as [a] person” (Frith 1996, 210) even without the aid of any visual cues, resulting in an identification with the persona of the composer, performer, or protagonist of a song.

At the same time the sociological face is created, a face to be musically expressive also emerges, which is what I focus on for the rest of the dissertation. While I do explore the complexities of the persona in the academic literature in the Chapter II, I do need to provide a brief definition of what I understand by persona. I take my basic understanding on this construct from three distinct fields which produce analogous definitions. The first comes from a psychological (or rather psychoanalytical perspective), where I utilize C.G. Jung’s idea that the persona represents the mask that we wear when interacting with other members of society (Jung et al 2014). Metaphorically, only when we look in the mirror do we see our true selves. What we see is never what the world sees, because “we cover [our face] with the persona, the mask of the actor” (Jung et al 2014, 20). This mask represents an idealized version of ourselves, one which we use in any social interaction.7

The second field which informs my understanding of the persona is sociology, where the persona is defined by face-to-face social interactions. Here, I find Goffman’s (1956) account particularly useful. He argues that when in the presence of others, individuals will “mobilize [their] activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in [their] interests to convey”, a situation which is deemed by the others “at least temporarily acceptable” (Goffman 1956, 3). In music, this means that an artist will most likely project an impression to the audience that is in his/her interest to convey, and a performer must maintain the status quo and not let the audience know of the illusion (Goffman 1956, 46), although this does not always happen, as was the case for my interaction with Steve Vai.

Finally, I also borrow from film studies, where this social and artistic mask informs Dyer and McDonald’s (1998) discussion of the star, a persona that “incorporate[s] complex interactions between on-screen and off-screen personae” (Lau 2016, 244). Dyer (1991) further points out that audiences easily grant the label of ‘authentic’ if celebrities seem to ‘keep it real’ in interviews or public appearances, which ties in with Goffman’s (1956) observation that audiences have a desire to equate the star to the real person, even though star and real person are

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7 This begs the question whether other guitar players might be able to ‘pick up’ one another’s mask and use it for their own ends. The issue will be discussed in depth in my analysis of Guthrie Govan’s work.
never coextensive.

The real person, however, is excluded from any further discussion on instrumental personae. Intentional fallacy aside (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954), while both onstage and in the recording studio it is the real person who makes choices about the sounds they make, I choose to remove the real person from my analysis of instrumental personae. As Dyer and McDonald (1998, 1) note, even though their worldly existence is important to how people frame them, “we never know them directly as real people”, only “their signification” (Dyer and McDonald 1998, 2). My focus here is not on the guitarist generating the sound but on the sound itself, which is where I depart from the above understandings of the persona.

**How?**

The musical analyses will focus on sonic aspects such as sound-box configuration, textural matters, as well as on a series of essential issues (first explored by Moore 2012), such as the relationship between the persona and issues of proxemics, the fictional/realist protagonist, and the relationship between the guitar persona and the ‘background’, what Moore calls the ‘environment’ of a track. I will also look at how the use of common (EQ, compression, reverb, delay) and creative mixing techniques (automation, saturation, panning etc.) affect the way the persona is perceived, as well as on guitar techniques and phrasing that will be aided by a discussion on vocality and musical prosody (found in Chapter II).

I believe that looking at how the artists themselves think about the issues discussed is beneficial, as it provides an alternative source of information about expressivity to which the persona approach can be compared. I need to stress the fact that this is not necessarily to assume intentionality but, rather, to see how close or far apart artist and analyst may be. What sort of gap is there between how these musicians see themselves and present themselves as music makers? Do they see music as self-expressive? Do they see their music as involving constructed personae? Are ideas of uniqueness, vocality, or compositional practices integral to their understanding of musicmaking? The interview data is not a form of ‘verification’ of my analytic findings. I do not intend to use the artist’s comments on their work as authoritative in any way, because “musical works can express emotions independently of the occurrent emotional states of their performers or composers” (Cochrane 2008, 329).

Finally, the overall structure of the thesis will be straightforward. It is comprised of five
main sections (excluding the Introduction and Conclusion): Chapter I: Literature Review, Chapter II: Methodology, Chapter III: Musical Analysis, Chapter IV: Discourse analysis. The first chapter will cover all of the relevant concepts from the academic literature on persona and will function as the theoretical framework for the analysis of chapters III and IV. It starts by looking into the various models presented in the literature on persona, before presenting my own contribution to the study of instrumental rock. It also touches on other key issues in the study of instrumental rock personae such as vocality, parallels with cinematographic techniques, and the contestation of unity. The methodological chapter will explore the means used to analyse both the music and the discourse of each guitar player. The musical analyses of Chapter III focus on each guitar player’s repertoire and approach it through the lens of notions covered in Chapter I. The discourse analysis chapter will tackle some of the notions addressed in the previous chapters to see how each guitar player thinks about persona and expressivity. Finally, the conclusion draws all of these threads to a close and presents future applications for the model and concepts presented throughout, as well as its limitations. The thesis also includes a detailed glossary of all relevant terminology of existing scholarship and of the new terminology devised for the analysis, so that readers have a quick reference list for terms essential for understating each macro and micro analysis. Along with the expected references from academic journals and books, the reference list also includes links to non-academic or journalistic writings (‘Webography’), interviews (grouped by artist), a discography of all the music documented throughout as well as a list of films consulted for various sections of the thesis (‘Filmography’). The following chapters show how the persona could be used to analyse instrumental rock expression, what questions it answers, and what questions it does not answer.
A question of unity

Expressivity and persona are fused in pop music into the star, an entity that has been a mainstay in both public and academic discourses. We seem to be unusually preoccupied with “the publicization (sic) of the self” (Marshall 2014, 154), making the “continuous interplay between the self” and a wider audience more and more prominent (163). This need in society creates interesting expectations for audiences, and, as Dyer and McDonald (1998, 9) ask, the question then becomes whether stars – or personae – are a phenomenon of production or of consumption. The answer is probably both, depending on the product. As I mentioned in the introduction, my focus will be on the former: how is a musical persona constructed by the producers of the music? Nonetheless, I believe that the other side of the coin needs to be briefly addressed.

Most studies on stars focus on film stars, which is somewhat of an advantage to my research, as the models I propose for analysing musical personae draw heavily on cinematographic techniques, as I shall develop below. However, I focus momentarily on the “non-filmic texts of promotion, publicity and criticism” (Sharot 2010, 73). Harries (2009, 14) argues that factors as diverse as on-screen performances, marketing performances, or interviews come together to construct the star persona, mirroring Dyer and McDonald’s (1998, 1) comment that the signification of the star also includes anecdotes about said star, adverts, gossip, essential addons of the film itself. While a thorough analysis of the complete persona of any of the guitarists I analyse must consider all the behind the scenes, “extra-textual elements of celebrity” (Marshall 2014, 166), this is too great of a task for the present study.

It is interesting to observe how certain film personae transcend any one role (typecasting notwithstanding) in the same way as a prominent musical persona transcends single pieces or albums. The advent of recording, both audio and video, created a persona afterlife that is quite literally eternal. Nowadays, more so than in any other period of history, the persona of an artist can live on long after the death of the real person. Especially in this age of social media as “an emergent site for star construction” (Lau 2016, 233), stars in the post-Facebook era acquire a multi platform, trans-medium dimension. They appear in their music, their performance videos, their interviews, their social media outings, and every possible other media outlet. What is
interesting here is the way fans and critics are now more and more in control of interpreting and ‘marketing’ a song, album, or film through vlogs, blogs, podcasts etc., taking the power away from the industry (record labels, marketing execs, or journalists) (Lau 2016). Of course, the old guard still poses some degree of control over how an artist is perceived, but the power has waned considerably in the past ten years or so. Regardless of who holds the power, it is important to be aware of the “non-static discourse of our contemporary online era” (Lau 2016, 233) and its impact on personae construction. The construction of the persona is an ongoing process (Hart and Woldemariam 2008, 183), and it is a process, it is engineered. As Jung (1999, 158) observed, essentially, “the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be”. Dyer and McDonald (1998, 1) also note that from a sociological point of view, the stars are dependent on the texts that make them. Outside of these texts they are real people, but even though this fact is important to “how they signify”, “we never know them directly as real people”, only “their signification” (Dyer and McDonald 1998, 2).

Particularly in music, regardless of how constructed a persona is, the listener will tend to experience the situation described in the lyrics through the eyes of the persona, as if the star is expressing his/her real feelings and presenting real situations. As Goffman (1956, 46) observed, the star must usually maintain the illusion of authenticity, and this is understandable, at least from an aesthetic and especially from an economic point of view. Audiences trick themselves into maintaining this status quo. The reasons for this fall outside the scope of this project, but one by-products of this self-deception is the fact that the persona is not only perceived as being authentic, but also unitary.

Surprisingly, persona studies have tended to see the musical persona as unitary, following the typical audience perspective. For instance, both Frith (1996) and Auslander (2009) see the star personality/performance persona as the most important out of the three levels (real person, star personality, and song personality), because, as they argue, in listening to popular music we tend to objectify the artist. Even in the case of classical music, Cone (1974) warned that while the persona that the singer adopts is never identical with the actual singer, listeners might still feel inclined to equate the two. Frith (1996) argues that when an artist presents personal, deep feelings in a song, the listener fits those feelings into his or her own experiences. This also happens when singers present narratives, as the listener will also be prone to attach the plot of the song to their own experiences. Even more so, Auslander (2009) argues that the lyrics of a song
can be perceived as being the direct experience of the performer, and in such cases, whatever narratives or emotions portrayed in the lyrics will be constructed around the persona.

The main reason why Cone’s (1974) model is problematic is that it postulates a hegemonic persona that covertly controls everything. However, Cone then revisited his original ideas in a later essay (1992) and suggested a different (but even more extreme) avenue for personae deconstruction. His new model argues for a protagonist who is permanently aware that he/she is singing, with the implication that the protagonist is the composer of the music (including the accompaniment). Since what we now call classical music has tended to be homophonic, the underlying harmony and accompaniment that we hear is what the composer-protagonist hears with his inner ear when composing. The three elements of his original model (vocal persona, instrumental persona, and composer persona) are thus united into one; they are one with the composer. What we hear is the direct expression of the composer. This view has permeated popular music scholarship, although in a less explicit manner. The notion of unity has been extremely prevalent in discussions on classical music, and it seems to have infused popular music discourse as well.

In popular music, this unified persona, argues Gelbart (2003), has been usually understood as revolving around the lead singer. In his work on the music of The Kinks, he suggests that even though the friction between the actual composer and the persona of the lyrics can be so great as to create problems for listeners who wish to identify with the singer and the persona/protagonist that they project, listeners will still tend to identify a single unified perspective. In the context of music with lyrics, Cone (1974), Laing (1985), Frith (1996), and Gelbart (2003) all suggest that the voice becomes “the guarantor of the coherent subject” (Frith 1996, 210), and that it “offers the pleasure of identification with a unified position” (Laing 1985, 67). Moreover, both Gelbart (2003) and Frith (1996) seem to suggest that listeners seek a unified persona even when the music might suggest otherwise. Gelbart (2003, 211-212) concludes that whatever does not fit gets “adjusted against the larger mythology of the star, rather than vice versa”. Nonetheless, he argues that rock is the ideal medium for the contestation of the monolithic persona, due to its “supposed counter-cultural force and embodiment of alienation” (Gelbart 2003, 204). In this context, it is rather odd that audience reception is bound to the assumption of that such unified personae exist. Are we dealing with a single composer persona? Even though tempting, I argue that listeners should not fall into this trap.
Although I do agree that one of the main pleasures of popular music comes from consuming the personae these stars project, I disagree with the premise that these personalities remain consistent throughout a song, a performance, or an entire career. Frith argues that “the most important ‘permanent’ element of pop music culture is not the event [which, for him, represents a performance, a recording etc.] but the star” (Frith 1996, 210). It seems, indeed, strange to suggest that recordings – arguably the only truly permanent feature of popular music – are merely events which are surpassed in permanence by the stars and their image. As Moore (2012) notes, if we follow the whole output of a band or artist, then our sense of musical persona “will have a historical dimension” (Moore 2012, 212). Stars can change, and I think we need not go further than Cat Stevens, Christina Aguilera, Miley Cyrus, Michael Jackson, John Lennon, or Alex Turner to acknowledge this.

Yet, both onstage an in the recording studio, the real person makes choices about the sounds they make. The decision-making process reveals much about their persona, and is presumably coherent across different musicmaking situations. Certain trends might influence an artist to such a degree that their overall persona changes drastically throughout their career, even though we know it is the same person at the helm (David Bowie being an obvious example). A person (unity) can certainly have a changing persona: in everyday life, we are used to treating people who age, change partners (and even sexual identity), become parents, etc. as the same person. Growing older is an interesting factor in music, as the voice changes with age (especially the singing voice). While certain timbral characteristics are maintained, the overall sound is slightly altered. An instance of this is Peter Gabriel’s collaboration with OneRepublic on the track ‘A.I.’ (2016). His voice is indeed recognizable (and even some musical sections would sound oddly familiar to a long-time Gabriel fan), but different enough from his years in Genesis to question the notion of a unitary Peter Gabriel persona. Samples (2018, 120) also takes this into account, noting how Tom Waits’ characteristic vocal distortion has created an extreme distinctiveness, “a timbral characteristic of his branded persona”, regardless of the “significant vocal changes and timbral variations”. Finally, stars can change but their ability to change then becomes a (stable) part of their persona, with David Bowie being the obvious example. This apparent paradox of “a changing voice [sound, persona etc.] that retains recognizability” is “an essential sonic marker” of what Samples dubs the “brand persona” (Samples 2018, 120).
As I mentioned in the introduction, my primary concern is with sound, with what comes out of a listener’s speakers. In terms of recording practices, Moore (2012) argues that the persona-proper is the sonic studio construct, and not the star personality. It is an illusion because we never hear, say, Michael Jackson’s actual voice when listening to one of his songs, for instance. The actual sound that comes out of his mouth gets captured by a microphone and is sent through at least a preamp before being recorded (notwithstanding the fact that often the signal gets modified by adjusting the EQ and compression levels and adding reverb and delay onto the vocal track). Because of the way recording works, at least two people are traditionally involved in capturing a sound: artist and engineer. Moreover, since the artist will often be less knowledgeable in the realm of recording and mixing, the engineer will imprint his own persona onto a recording, due to certain habits regarding processes and effects used. Consequently, the musical persona is *constructed* not only at the metaphorical level (at the intersection of two artistic decision-makers), but also at the level of the vocal track itself. While early recording practices were based on capturing a live take in its entirety, the practice quickly changed so that a vocal track, for instance, was the result of multiple takes, even recording one line of verse at a time, until everything was deemed acceptable.

Another factor that might help sustain the unity of the persona is the fact that most of the songwriting and recording processes happen behind closed doors – the public does not have access to the ‘magic’ of the studio or the rehearsal room. Moreover, the roles of engineers and producers also acquire magical proprieties, even though “their contribution to [a] compositional project is profound and indelible” (Zak 2001, xiv). Nonetheless, album booklets usually contain pages upon pages of information on where an album was recorded and by/with whom. The studio itself is usually not the property of the band, and even if it were, the actual gear that the artists use is not created and developed by them, but by specialised companies comprising of an incredible array of engineers, developers, and workers. An impressive number of people are responsible for a finished record (producers, engineers), video or live show (from directors to cameramen and lighting designers), so there obviously cannot be a single, supervising persona that coordinates everything from the shadows.

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8 While there are performer-engineers, at least part of the process (usually mastering) is left to other individuals.
9 For example, the artists (unless they engineer and produce their own music) do not know what the final mix of a track/album will sound like. This, obviously, also raises questions regarding the notion of authorship.
Considering a song/track (let alone a larger work such as a symphony) unified is problematic. As Moore (2012, 285-286) has suggested, in light of postmodern thought, the idea of a unified subjectivity of the persona cannot be maintained. While the voice might provide an element of stability and the illusion of unity, other layers (particularly the protagonist) do not obey the same rules. One can encounter multiple instrumental personae created by each instrument, or multiple protagonists created by the same instrument. This fractured identity seems to be a key feature of this music, and I shall discuss its ramifications more in depth throughout this dissertation. Interestingly, the literature seems to dislike the idea, even though we understand that a person can be conflicted in real life, which could result in multiple different instances of the same personality, so to speak. Although several personae/protagonists (as opposed to a unified one) might also be experienced in the music, Karl and Robinson (1995) maintain that “the formal coherence of the music often consists precisely in its embodying a coherent unfolding of psychological states” (Karl and Robinson 1995, 405), leading Cochrane to conclude that the only time when it is desirable to opt for the unified persona is when the music is (formally) unified to begin with (Cochrane 2010, 268).

Robinson (2005) suggests that the way to explain apparent formal anomalies is to consider them as stemming from a persona in the music, from their psychological dramas. She also affirms that while composers might have just written anomalous and incoherent works, if one considers “what is known about the author and what the author probably intended”, then those anomalies might have real significance, making the works coherent and unified (Robinson 2005, 331). She concludes that a composer’s “compositional practices, beliefs, and attitudes (…) should account for as much of the piece as possible in a consistent way” (Robinson 2005, 333). Of course, we have Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954) to remind us of the intentional fallacy and, as Moore (2012) argues, this gives us the power to contest even the intentions (as far as we know them, of course) of the composers themselves. The ‘death of the author’ (Barthes and Heath 2009) puts interpretation in the ears of the listener.

In musicological circles, the notion of unity has been heavily problematized over the years. Morgan (2003, 21-22), for instance, sees unity as the coexistence of distinct elements that, however differentiated, work together to produce a coherent goal. However, in classical musicology, unity is almost ubiquitously equated with organicism, which maintains that the artwork grows chronologically in a way that resembles a natural organism. Heinrich Schenker
was particularly fond of this approach to unity, believing that “organic coherence” (i.e. unity) is “inherent in the works of the great masters” (Schenker et al 1979, xxi). Similarity (between sections or motifs) is a key issue here, but scholars such as Kramer (2004, 362; 366-368) argue against a notion of musical analysis that privileges similarity over difference, as similarity and dissimilarity obviously coexist, with dissimilarity having the possibility of being powerful and meaningful. There seems to be a distinction between a single-theme notion of unity and a striking thematic contrast notion of unity, with the latter maintaining an appropriate proportion of unity and diversity within a work, a middle-ground between boredom and chaos (Schwartz 2001, 57-58). However, since this “synthetic unity embracing contrast and diversity” (Parsons 1999, 134) must not exclude “the logic of pursuing unexpected impulses” (Dubiel 2004, 375), I cannot help but feel that by explaining everything, the term explains nothing of real value to analysis.

I shall use a musical example to paint a clearer picture of the problem of unity. As I previously mentioned, the protagonist in particular – the character who has no identity outside of a song – does not obey the rules of unity. Michael Jackson’s ‘Earth Song’ (1995) offers an excellent case of such destabilizing contradictions. If one takes Jackson’s star personality as the focal point of such deconstruction, the result will most likely be that the protagonist is unitary, as we know it is him who is doing all the singing. However, if Moore’s sonic illusion is taken as central - and this is my position on the matter - the situation is dramatically changed. Formally, besides the vocalised choruses, the song features two main distinct sections, as well as a bridge. The verses (starting at 1:01) (“What about sunrise?” and, further on, “What have we done to the World?”) feature a fragile protagonist who tries to come to terms with the damage that humanity has done to the planet, not only through exploitation of the environment (mainly driven by capitalist greed) but also through warfare. The protagonist’s voice is constructed at the intersection of speaking, crying, and whispering, with the constant gasps for air suggesting that he is personally affected by these issues. Moreover, the frailness of the protagonist is also suggested by the highest notes at the end of the section, which are sung with a light falsetto tone. It is obvious that the protagonist cannot improve the planet’s dire situation in any way.

The second section (“Hey, what about yesterday?”, starting at 4:15) features a completely different vocal delivery. The light, falsetto voice is now replaced by a rich, full chest tone. The raspiness of the voice is also in direct contrast with the pristine quality of the vocals of the verses. Even though the protagonist is talking about the same issues, this time it feels as if change is
possible, for several reasons. Firstly, the accompanying texture has changed dramatically, from the airy synth-led verses to the distorted power-chord led second section (a type of chord that Walser (1993) argues is a symbol of power). Secondly, throughout this section, a call-and-response gospel choir reinforces the message of the lead voice. The power of the masses makes the section seem more imposing, as if the vocal protagonist is a priest who talks to his congregation and urges for change. Thirdly, the key changes from G# minor to Bb minor, which suggests that together we can rise and stop the damage from going any further.

In this context, the protagonist cannot easily be perceived as being unitary. Since the vocal delivery in the verses is so different from the latter section (not to mention the sharp textural change in the underlying parts), ‘Earth Song’ feels more like a duet than anything else. The protagonist shift happens in what can be dubbed the bridge of the song (“I used to dream”). It is quite interesting that the lyrics in this section switch from first person singular (first time used in the song) to first person plural (“I used to dream/I used to glance beyond the stars/But now I don’t know where we are), with the second persona coming in (progressively) on “although I know we’ve drifted far” (3:17). I have always found this transformation intriguing, as it is quite easy to imagine that two singers sat in the recording booth, the first one leaving the rest of the song to the other.10

While not on the persona per se, Heile’s (2015) discussion on copyright and the music of Duke Ellington provides an interesting backdrop not only for most of the issues I will address in the musical analysis section, but also for the contestation of unity. Copyright law privileges melody and represents “almost entirely the locus of the economic worth of a song” (Melody n.d.). Of course, some artists’ harmonic palette is as distinctive as their melodic ideas, which is the case particularly for Steve Vai. Moreover, what is especially interesting about copyright law is that it does not consider elements that occur in live performances (Heile 2015; Auslander 2008). Following Frith and Marshall (2013), and Heile (2015), US copyright law (which seems to be the benchmark for music copyright) does not recognize groups but only individual artists. While, for instance, Joe Satriani might be the only person credited for the composition of a track, it is difficult to judge what exactly it was that he created. What percentage of what the listeners hear is the product of Joe Satriani alone? As Heile (2015, 22) suggests, there should be “a subtle

10 Of course, it could be argued that the music video for the song shows a single singing character with two completely different attitudes.
understanding of the inextricable relation between individual authorship and collective or distributed creativity” (Heile 2015, 25). Particularly in the case of Satriani and Govan, while they do not compose every hit and nuance of the record, they are “largely responsible for creating the conditions under which it could be created” (Heile 2015, 25). Satriani’s name, for instance, can be seen “more as a brand name than as an authorial signature” (Heile 2015, 25). Samples (2018) also invokes this idea of a brand persona, observing that listeners will tend to attribute variables in sound, even if these differences are considerable (changing voice with age, style change etc.), to the artist who owns the brand. Finally, and probably most importantly for this thesis, from a legal standpoint it seems that, at least according to the New York courts, there is no ‘grain of the instrument’ that can be thought of as ‘property’. For an instrumental timbre to become legally protectable (the same way as a vocal timbre is), it must be “must be both distinctive and widely known” (Samples 2018, 132). While an instrumental sound can most certainly meet these two criteria, a legal precedent has yet to be set.

Overall, particularly in today’s world, where everything seems to be a reference to a reference, the persona can not only oscillate “between instances of difference and similarity” (Harries 2009, 19), but it can also be a collective persona. The unitary character of such a construct cannot be easily maintained. A fractured persona is a far more lucrative way of approaching the persona, not only in terms of a historical dimension of an artist’s output, but also in terms of how music is composed, recorded, and performed in today’s industry. There are some important implications of such a paradigm shift, and I shall explore them later. I move now to the models of persona deconstruction that have been proposed in the literature, their effects on instrumental music, and what I propose to be a more beneficial way of interacting with the personae present in instrumental rock music, all with the aim of making a good argument for why addressing the notion of expressivity through the lens of the persona is useful.

**Models for instrumental personae**

There are at least two reasons for why I chose to approach instrumental rock through the lens of the persona. Firstly, academics have discussed this idea in regards not only to classical music, but to popular music with vocals as well (Cone 1974, 1992; Tagg 1979; 1999, Newcomb 1984, Clarke 2005, Robinson 2005, Cochrane 2010, Moore 2012, and the list can go on). All of
them suggest that listeners tend to identify person-like qualities in the music that they listen to, with empirical work carried out in the field of music perception seemingly supporting this view (Watt and Ash 1998, 49). Secondly, the instrumental rock persona has not been studied in the context of popular music, nor has expressivity been explored through the prism of the persona in instrumental rock. Of course, not every research gap needs filling, but I believe that valuable insights on expressivity can be gained through this approach. As scholars have showed (particularly Auslander 2009, Cochrane 2010, and Moore 2012), analysing popular music personae in songs with lyrics opens an entirely new avenue for exploring how the singer expresses the emotions in the lyrics and how the instrumentation can support or contradict the sentiments of the vocal persona. The potential for persona analysis on instrumental music is immense, given the lack of a vocal strand, and can offer fascinating new insights into the expressive power of instruments.

The persona has been a mainstay in academic writing for the past forty years, with scholars analysing its presence in both classical and popular musics. The thesis builds upon existing models to offer a potential alternative when analysing instrumental rock. The literature has essentially broken down the persona into either a musical (score) persona (deconstructing features of the music) or a star persona (deconstructing features of the star-personality). Edward Cone (1974), who, to my knowledge, was the first to consider the notion of musical persona, develops a threefold model of a score-based persona: vocal, instrumental, and composer persona. Particularly in his 1992 revision of this model, he is in a constant search for a composer persona, one which supervises every little detail of the music.\(^{11}\) However, this search for a composer’s voice is complicated by various layers that the persona can acquire. In his instrumental model the persona becomes a virtual persona, which can be divided into virtual protagonist (the complete musical persona), virtual orchestral persona (a composite between the personae of the instruments), unitary virtual agent (an instrument which assumes the leading position), permanent (unitary) agent (if the unitary virtual agent maintains its position throughout a composition), a temporary (unitary) agent (which seems to be the same as the unitary virtual agent), implicit virtual agent (‘dialogue’ between virtual agents) and, finally, simulated virtual agent (melodies jumping from one instrument to another; Klangfarbenmelodie). To make things

\(^{11}\) One of the main reasons his model is slightly problematic when applied (not only) to popular music, a weakness also exposed by Gelbart (2003), is that it postulates a hegemonic persona in the guise of the composer.
even more vague, a wordless vocal persona (a vocalised line) is also called a virtual agent. While I can see why there would be a need for that many personae in a symphony, the model is too complex to be used in a productive way in the context of popular music.

The persona is arguably more difficult a concept to tackle in classical music, given the complex relationship between composer, conductor, and performer. Classical music scholarship on the persona rarely focuses on the performer and virtually never on the conductor. The composer is permanently in the spotlight. While classical music pieces do need all three entities to bring life to the music (at least to a complex long-form piece such as a symphony), developments in technology have the potential of rendering the conductor obsolete. The main reason why the conducting job was initially created was to keep time, to make sure the orchestra members were in sync with one another (of course, conductors have their rightful place in front of the orchestra). The pianist and composer Havasi, for instance, performs his music with a full orchestra and choir, with all the musicians having click tracks play through individual headphones. This is a widespread practice nowadays, particularly in popular music, as it permits utilizing pre-recorded tracks in a live performance, without another human musician being responsible for producing those sounds. As far as I am aware of, this has yet to be attempted on a large scale in a classical music setting, but the idea is by no means far fetched. Recent developments in sampling technology threaten even the performer, as the process of synthesizing acoustic and electric instruments is becoming easier and more reliable. Even the human composer can become obsolete, with computers being able to create new music from scratch for years.

Regardless of the potential of the persona dissolving into a meaningless concept in classical music, the relationship between composer, conductor, and performer is complex and particularly interesting from the perspective of the persona. What are we interacting with during the performance of a Beethoven symphony? It cannot be only the persona of the composer, as he left it in the score, in the potentiality for the music to become audible. It cannot be in the baton of the conductor, as he/she did not write the music, nor can it be in the hands of the instrumentalists and throats of the singers, as they themselves are infinitely interchangeable without the music sounding any different. The issue is too complex to have a singular, static solution. What classical music highlights is that the complex relationships between all the people involved in creating the music generate a similarly complex model of persona analysis. Popular music is
somewhat easier to tackle, even if just for the fewer people involved in its production. Classical music personae fall outside the scope of this dissertation, but they do inform the following discussion, be it even indirectly, as they point to an open-ended, non-static model to the analysis of the persona, a conclusion which will prove useful in analysing the music per se, as I will do in the second part of this dissertation.

Clarke (2005) attempts to bridge the gap between classical and popular persona analysis by focusing on pieces from both worlds in his discussion of ‘subject-position’. He focuses on a sort of postmodern pastiche in which the discrepancies in Frank Zappa’s ‘Dog Breath’ (1969) or Stravinsky’s ‘Apollon Musagète’ ballet are to be understood as ruptures in the personae. This “slippery ambivalence between direct engagement and distanced parody” (Clarke 2005, 117) is also mirrored by Parakilas (2012), who argues that we might sense the disruptions in the music, the unforeseen elements, as interventions of different personae who are imagining the music and interrupting the illusion of a unified work (a unity presumably created by the composer’s persona). I shall return to the notion of subject position in the sub-chapter on cinematographic techniques and too the issue of unity at the end of this chapter.

In popular music (and at the other end of the spectrum in the literature) dwells the star persona, where the music assumes secondary position, with the actual performer, or star, being in the limelight. Here, Frith’s (1996) model seems to be normative and represents the starting point for most other scholars’ attempts at defining the notion (Auslander 2009 or Moore 2012). For Frith, the essential component is stardom. He argues that popular music artists are “the site of desire-as a body, and as a person” and they enact song protagonists while also giving (limited) information on the star and on the “real material being”, the “physical body producing a physical sound” (Frith 1996, 212). This is a view that Auslander (2009) also espouses. Frith proposes a threefold model of musical persona, consisting of the real person, the star personality (what we interact with when an artist is performing or giving an interview) and the song personality (what we interact with when listening to a song), all of which exist at the same time during a performance.

Moore (2012) attempts to bridge the gap between the two ends of the spectrum by focusing more on the music than on the musician (but still considering both). He conflates Frith’s first two levels, while further subdividing the third. Thus, his model proposes a performer, persona and protagonist. The first one is a combination between the real human being, one with a discernible
biography, and the role of the performer. Recalling my previous distinction, this represents the star persona category. For his second level, Moore draws on Cumming’s (2000, 21f.) work, and envisions the persona as the illusion of “musical ‘body’ and identity” which is created in the studio by altering the parameters of the voice (dynamics, EQ, reverberation and so on), as opposed to the historical human being or the star persona of Frith and Auslander. Since the “characteristics of sounds are the aural ‘marks’ of bodily actions”, it is this persona listeners interact most with (Cumming 2000, 21f.). Here, the persona is not score-based anymore, but recording-based. This second layer is the most relevant to my analysis, as I believe it to be the most overlooked aspect of any analyses on personae, even though it seems the most relevant, particularly in analysing instrumental rock. Moore’s final layer is represented by the protagonist, a character that has no identity outside of a specific song. This final one might be dubbed a literary persona, since it is dependent solely on the lyrics. For Moore, there can be no protagonist without a lyric, and while the lack of lyrics can pose a problem, I believe that a solution to the conundrum is found by replacing the emphasis on lyrics with an emphasis on texture and timbre. This change in focus is not random, as there are numerous fan forum (Reddit 2013), internet comments (Daemonic Nimrod 2011), and artist interviews (Numan and Frost 2012) that suggest that listeners do sometimes take texture as central.12 Moore (2012, 29) himself argues that the feel of a particular track is the “first aspect to attract (or repel) a listener” because “it is the sound-world set up by a track that frequently forms the point of entry for a listener, that first triggers a sense of recognition” (20). The repercussions of this shift will also be discussed at length later on in this chapter.

The biggest difficulty in addressing the instrumental persona seems to be accounting for the features which are innate in the vocal persona but are harder to pin down in an instrumental setting. Consequently, the most logical step in this direction would be to find a link between the instrumental persona and the vocal persona. A fruitful avenue might consider the relationship between a vocal protagonist and an instrument that can be personified. In Iron Maiden’s ‘Revelations’ (1983), for example, the line “The Eyes of the Nile are opening - you’ll see” is followed by short phrases which revolve around an A power-chord (3:51). The staccato feel is broken when the vocal persona yells “Go!”, after which the guitar rhythm switches to a straight

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12 I opted for writings that people have chosen to make, rather than in response to some sort of questionnaire where the question is inevitably loaded.
eight-note pattern (4:12). Thus, the exclamation might address the ‘you’ of the lyrics, but it could also be interpreted as a direct order given to the guitar-persona, which proceeds to play a passage that represents movement. Another interesting example is Metallica’s ‘Fade to Black’ (1984), where the lyrics “No one but me/Can save myself/But it’s too late” are continued by a descending anapaest instrumental line which ends the phrase, the result of which resembles a Klangfarbenmelodie (4:10). The instrumental line could potentially represent the continuation of the vocal line, thus creating a complex vocal-instrumental persona (although there would still be two different protagonists).

Other songs go a step beyond and create instances where vocal and instrumental lines become separate entities in their own right. In Genesis’ ‘Dodo/Lurker’ (1981) the vocal persona interacts with the instrumental persona in a sort of dialogue. The lines “Meanwhile lurking by a stone in the mud/Two eyes looked to see what I was/And then something spoke/And this is what it said to me” are continued by a synth melody, which could symbolize what was said by that ‘something’ (5:09). In this case, the instrumental line takes on a life of its own, and becomes a fully-fledged protagonist, having the same weight in the music as the vocal protagonist. An even more interesting situation is when the vocal line is taken by the accompaniment, either in a call-and-response fashion or as a reiteration of the vocal line. A rather brilliant example of both is Joe Satriani’s ‘Crowd Chant’ (2006), where the roles are reversed: as opposed to the guitar repeating the vocal line, it provides the subject that is repeated by the (vocalised) crowd for the entire track. Which of the two lines is the lead line? Although I can see arguments both ways, there is no definitive position to take, and one should not assume that the guitar is the central persona merely because it is the first one we hear, nor should one assume that the vocal line is central simply because of the presence of the vocal strand. Here, it seems, both are on the same level of pertinence.

While conceiving an instrumental persona seems feasible, scholars have presented convincing arguments that point towards a different conclusion. Moore (2012) presents a series of elements that help define the persona in vocal music, some of which seem to undermine the notion of a persona in instrumental music. The discussion revolves around three key issues: proxemics, the individual-environment model, and the realistic/fictional characteristics of the protagonist and its involvement in the track (if it is distant or involved). I generally find Moore’s model extremely useful in addressing vocal personae, and I choose to base my theoretical
framework on his model, as it not only covers many parameters of vocal music, but these parameters can easily be converted into instrumental equivalents. His model is the most comprehensive in popular music, but it is not so complex as to render it as unwieldy as Cone’s (1974), for instance.

Some of the above elements can easily find analogies in instrumental music. By proxemics, Moore (2012) refers to the distances between individuals during an interaction. Although we cannot find a musical equivalent to this distance, modifications of proxemics could still address “recorded presences” (Moore 2012, 186). Proxemic distances can be intimate, private, public, or social and are made apparent in music by mixing techniques. These refer not only to the distance between the listener and the persona (because of issues of perceived loudness and degree of reverberation), but also to the “degree of congruence” between the melody and the harmony, what Moore describes as “persona” and “personic environment” (Moore 2012, 186). However, I think that intimate, private, public, and social alone do not do justice to the entire gamut of possible volume level and congruence situations that can be encountered in instrumental rock. Moore’s ‘Articulation of persona’ heading (p. 187) needs to be addressed, as it only accounts for ‘close range whispers’ in vocal music in the intimate zone. The instrumental equivalent of this would be a guitar sound that is achieved by either playing on a clean channel, or by turning the guitar volume knob down on a distorted channel until a mellower, whisper-like tone is achieved. However, a loud and aggressive sound could be the articulation of a persona in the intimate zone. One also has the possibility of screaming at the top of his/her lungs right in front of another person. While it is far more likely to whisper or use a softer tone when talking to someone in close quarters, one must not exclude the other possibility. Consequently, I think that the degree of reverberation is at least, if not more, important than the general volume/degree of congruence of the protagonist, as reverb is usually the main marker for space in recordings. In addition, although this does not happen often, it is at least conceivable that a whisper/clean, mellow guitar line can be on top of a dense environment. It is also conceivable for the standard sound-box placement to be modified to such an extent that the protagonists and its environment seemingly occupy two distinct planes. In such a case, there can be two different proxemic zones operating at the same time.
We can obviously imagine an instrumental line functioning according to proxemic principles, in the sense that a track might start off with a quiet, unaccompanied, restrained melody and end up with a full band forte and over the top musical material, as in Steve Vai’s ‘Hand on Heart’ (1996), for instance. The track starts off with a guitar monody (distorted, but with the volume knob turned down low to create a slightly more overdriven sound, somewhere between clean and distorted), with no additional effects added to it, except for light stereo delay (which is a mainstay of most guitar players’ sound). Coupling this with the fact that the melody is played using the bridge pickup of the guitar (which creates a very mellow, singing tone) produces a somewhat reserved utterance that could easily be understood as being an intimate interaction between the listener and the persona of the melody. (The 3:42 reiteration of the first theme is an even better example of this.) An acoustic guitar and very sparse drums are then added to the mix the first time the melody is repeated, bringing the track in its private stage (0:26). The protagonist is somewhat less direct in its utterance, and leaves space for the other

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13 All of the figures, illustrations, and tables in this thesis are my own.
14 The rectangle represents the sound-box, the outer circle represents the listener, the inner circle represents the protagonist, and the squares represent the environment.
instruments, but is still at the fore of the mix. At 2:38, the solo section, the texture changes again. The bass (which had entered on one of the main melody reiterations) is now prominent, with the accompanying guitars playing distorted power-chords and the melody performing a somewhat improvisatory line. This could be the public stage, one that prepares the social one in which the melody gets sent back in the mix, with lush synth chords being foregrounded. The guitar melody also features some incredibly fast lines that will eventually take the track back to a recapitulation that traverses - depending on how one interprets it - all the proxemic zones. Particularly in this latter section, the analogy to a film shot which moves out from a central focus to bring in more and more context can easily be made.

Moore’s second essential feature is a development of Tagg’s (1979) model of the individual-environment relationship, which he uses to expose the problematic nature of the melody-accompaniment dualism (or, in rock music, the lead-rhythm dualism). While it is in no way universal, this duality is probably the most important feature of post-Renaissance Western music, being shared by both classical composers and heavy rock bands (Tagg 1979). A common feature of this relationship is its hierarchical nature. Both Cone (1974) and Tagg (1979) observe that the accompaniment has always been qualified as being subordinate to the melody. Even the term ‘accompaniment’ suggests a hierarchy in which the melody assumes a lead position and is coloured by whatever is going on in the background. However, as Fuller (2001) argues in the case of a Bach fugue, although the other voices ‘accompany’ the subject, in theory all voices are equal, and in some instances (when the subject is in the inner voices), the countersubject might assume central position for a certain period. The other voices literally go with the subject rather than supporting it. The current meaning of the term does indeed imply some sort of subservience, but this was not originally the case (Fuller 2001), and it seems that the meaning still suggests an even footing in German (Duden Dictionary 2015), where the term (‘Begleitung’) came from (Oxford Music Online 2001). Moreover, if we think about this relationship as complementary, we can conceive “an ecologically more sound relationship”, with the melody considered as part of the environment, because in day-to-day life we affect the environment and it affects us; we are always part of the environment (Moore 2012, 203). The vocal persona is prioritised, however, in our perception because it is human (voice), while the environment is not (instruments). Both are, nonetheless, natural, so even though we might focus on the voice, it is highly unlikely that any
rock fan, even on the topic of groups with vocalists, would talk about, for instance, Freddy Mercury accompanied by Queen.

In this individual-environment model, the latter can occupy one of five positions: (1) inert (does not contribute to the meaning of the song; it only provides “a stable metrical and harmonic backdrop”, sometimes doing nothing more - Moore 2012, 191); (2) quiescent (setting up attitudinal expectations for the listener, such as genre and style expectations); (3) active (supports the position of the persona, the meaning of the lyrics); (4) interventionist (the accompaniment provides more information than is presented in the lyrics, amplifying the meaning of the song); (5) oppositional (giving off musical cues that are in contradiction with the lyrics; an oppositional stance against the persona). But can the environment ‘enlighten’ us if both it and the lead lines are wordless? I would argue that it can, although some degree of imagination and negotiation is needed.

Analogies with the instances described by Moore could be found in instrumental rock if texture is taken as central. As I showed in the introduction, various fan postings prove that listeners do sometimes take texture and timbre as central. In a discussion on death metal, Wallmark (2018, 66) argues that “central to the genre’s identity (...) are its timbral qualities” (mainly the extremely distorted electric guitar and vocal sounds) that signal the “drastic, experiential awareness of the material limits it embodies: distorted, overloaded guitar and vocal sounds are the audible manifestations of imminent bodily or mechanical breakdown”. Moreover, he gives volume, distortion, detuning, and the mid scoop EQ as key elements in forming the guitar sound of death metal. Studies (Seol et al 2011, for instance) seem to suggest that the representation of timbre takes up a considerable amount of computing power of the auditory system, even though it is quite clear that less astute listeners will not be able to hear timbre “as an ongoing, structurally and affectively salient musical parameter” (Fales 2018, 24), at least not as clearly as pitch, loudness, or duration (Hailstone et al 2009).

Moore’s (2012) environment breakdown needs to be re-evaluated to some extent to fully work in the context of instrumental music, and I will opt for a parallel with film, departing from his original analogy with painting (taken from Tagg 1979). Since static pictures do not exhibit the temporal strand that is a key feature of music, it is not the best possible analogy, A ‘moving picture’ (to borrow a double-entendre from the progressive rock group Rush), on the other hand, offers the possibility of experiencing images in time, in the same manner as a listener perceives
music: musical images in time. Consequently, the terminology I adopt will reflect this choice of ‘cross-domain-mapping’ (Zbikowski 2002).

In film, the cinematographic gestures affect the way a shot is perceived by the viewer. Clarke’s notion of subject-position is useful here. He argues that in a film, even though every viewer comes out of the movie experience with a unique perspective, the number of potential understandings of the film is not infinite (Clarke 2005, 92-93). This potentially infinite plurality is limited by the subject-position, “a limit that can be attributed to properties of the film itself’, and can be seen as “the way in which the construction of a film causes a viewer/listener to adopt a particular attitude to what she or he is witnessing” (Clarke 2005, 92-93). For instance, in Ex Machina (2015), the way Ava and Caleb are framed (low angle to high angle shifts, the reflections of Ava in the glass that separates the two characters etc.) clearly suggest particular ways of understanding their relationship throughout the film. In music, this refers to the ways in which features of the songs and tracks themselves guide the listener towards a more restrained list of potential meanings. However, the meaning itself is not of interest here but the techniques involved in creating those limitations, and how these affect the way listeners perceive the protagonist, the environment, and the relationship between them.

While in cinema this can be achieved through lighting and camera placement (Stevens 2012, 282), the main cinematographic pyrotechnic relevant to this analogy is the modification of the depth of field. Two main options are available to the filmmaker: deep focus, where every detail is visible and as clear as possible, even in the background of a shot, and shallow focus, which forces the viewer to focus on a single or few characters or objects and blurring everything else (Ablan 2003), thus “isolat[ing] a character in space” (Brown 2002, 57), as in the aftermath of the fight between Rei, Kylo Ren, and the guards in Star Wars: The Last Jedi (2017). On the other end of the spectrum, a deep field shot will portray distinct levels of the movie’s narrative in the same frame, as in one of very early scenes from Citizen Kane (1941). This means that at any given moment within a shot, both the foreground and the background are clearly visible, presenting either different facets of a single narrative, or multiple narratives simultaneously. Moreover, movement between the two types of shots is possible, resulting in a rack-focus shot.

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15 The literature on the subject position is, of course, expansive, with special reference to gender position (Mulvey’s (1975) ‘male gaze’, for instance). However, these issues fall outside the scope of my research.
16 A representative scene can be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=god-9smfGHs.
17 The specific scene can be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyIPvJvMYo.
18 The specific scene can be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbGqbRWwC_Q.
Here, the focus changes over time, as in a shot where individuals take turns in a dialogue or when the director wants the audience to pay attention to a specific object, as in the card game scene from *Casino Royale* (2006). A song/tracks’ features can create the effect of a rack-focus shot, in the sense that the mixing gestures guide the listener to focus more on the background than on the foreground (and vice versa) or to focus more on one or two musical elements, by modifying the volume, delay, reverb etc.

These features work best in tandem with Moore’s individual-environment model. However, the first two categories of Moore’s model (inert and quiescent) are better understood as one, which I dub *static environment*. I tend to conflate the two because I find it hard to imagine any metrical and harmonic backdrop (inert environment) without implications of certain genre and style conventions (quiescent environment). Moreover, neither provides actual meaning to the track and can arguably be attributed to any music. However, while providing a stable metric and harmonic setting is probably the most basic function of an accompaniment, it does not always react in this manner. Moore’s first two categories are hard to attribute to Joe Satriani’s ‘Midnight’ (1987), for example, as the environment neither sets the harmonic and rhythmic support nor does it set the stylistic and genre boundaries (see the Joe Satriani analysis). Consequently, a new category must be added to cope with this fact. I shall refer to such instances as *blurred environments*, in the sense that the environment might exhibit some elements of a standard environment, but the details are not sufficient to make out what it represents. This scenario resembles a movie scene where the camera is so focused on a character that it creates the sensation of tunnel vision, a loss of peripheral vision as in a shallow focus shot. We are aware that there is an environment, but we cannot make out what it is.

The active environment presents no stylistic or timbral dissonances. Here, nothing stands out in terms of timbres or styles, with all the parts seemingly supporting the same idea. The main melodic material maintains its central position for the entire duration of the track, or for the duration of a section of the track. A good example of this is Yngwie Malmsteen’s ‘Black Star’ (1984), where the bass guitar and kick drum ostinato that starts at 0:24 is essential to understanding what the dual lead guitars are doing. The synth plays a two-chord progression

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19 The specific scene can be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_xltw7Q4No.
20 I do not use Moore’s term (‘inert’), to avoid confusion. Drawing on analogies with film, I envision this type of environment as if a monologue or dialogue were taking place inside a room where nothing changes in the background for the duration of the scene.
made up of an E minor and a C Major chord (which support the melodies), but the constant Es in
the bass create the illusion of a static environment, even though E is part of both chords (root in
the first, third in the second).

The instrumental interventionist environment, on the other hand, works in a somewhat
different manner than in a song with lyrics. Since there are no lyrics whose meaning can be
amplified by the environment, in a strictly musical setting the interventionist factor might be an
instrumental line that breaks out of the environment and is brought to the fore. This can either
mean that a certain part switches from chords to distinct melodies, thus creating a polyphonic
texture (in conjunction with the main melody), or it can be brought higher in the mix or even
have its position within the sound-box modified (say, switching from left to centre). These lines
become more and more independent and the distinction between figure and background starts to
blur considerably. 21 Returning to my film analogy, it is as if a background character intervenes in
a dialogue between two characters that were in the foreground up until that point (as in a rack-
focus shot). A good example is Metallica’s ‘Orion’ (1986), where, at 5:40, the harmony guitars
and the bass all assume central position, leaving only the drums in the background as rhythmic
support. The resulting polyphonic texture is crucial to the section, as the interplay between the
three different melodies is far more interesting than each individual line.

Finally, the accompaniment can provide an oppositional stance against the persona. Here,
stylistic or timbral dissonances are the norm, and the differences between the protagonist and the
environment are so great that they seem to have their origin in completely different pieces of
music. It is as if an actor was interpreting a Shakespeare Macbeth monologue in front of a green
screen, but instead of images of 1000’s Scotland, images of modern-day Chile would be
projected as the background. Th musical equivalent often happens in live performances of
virtuoso guitarists, when solos become overtly technical and get detached from any stylistic
norm that a listener might expect, such as in Dream Theater’s ‘Stream of Consciousness’ (2003),
where the solo that comes in at 3:50 is extremely technical and fast (relentless sixteenth-note

21 Moore’s nuanced understanding of the interventionist element could potentially work in instrumental music as
well. If we relate to the previous structural elements of a protagonist, the timbral differences between the main
melodic material and the environment can indicate that what the melody is ‘saying’ might not be what it seems at
first sight. Again, this ultimately boils down to whether a listener is used to an artist’s tone. For instance, since Joe
Satriani’s tone is normatively distorted, a clean tone over a highly distorted and mechanical background could be
interpreted as an environment providing information over and above of what the melody is offering. Nonetheless, I
find this interpretation more suited for the distinction between fictional and realist protagonists, so I shall use the
first one as the interpretation of choice.
sextuplets) and seems constantly at odds with the tango-like harmonic-rhythmic backdrop, particularly at the section starting at 4:12. (I always imagine this section as a video mash-up of Usain Bolt running in an Argentinean ballroom – this could be a deep focus shot, as two different narratives are presented at the same time.) Here, it would be tempting to consider that the protagonist is under some sort of misapprehension, with common sense telling us that the environment describes the situation better.

I shall expand on these ideas and provide more in-depth studies of specific tracks from each of my four case studies in the analysis chapter. Cinematographic techniques can tell a great deal not only about the filmmaker and his/her visual sensibilities, but they can also be separated from the creator and applied directly to the characters or the action on screen. The way a certain character is framed, for instance, can completely change the way the audience interacts with him, or the way the characters and their environment interact with each other. The TV show Mr Robot is a prime example of how framing can let the audience know how characters feel, what their relationship with other characters is, and how each character’s persona is presented to the audience, particularly in the case of Elliot, the main protagonist. The off-kilter framing of the character highlights not only his social anxiety, but also creates a sense of isolation, uneasiness, and disorientation, which is exactly the state Elliot is in most of the time.  

This also relates to the issue addressed at the beginning of the chapter. Stevens (2012) demonstrates how the films’ narrative and mise-en-scène construct stars, focusing on Robert Redford and Barbara Streisand movies. Stevens describes a series of shots from Funny Girl (1968) where the camera movements construct both Fanny Brice’s character as well as Streisand’s persona, particularly because this was Streisand’s first film appearance. The star personality often trumps the narrative in films, and this is sometimes highlighted by cinematographic techniques as well as through the film’s plot. In his discussion on the close-up, Dyer and McDonald (1998) highlight the importance of close framing in creating stars, as the audience could now observe all the little nuances in their expressions. The same things happened with the advent of the microphone, as artists could now sing even the faintest of notes and evoke emotions that until then were lost in bigger venues. Frith (1996, 187-189) and Jungr (2002, 112) also address the issue, arguing that this aural close-up creates different layers of intimacy that

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22 A compilation of such scenes can be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW9qJmpFN0.
were impossible to project otherwise, especially in opposition to the vocal projection being there only for the voice to get heard.

The character in a film is arguably the most essential element of a screenplay. The plot is uninteresting if the protagonists are not fleshed out properly and do not have clear motivations and backstories. (Of course, there are exceptions to this, as Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk* (2017) proves). Yet, how does the notion of the protagonists present itself in instrumental music? The answer to this question brings me back to the crux of Moore’s issue with instrumental personae. He argues that the nature of the protagonist and the singing persona can be divided into three levels. The first level deals with the dichotomy between realistic and fictional protagonists. If what the singer is saying seems to come from his own experiences then we will tend to consider him or her as realistic, whereas if the singer unambiguously assumes a role, in the same way an actor does, we tend to consider him fictional. (Of course, the distinction between the two is not always clear-cut.) The second question deals with the dichotomy between realistic and fictional situations in which the protagonist can find himself/herself. A realistic situation is something that can be encountered in everyday life, while a fictional situation reflects a distant past (even a mythological one), a distant future, or something completely fantastical. The third and final level deals with the personal involvement of the protagonist in the described events. One needs to ask whether the protagonist is describing a situation in first person (singing from experience), or if he/she is presenting something as an external observer.

Notice that all instances are dependent on lyrics, as Moore argues there can be no persona without a lyric, as I previously mentioned. In this context, can one still talk about an instrumental persona? I would argue that we can, although, again, some degree of imagination and negotiation is needed. Analogies with the three instances described by Moore could be found in instrumental rock if texture becomes central. Thus, a realistic protagonist might be represented by a lead guitar line that features minimal processing, while a heavily processed guitar sound could create the illusion of a fictional protagonist. A good example of the first would be Guthrie Govan’s ‘Eric’ (2006) (although, in this case, the title of the track also suggests a real person) with Steve Vai’s ‘Midway Creatures’ (2005) at the other end of the spectrum. The distinction between a realistic and a fictional scenario could be exemplified by features in the environment, in a sense that a synthesized or heavily processed background (or one which features mechanical ostinato patterns) could represent a fictional scenario as in Joe Satriani’s ‘Attack’ (2000), while a
background involving the ‘natural’ sounds of the instruments could represent a realistic scenario, as in Eric Johnson’s ‘Cliffs of Dover’ (1990). As for the third case, an even more extreme form of negotiation must take place. There are certain tracks where there is no lead guitar per se, or where there are more equally important lines, such as in Iron Maiden’s ‘Losfer Words (Big ‘Orra)’ (1984), particularly the section that starts at 2:31 (a deep focus shot). Here, one could assume that the scenarios described are presented by a more distant protagonist, or even by a narrator-protagonist.

For all the fictional scenarios mentioned above, the use of specific modes (lydian/locrian extremes) or certain phrasings and rhythmic patterns could also change the way a certain protagonist is perceived. Of course, these examples and analogies stretch the limits of Moore’s model almost to the breaking point, but they do suggest that instrumental personae could be created even in the absence of lyrics. I argue that notions of articulation of a line, or of a timbre, are crucial, and I shall address these issues later. Regarding the realistic/fictional dichotomies, I only need to add that a clean, unprocessed tone might be interpreted as being fictional by someone who habitually follows any of the four guitarists’ music, as their standard tone is distorted (although not always processed). Of course, not everyone feels that the guitar lines should normatively be unadorned. The key issue here is that there is a difference between two ends of the spectrum. However, how they are read is not a given and depends on listeners’ preferences.

A final note here deals with term ‘protagonist’ itself. While it does not necessarily imply an action, as one of the definitions of the word is “the main figure or one of the most prominent figures in a situation”, the fact that this figure is often found in a “play, film, [or] novel” suggests that there are narrative undertones attached to the term (Oxford Dictionaries n.d.). I do not subscribe to the idea that music is necessarily a form of narrative; I see it as a form of utterance. Hence, vocality is an essential feature of my understanding of music, of how I interact with instrumental music, and will feature prominently in my model for the deconstruction of instrumental personae. Nonetheless, I shall use the term protagonist mainly for lack of a better one, but with the observation that it does not operate on a narrative level. The protagonist of instrumental rock is a static character that utters lines. I see the musical material as a form of utterance “to be compared and contrasted with the verbal utterance of ordinary speech”, which even though is a simulation of speech still creates the illusion of “symbolic, nonverbal utterance”
This implies that, in my model, each instrument (although, again, I do focus on the guitar) says something rather than does something. Furthermore, as I have argued, the distinction between individual and environment, while useful in some cases, does not paint an ecologically sound picture of the music, in the sense that both elements are part of what we experience in our day-to-day lives, with either having the possibility of being central at one point or another, or even throughout an entire piece. Consequently, I see a piece of music as a form of dialogue between personae, or monologues addressed to the listener. Sometimes these form a cacophony, but other times the other personae might make room for one to tell its story, so to speak. Of course, in order for these protagonists to tell their story, they must first acquire a voice.

**Vocality**

It would be useful at this point to recall Moore’s comment that “the result of the activity of singing” is what is subjected to the accompaniment, not the melody per se (Moore 2012, 189). Referencing Frith (1981), he points out that the sounds/noises around the words – Barthes’ ‘grain’ of the voice (Barthes and Heath 2009)– can signal if one is to trust the singer or not, because of the tendency in popular music reception to celebrate the inarticulate over the articulate, in the same way that in everyday life we tend to trust sighs, laughs, moans, and gasps more than what people actually say. These prosodic elements are essential to my understanding of the instrumental persona, and I will develop the idea in the final part of this chapter. It is this aversion to the ‘silver tongued’ that signals to Moore that one can experience a subject-position without reference to the lyrics, because the environment might provide more information about what is really going on than the lyrics themselves. In this context, Tagg’s (2001) deconstruction of ABBA’s ‘Fernando’ (1976) presents an interesting case where certain features of the song, such as melodic intervals or instrumental setting, suggest one should not trust the singer(s).

Popular music inherited from the blues the elevation of “the role of the musical instrument within popular song, making it a second voice, integral to the song itself, punctuating,

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23 Granted, these suppositions about how protagonists are heard are based on my own listening habits. Of course, the sounds we hear are always heard in the context of not just of other sounds in a track but also in this genre and, indeed, other genres. Music is always heard/made in the context of other music, which means that my arguments could not be applied as easily to electronic dance music, for instance. Nonetheless, I draw here on the sort of sound conventions with which people listening to these instrumental rock artists are familiar, particularly because an important number of fans are also musicians themselves and are used to breaking down musical elements.
commenting upon, and answering the vocal line” (Evans 2002, 22). As Backer (2002, 118) argues, “[s]liding produces vibrato, glissandi, bends, and microtonal inflections that can emulate a human voice”, creating “onomatopoeic sound” (122). He goes on to note that the “tonality of an overdriven amplifier is not unlike a human voice”, as “[i]nflation and phrasing oddities like glissandi and vibrato become more apparent” and “[n]otes take longer to decay, facilitating string bending” (Backer 2002, 122). Furthermore, Jungr (2002, 104-105) expands on Lomax’s (1962) analysis of both gospel and blues singers and concludes that features such as glissandi, slides, wails, sobs, whooping etc. are all found in blues guitar playing. “The emulations of human speech” (Backer 2002, 125) comes from the fact that blues is a vocal music, “with string bending and the bottleneck slide on the guitar and the inflections of the harmonica as surrogates for the sliding, bending, expression found in vocal blues” (Headlam 2002, 184). Walser (1993, 58) also observes how the various “moans and screams of metal guitar playing” spawned from “earlier African American vocal styles” represent “imitations of vocal sounds” (119).

Particularly considering Vai and Govan’s comments on the vocality of their guitar sounds, Cone’s (1974) observation that the persona is realized in the voice of the instrument becomes salient. In this section, I explore how the illusion of voice is created. I argue that two elements come into play here (fig. h). The first deals with the information that is fed into the guitar – the technical level. Vai frequently invokes the notion of note identity, arguing that each note should have “its own zip-code” (Vai 2012o), a feat achieved by changing the attack, dynamic, duration etc. of each individual pitch. I dub this musical prosody, for reasons that will be discussed below. I shall use the two very similar tracks, ‘If I Could Fly’ (2004) by Joe Satriani, and ‘Viva la Vida’ (2008) by Coldplay, to highlight the many ways musical prosody helps create vocality in the Satriani track.

The second element I focus on is gear. Each guitarist uses a set of effects processors and other similar devices to achieve vocality – the technological level. While I will discuss particularities in the case studies, I shall go over the main equipment used by guitar players to produce a more vocal sound. The main issue here is not whether the resulting sound resembles a voice (although scholars such as Wallmark (2018) remark how the distorted guitar creates a a similar sound to vocal distortions such as screams), but the fact that listeners can easily draw a parallel between a vocal and an instrumental line.
As discussed above, the ramifications of such a comparison are key to my model of instrumental personae. I also need to mention that the entire discussion assumes that English linguistic rules are the norm in this music. I argue that this is a fair assumption, given that the mother tongues of the musicians I analyse is English. Of course, this is not necessarily true for Malmsteen, but my hypothesis is that regardless of Malmsteen’s native Swedish, his music will still reflect the same musical-linguistic norms as the other three native English speakers, given that Malmsteen studied English from a very early age and sees his command of the language at least on par with his mother tongue (Malmsteen 2013h).

**Prosody, grammar, and rhythm**

Prosody is the branch of linguistics that deals with features of speech that fall outside the scope of grammar. A popular anecdote among my peers will work as a good example for why prosody is essential to conversation. During a linguistics university lecture, the professor told his students that while a double negative always forms a positive in English, a double positive never forms a negative. Most of the students remained silent and in awe after hearing this. However, a voice from the back of the room broke the silence and said “Yeah, right!” Joke aside, as Endress and Hauser (2010) point out, every language features prosody. Even the American Sign Language exhibits prosodic features - variation in facial gestures or velocity of movements (Wilbur and Martínez 2002) -, and Gross et al (2014) suggest that prosody is projected even when silent reading.

As Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (1996) pointed out twenty years ago, while research on prosody has been done, the results still carry the undertone that prosody occupies a secondary place in a language, behind words and sentences. However, studies have shown that prosody is

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24 However, as Kawaguchi et al (2006, 103) note, the term carries quite different connotations depending on the language of reference. For example, in German it is “generally used for features of verse”, with the equivalent of ‘intonation’ being used to refer to “features of length, rhythm, stress”.
not just an adornment and is not determined by syntax alone (Dehé 2014), contrary to the common view (Frazier and Gibson 2015). Cutler et al (1997) argue that without a strong degree of prosodic features, any utterance would be more difficult to understand. Ambiguous statements can be interpreted as either literal or idiomatic (Ashby 2006), with prosody playing an essential role in decoding the true meaning behind such constructs. This ties in neatly with Frith’s (1996) ‘silver tongue’ observation, in the sense that people tend to react more to prosodic features than to what is being said.

Scholars have analysed prosody from a multitude of perspectives, breaking its features into basic prosodic components (loudness, pitch, voice quality, duration, speaking rate, and pause) and compound prosodic attributes (intonation, accentuation/stress, rhythm, and hesitation). However, as is noted in most studies, these factors interact in complex ways in speech, and can appear at both the micro (morphemes, phonemes) and macro levels (sentences). The distinction between micro and macro levels is not always clear-cut, as a sentence might consist of a single word (Cruttenden 1997). Nonetheless, these features help the listener break down the continuous flow of language into discernible components such as words or phrases (Mary 2012), and help uncover the meanings behind the words themselves (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996).

In the realm of music, prosody also plays a key role in song. The reflection of speech prosody in vocal music is uncontroversial, although metrical accents and melodic stress do not always coincide with the stress and pitch contour of the words, as I will show below. Nonetheless, Palmer et al (2001, 526) argue that musical prosody “plays a similar function in music perception and recognition as in speech”. Moreover, Hausen et al (2013, 9) observe that music and speech both use similar acoustic cues for communication, with “the association […] between the perception of music and speech prosody [being found] more specifically [in] word stress”. They argue that their findings give credence to the idea that music and speech use the same or similar neural paths, which supports the results of Thompson et al (2003). Patel et al (2006, 3036) highlight the similarity between music and language, arguing that notes could

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25 Of course, the ability to perceive prosody can vary considerably from person to person. For instance, Thompson et al (2003; 2004) and Lima and Castro (2011) argue that musical training makes individuals more sensitive to prosodic features. On the other hand, Trimmer and Cuddy (2008) argue that musical training does not offer an advantage to recognition of emotions, and that emotional intelligence is what aids individuals in recognizing emotions in speech and music.
26 Kompe (1997) argues that the difficulty in understanding people with hearing disabilities (particularly children) is prosodic, not phonetic.
27 I use Kompe’s (1997) list.
“roughly be compared to syllables”. However, while it is common to consider that both speech and musical prosody require a sonic layer to be perceived, poets do use orthography to direct readers as to the sound, rhythm, rhyming scheme, stresses, tonal qualities, volume, etc. of words or even of larger structures, functioning as an indication of how to perform a text.

If we grant credence to the idea that prosody is ‘the music of speech’ (an idea that Kawaguchi et al (2006) and Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (1996), for instance, espouse), we still must account for the features that create the speech of music. While prosody represents the sum of all the above features, some are more easily translatable into musical prosody than others. Changing the pitch of a note, for instance, would mean modifying the original melody. While prosodic features in languages such as English mark intention or politeness, in tonal languages, it is the actual pitch that carries meaning (Proto 2015). To that extent, music would be a tonal language (in the linguistic sense), which implies that modifying pitches is not possible without disrupting the meaning of the words/musical lines. Consequently, pitching is not a translatable concept. Even loudness, to some extent, is hindered by today’s obsession with over-compression in the mastering stage of cutting a record. However, guitar loudness is usually understood as a combination of volume and distortion, especially because, historically, obtaining more sustain and gain would be possible only by turning up the volume on the amplifier. Consequently, a distorted sound could be interpreted as a louder one, especially if it is preceded by a clean sound. As Walser (1993, 42) points out, “the human body produces aural distortion through excessive power”, as “screams and shouts are usually accompanied by vocal distortion, as the capacities of the vocal chords are exceeded”.

Voice quality is an interesting factor that I shall discuss later in this section. Speaking rate is also essential, as it ties in with the notion of virtuosity. Robert Walser’s (1993) research on heavy metal highlights some of the key elements of virtuosity and the electric guitar, arguing that the electric guitar has been the virtuoso instrument of the past few decades, particularly because of the sustain that distortion creates, as you can now not only play fast, but manipulate any melodic line, extending notes and vibrating them, thus enriching the expressive potential of the guitar. Essentially, this is an issue of the flexibility of the guitar playing, and not only about speed. This “amazing virtuosity that can create a sense of perfect freedom and omnipotence” is “set up

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28 Turk (2009, 317) argues that the expression probably has its origin in the etymology of the term (pros + oide: ‘to’ + ‘poem, song’).
between the potentially oppressive power of bass, drums, and rhythm guitar, and the liberating, empowering vehicle of the guitar solo” (Walser 1993, 53-54). Regardless of one’s view on virtuosity, it does highlight individual prowess and expression, with the virtuoso being able to “to command extraordinary, almost supernatural rhetorical powers” because of his/her ability (Walser 1993, 76). Of course, my four case studies might fit into what Walser (1993, 99-101) calls “guitar for guitarists” music, where “ideologies of complexity, virtuosity, and individuality”, along with the “valorization (sic) of balance, planning, and originality” and “a conservatory style fetishization (sic) of technique (...) and innovation” reign supreme. Nonetheless, virtuosity is a key element not only of the music of the four guitarists, but also of the genre, as it puts the limelight on individual expression.

Rhythm and pause can be conflated into a single category of rhythm, as is the case in most models for musical rhythm. The four elements left are intonation, stress, hesitation, and rhythm (fig. a). These features also mirror Wennerstorm’s (2001) main prosodic features, but on this note, it is worth mentioning that one should not confuse intonation with stress. Technically, the distinction lays in the fact that stress deals with stress accent, or pitch accent, as in tonal languages and governs a single word, whereas intonation governs a sentence (Kawaguchi et al 2006). While intonation could be the equivalent to musical phrasing, all four elements are needed to create the illusion of speech. As Knösche et al (2005, 259) point out, phrasing is “equally important for the domains of speech and music”, representing an essential “means of structuring auditory streams”.

![Figure a](image_url)

The link between speech prosody and instrumental music is somewhat provocative, even though scholars have proposed a link between the two (Hall 1953, Abraham 1974, Huron and Ollen 2003, Patel and Daniele 2003, Patel et al 2006, etc.). As I previously mentioned, speech stress and contour do not always coincide with the musical equivalent. In Iron Maiden’s ‘The Red and the Black’ (2016), for instance, the line ‘human decoy’ is sung ‘hu-MAN de-COY’, exactly the opposite of its speech equivalent. The extent to which such discrepancies bother the
listener is a matter of speculation at this point. However, the sheer number of such occurrences (most Eminem songs play on this displacement of speech stress) suggests that listeners might be more inclined to follow the rhythm of the vocal performance, and not the proper prosody of a certain word. At the same time, particularly with someone like Eminem or other artists such as Bob Dylan, songwriters may deliberately play with the tension between musical and linguistic rules by drawing attention to ‘misuses’ of speech intonations because of the musical rules. Furthermore, one also needs to take the distinction between private and public speech into account. The latter (rhetoric) has it own rules of emphasis, repetition etc. precisely because it is a performance. Similarly, we take for granted the differences between the speaking and the singing voice, even when there is no instrumental accompaniment.

Yet, a study by Palmer and Kelly (1992, 525) on the interrelationship between linguistic rhythm and musical meter showed that “[t]he rhythmic organization of song reflects the integration of prosodic structure in language with principles of musical rhythm”. Moreover, it seems that “prosodic stress [and linguistic rhythm] tends to align with musical meter” (Palmer and Kelly 1992, 526-527), at least in classical music. A reason for this might be the fact that the principle of rhythmic alteration in linguistics is built on the same idea of binary alteration (long-short/stressed-unstressed units) as musical rhythm, which consists of alternations of strong and weak beats. These alternations are periodic, and while they are not always binary, because popular music tends to be in 4/4, a parallel between the two can indeed be made.

These accents form a hierarchy, with musical hereditary stresses and periodic accents. This is quite different for words, as they often carry the same prosodic features across different contexts, whereas musical units are easily reassigned, depending on the context (Palmer and Kelly 1992). However, even though this might be the case at a macro level, a more detailed view of the constituent parts does indeed expose a crucial point of similarity between the rhythm of speech and the rhythm of music. Both music and speech are made up of alternations between short and long syllables/short and long note durations; they are made up of the same two basic units, grouped into metric feet. This gives the two quite different mediums a point of convergence, and even less astute listeners will be able to sense, though they might not be able to articulate it as such, the differences between a long note and a short note, since they will be accustomed to do so for speech patterns.
In their comparative study of English and French, Patel et al (2006, 3042) develop on Patel and Daniele (2003) and suggest that recent advancements in phonetics seem to confirm the age-old intuition “that the instrumental music of a culture can reflect the prosody of its native language”. Stressed syllables appear at a constant rate in English, as opposed to French, where the stress usually falls on the last syllable of a word (Mary 2012), and this happens in English and French music as well, it seems (Patel et al 2006). I mention here that I do not subscribe to the idea that music is a language, nor do I believe that casual listeners hear a piece of music and are able to uncover its country of origin. Yet, the fact that “[o]rganized rhythmic and melodic patterns” are the result of either prosody or music (Patel et al 2006, 3042), with music and speech perception being linked via the perception of both pitch and rhythm (Hausen et al 2013), makes for a valid music-language comparison at the sonic layer in the minds of most listeners.

Hannon’s (2009, 407) study suggests that listeners “perceive language-specific rhythms in musical contexts and can use this information to classify purely instrumental sequences”. Anglo-American popular music tends to be in either a binary or a ternary meter, with binary and ternary rhythmic subdivisions, each with its own hierarchy of stressed and unstressed units. As Cason et al (2015, 43) point out, “salient and less salient syllables form the metrical patterning of utterances”, even though the predictability of rhythm in speech is considerably lower than in music. Palmer and Kelly (1992, 525) go on to argue that “prosodic stress tends to align with musical meter”, with “[t]he rhythmic organization of song [reflecting] the integration of prosodic structure in language with principles of musical rhythm”. Wennerstrom (2001, 64) suggests that “a universal human sense of rhythm forms the foundation of prosody in languages”, which “means that constituents of speech, from the syllable all the way to the discourse level, tend to follow an alternation of strong and weak beats at regular time intervals”, as in music.

We certainly do create a melodic contour when we speak, and this melodic contour might be another cause why instrumental music could be viewed as a form of utterance. Pattison (2014) argues that some sort of tonic seems to be present when we speak. While I will not go as far as Leonard Bernstein (2002) and propose that the melody be the noun, the harmony the adjective, and the rhythm the verb, the grammatical function of the words could potentially translate into ways of phrasing a lead line. In natural speech, the article ‘the’ is naturally unstressed. In a line

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29 Patet et al’s (2006) study did not consider relations between instrumental music and tonal languages such as Chinese or Japanese, however.
such as “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones”, one would not naturally say ‘THE evil/good’, but ‘the EVIL/GOOD’, emphasizing the noun that carries meaning, not its article. Pattison (2014) notes that articles, personal pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions set the tonic, while stressed syllables move away from it. In music with text, as Proto (2015, 116) points out, “speech units are assigned to musical pitches in such a way as to conform to specific requirements of the singing idiom”. Single notes on weak beats, for example, could act in the same manner, signalling to the listener that an important note is due. Again, I am not arguing that music represents language, but the fact that both present similar ways of articulation makes the comparison worthy of further exploration.30

Comparing Joe Satriani’s ‘If I Could Fly’ (2004) to Coldplay’s ‘Viva la Vida’ (2008) highlights many of the issues discussed.31 I focus on the events that take place between 0:49 and 1:15 in ‘If I Could Fly’ and between 0:12 and 0:27 in ‘Viva la Vida’. The harmonic context of both pieces is indeed strikingly similar. The IV, V, I, vi of Satriani’s track becomes ii, V, I, vi in ‘Viva la Vida’. The substituted chord does not affect the overall premise, as both are subdominants, and form part of the environments in which Martin’s vocals and Satriani’s guitar operate. Moreover, even the melodies of the Satriani main theme (0:49 onwards) and the Coldplay verses are alike, both containing the same main intervallic leaps and are analogously rhythmically positioned within the 4/4 metric fabric of both pieces.

‘If I Could Fly’ is a good example of how musical prosody gives a voice to Satriani’s guitar. In terms of intonation, it is obvious that Satriani’s guitar line, like most others, features a multitude of raises and falls, and, as Moore (2001, 30) notes, listeners react more to the general contour of the melody than to specific intervallic relationships. Consequently, Satriani’s guitar melody features intonation by default. Because the guitar plays a monody – and not a form of polyphony or homophony – and this monody features multiple different notes, listeners will

30 The analogy to speech and grammar can lead to even more far-fetched theories. Would an equivalent to rhyming be possible in music? It might, although a great degree of imagination would be needed. A rhyme involves one or more syllables sounding the same, usually at the end of a line of poetry. Rhyming normatively occurs at the end of a line in popular music as well, so the end of an instrumental line is where one would expect such a phenomenon to occur. One can go even deeper and create an analogy between the final note of a line and the sound either being an equivalent of a consonant or a vowel. If the line ends with an attack, the final note could be the final consonant of a word. Conversely, if a line ends without any emphasis and attack on the final note then it can be considered a vowel. This does not mean that one can construct proper words out of these vowel-like and consonant-like sounds. Rather, it can be a way of creating the illusion that the guitar is uttering something, using similar sonic cues as the voice to do so. This discussion, although interesting, is beyond the scope of this project, however.

31 In an interesting turn of events, Satriani sued Coldplay for copyright infringement, arguing that they used his 2004 track as the basis for their 2008 song. The lawsuit did not go in Satriani’s favour (Kreps 2009).
more likely perceive it as a form of utterance rather than as an instrumental, non-human, accompanying line. Furthermore, in ‘Viva la Vida’, the musical lines do not always coincide with the natural speech intonation of some of the words of the lyrics. In the second line of the first verse, for instance, the word ‘alone’, which has a low to high contour, is sung using a downward intervallic movement. Such contradictions are impossible in a strictly musical medium.

In terms of stress, Satriani’s melody follows the convention of strong unit - weak unit alternation. In ‘Viva la Vida’, the vocals are sometimes subservient to the musical stresses. For instance, the word ‘revolutionaries’ from the song’s second verse sees the stress fall on the penultimate syllable in the vocal track, while the natural spoken stress should fall on the third. The syllable ‘ne’ falls on the strong first beat of the bar, so unless some sort of syncopation or unusual musical stress is employed, the word will be stressed per metric subdivisions. In the Satriani track, the melody obeys the same rules and sees usual stressed notes and unstressed notes follow metric and hereditary rhythmic patterns. The first note is positioned on the first beat of the bar, followed by a syncopation right before the second bar, which, incidentally, also occurs in the Coldplay song. While these examples contradict the common-sense notion that metric and prosodic features tend to align, such contradiction are irrelevant in instrumental music. The fact that speech, vocal music, and instrumental music feature stressed and unstressed units (not to mention that all three types of utterance feature melodic contours) is enough to create a parallel in the minds of listeners.

_Hesitation_ is a very interesting element to analyse here. There are eight-note rests before almost every phrase in ‘If I Could Fly’. Chris Martin does not pause as often in ‘Viva la Vida’, but rests are found here as well. However, these vocal rests, at least in speech, do not necessarily equate with hesitations, as it is quite natural to separate sentences and phrases with verbal equivalents of commas and period marks. However, a different type of hesitation emerges in the Satriani track. What is particularly striking in how Satriani articulates his melodies is the way he attacks his notes, particularly if he bends them afterwards. This can be heard throughout ‘If I Could Fly’ and through most of his more recent output. Every bend is preceded by a rest, but it is so short it cannot realistically be notated. However, it can be perceived. Satriani is always

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32 As Moore (2012) shows, these anticipated syncopations are a common trait of popular music, and are present in both instrumental and vocal music.
33 This is an approximation, as the rhythmic complexities of popular music are hard to accurately put down on paper.
mindful of the inevitable noises that the unused strings make whenever one plays an electric guitar through a high gain amplifier (Satriani 2008). Consequently, he takes extra care with his bends, because of the risk of accidentally hitting adjacent strings with the left hand. He mutes the strings with his free right-hand fingers, and this seems to extend to the beginning of these noise-inducing bends or phrases. This type of articulation creates a sensation of hesitation, of unsureness whether the note being played is the right one or not.

Even though all the above elements are essential to the illusion of vocality in the Satriani track, rhythm is probably the principal element. As one “cannot conceive a melody without a rhythm” (Bartók and Suschoff 1976, 224) nor can speech function without a rhythmic aspect, it is easy to see how listeners might be inclined to hear instrumental melodies as substitute vocal lines. Rhythmically, the two tracks differ to some extent, mainly because some of the key notes of the vocal line are repeated to facilitate the lyrics. While the differences between the two melodies are not particularly evident at a fugitive listen, the similarities vanish to some extent when breaking each line in its constituent long-short units. Transcribing the rhythm of the lyrics to ‘Viva la Vida’ as if they were spoken rather than sung exposes the fact that the rhythms are not, at a deeper level, similar at all. Nonetheless, this is of little concern to the overall premise. Again, the fact that Satriani’s guitar line is not a continuous note and features multiple types of rhythms facilitates comparisons between voice and guitar.

The singing instrument

A non-vocal to vocal continuum can be imagined for the different degrees of guitar vocality. The main factor here is monody. While singers who can produce controllable voice overtones certainly do exist, these represent a negligible minority. Most can produce only a single line at a time, notwithstanding overdubbing. This means that the closer a guitar line is to a monody, the closer it will be to creating the illusion of a vocal line. It seems that vocal expression is also the benchmark for instrumental expression. On one side of the continuum, we have the chordal and rhythmic guitar lines, which even though might create distinct instrumental personae, do not create the sensation of a main character/figure, and lie more comfortably in the background. On the other end of the spectrum, we have monodies, with combinations of both laying somewhere in between the two extremes. Obviously, the illusion of a singing guitar will also be aided by studio gestures, in the sense that a melodic guitar line can be positioned so far in
the background by using sound-box placement, reverbs, delays, and volume controls that it loses its identity as a single, discernible melody and becomes part of the environment.

Humans are binaural creatures and this particularity bounds us to act in certain ways. When we want to make sense of a sound that we hear – to figure out what it was that we heard – we immediately turn our heads towards what we think was the source. We also do this automatically when we listen to another person talk, a characteristic which is especially evident when interacting with multiple interlocutors, as we will move our heads towards the person who is talking at any time. This implies that the voice is always in the centre of our own sound-box. Since the guitar occupies the same sonic space in the sound-box, I find the parallel between vocal and lead guitar compelling.

If the guitar is in the centre of the sound-box and plays only single notes, distinct categories of guitar-singers can be conceived (fig. b). The first category is the mimicking guitar. Here, the guitar plays a line previously sung by a singer, as in Yngwie Malmsteen’s ‘Save Our Love’ off Angels of Love (2009), which is essentially an instrumental version of the track with the same name, originally released on Eclipse (1990). Steve Vai’s ‘Mullach a’ tSi’ (2012) also fits into this category, as it is an instrumental version of Pádraigín Ni Uallacháin’s take on the sung lullaby of the same name (Pádraigin 2012). The second category is represented by the unison guitar. The guitar follows the vocalist in unison, doubling the vocal line throughout an entire song (Zappa’s ‘The Dangerous Kitchen’, 1983) or sections of a song (Vai’s ‘So Happy’ (1984), starting at 1:06). While in these examples the vocal track features words, in pieces such as Vai’s ‘Oooo’ (1999) or most of Malmsteen’s instrumental music with choirs, the track features a vocal part played in unison with a guitar part, but as opposed to the previous examples, the voices only utter the vowels ‘u’ or ‘a’.

This category exposes some interesting questions. How could this guitar-voice fusion be interpreted? Is it just a studio-technique? Is it a way to highlight the quality of the musicians in the group? Possibly, but in the context of instrumental music, this practice of superimposing two guitar voices can reveal the meaning of a track. I shall use Vai’s ‘The Story of Light’ (2012) as an example. The first section features very dense textures, with distorted chords and drum overdubs enveloping the whole frequency range, almost to the point of overflow. However, the second section (starting at 2:35) sees this density destroyed. Besides a sparser drum pattern and bass track, the dense texture of the first part is replaced by an extended guitar melody that is
doubletracked, with the guitar in the left channel mimicking note-for-note the guitar in the right. This studio event forces the listener to pay more attention to the melody lines, as they are felt like a breath of fresh air after the wall of sound of the opening, like the light at the end of tunnel, so to speak. In the context of the title of the track, this doubling can easily be representing light itself, which is both a particle and a wave. Of course, this interpretation is aided by the title of the track and some basic knowledge of physics.

The third category is represented by the dialogue guitar. Here, the guitar acts as the partner of a dialogue with a human voice. Examples include the intro to Steve Vai’s ‘The Audience is Listening’ (1990) and Joe Satriani’s ‘Crowd Chant’ (2006), where the guitar and voice take turns in a call-and-response fashion, seemingly re-enacting a dialogue between two humans. One would naturally be more inclined to consider the voice as the central element in such instances, because of our propensity to follow lyrics. However, in the case of Satriani’s track, both guitar and vocal lines are wordless, so it is extremely hard to argue that one is more important than the other. As I argued in the previous chapter, although I can see arguments both ways, there is no definitive position to take, and one should not assume that the vocal line is central merely because of the presence of the vocal strand. Here, it seems that both are on the same level of pertinence. Moreover, even in the instance where the singer utters meaningful words, if the guitar line had a similar set of words it was based on, what is actually being said is less important. What is important is that the guitar line stands in for another human voice and creates the illusion of a dialogue between a human and a human-like being.

Finally, the fourth category is represented by the singer guitar. This is the one I am more interested in, as it substitutes the vocalist completely, leaving room for the guitar persona to take over the sonic landscape. While in the other cases the presence of the vocal strand arguably lessens the significance of the guitar, when the guitar is the sole carrier of melody in the track, it becomes the key persona, the singer of the band. However, this effect is achieved by using a combination of pedals and techniques. In terms of effects, I shall separate them in two categories: outboard and native. I use ‘outboard’ to describe effects units that guitars must be plugged into to operate, and ‘native’ to designate the various elements mounted on or inside the guitar itself. Outboard gear includes wah-wah (and the auto-wah), phaser, flanger, pitch shifting, and volume pedals/rack units. Native gear includes the whammy bar, the pickup selector, the volume knob, and sustainers. In terms of technique, the ones that blur the lines between guitar and voice are
vibrato, legato, bending, sliding, tapping, grace notes, and harmonics. I shall offer a general discussion on each here and will develop the notions in the next sections of this dissertation, as even though all four guitar players use the above gear and techniques, each has a unique way of articulating their melodies and specific ways of colouring their sound through various effects units.

![Diagram of the relationship between singing guitar, mimiking, unison, dialogue, and singer](image)

**Effects - Outboard gear:** Wah-wahs, phasers, and flangers help create the illusion of a voice by modifying a tone’s acoustic factors, particularly its “vowel quality” (Erickson 1975, 72). Wah-wah pedals create spectral glides (Erickson 1975), which involve altering the spectral quality (harmonics) of the tone by filtering out frequencies outside of a set range, with the resulting resonance having the potential of being “swept across a range of frequencies” by changing the position of the pedal on the effects unit (Osiol 2012). The resulting sound is somewhat of an onomatopoeia, as if a person was saying the syllables ‘wah wah’. Phasers and flangers act in an analogous way. A phaser creates peaks and valleys in the frequency spectrum, but the modulation is often done automatically, at a set unit of time. This process is created by “delaying the sound signal in one or more ways and re-combining them” (Moore 2012). The flanger also creates “notches in the frequency response”, but “[t]he real difference between a phaser and flanger is that a flanger always produces a large number of notches that are an even multiple of frequency apart” (Keen 1999).

The spectral glide that changes the vowel quality occurs frequently in speech, particularly in words that feature diphthongs. As opposed to a monophthong, where a single vowel in a word is (usually) flanked by two consonants, as in ‘cat’ or ‘bar’, diphthongs occur when a word features two adjacent vowels in the same syllable, as in ‘vile’ or ‘loud’. There is also the situation where two adjacent vowels are part of different syllables, in which case it is a hiatus, but the outcome is still the same. The vowel quality changes when moving from one vowel to another, creating a similar sound that wah, phaser, and flanger pedals create, or, better yet, a sound that is imitated by these effects pedals. This transformation happens to a peculiar effect in
some folk musics. In Romanian folk music, in genres such as the ‘doină’, for instance, the themes of sorrow, grief, and yearning lend themselves well to this type of technique, as a way for the performer to express very powerful feelings. In a lyric such as “Și lui Radu nici că-i pasă” (which translates as ‘Radu doesn’t even care’), the vowel ‘a’ in ‘Radu’ is first transformed into ‘e’ and then into ‘i’, resulting in a ‘Ra(e)(i)-du’ phrase (Oprea 2002, 138). It is also common as part of the idiolect of some popular music vocalists, such as Matt Bellamy of Muse, particularly when performing live, as seen on their Hullabaloo (2002) DVD. In instrumental rock, Steve Vai, for instance, constantly uses the Eventide Electronic DSP 4000 to sweep through the frequency range and generate an ‘i’-’e’-’a’-’i’ (as in the entire ‘Yai Yai’) or ‘i-a-i’ (as in the opening of ‘Kill the Guy with the Ball’).34 This effects unit acts as a pitch shifter that also features a modulating frequency filter, which is the main effect behind the guitar sound (Vai 2005e). While it takes a certain amount of time for the effect to generate all the different vowels, shorter notes of a melody will spell out only one or two of them. In this way, the illusion of a voice is even more accentuated, since the constant breaking of the ‘i-e-a-i’ pattern could represent either some form of stuttering or a way of reorganizing the units of the ‘guitar language’ to create discrete sentences.

A volume pedal is occasionally used to hide the attack of the note. The sound that the plectrum makes when hitting the strings is full of high frequencies that create a different sound than the glottal attack of singing. Nonetheless, by removing the attacks of guitar notes, these noisy sounds are eliminated and thus every note functions as a vowel. Guthrie Govan uses this pedal extensively, and maintains that it is one of the pedals he cannot do without when performing live (Govan 2015k). Steve Vai also uses it, often in conjunction with a delay pedal, as in ‘Whispering a Prayer’ (2001).

Effects - Native gear: Whammy bars have been a standard feature of electric guitars ever since their invention. The system uses a lever (controlled by the right hand) that changes the tension in the string, causing the string to vibrate at a lower tension, thus producing a lower sound. By varying the tension of the string at a constant rate, the resulting sound resembles a standard guitar vibrato. However, many more variations are possible. Beside extreme examples such as the ‘dive-bomb’ (which literally involves going from any given note to the lowest possible one using only the whammy bar), it is also capable of more nuanced techniques, such as

34 The same effects unit is used differently on ‘Bad Horsie’ (1995), where the preset is a vocal filter.
glissandos, portamentos and it can even enable the guitarist to access microtonal pitches. While most whammy bar systems normally only allow lowering the pitch, the development of ‘floating bridges’ now permit the pitch to rise as well, by pulling the bar (as opposed to just pressing it).

The whammy bar can also be used to articulate the pitches in specific places, particularly at the beginning and the end of notes. Usually, the right-hand attacks a note with a plectrum and then the left-hand finger releases to mute the sound. With the whammy bar, however, guitarists can come into the note from bellow and then slide back down again at the end of a phrase or even a single note. Thus, the attack noises usually attributed to the guitar (elements clearly audible in a technique called alternate picking; see John Petrucci solos) are cancelled and replaced by smooth rises and falls that resemble the rises and falls of human speech. Satriani and Govan also use the bar to affect only certain parts of the melodies, usually the final notes of a melodic phrase, resembling the wobbles that can occasionally be found in human speech, particularly at the end of words and sentences. Even though guitarists do not generally aim for a specific note, the resulting sound resembles the un-tempered quality of the human voice. Even though singers strive to be always in tune, humans are not naturally equipped to sing using a tempered system, at least not as well as a piano, for instance. The whammy bar can also be manipulated in a rhythmic fashion, as on Satriani’s ‘Lies and Truths’ (2013) (at 0:50), thus creating the illusion of discrete syllables. It can also be used to create melodies. In pieces such as Vai’s ‘The Attitude Song’ (1990), at 0:21, or Satriani’s ‘Sleep Walk’ (2002), at 0:19, the melodies were played with the whammy alone. Using the bar in this way not only eliminates the pick attacks after the first notes, but also represents a method of subverting the notion of the guitar as a tempered instrument. Manipulating the bar means that each pitch traverses the entire possible gamut of notes before reaching the next one. This occurs naturally in singing as well.

The pickup selector also functions as a sort of sustainer fifth/octave button. The vowel quality of a note changes when switching from one position to another. The best result is usually achieved by switching between the extremes, between the neck and bridge positions. The neck position engages the bridge pickup, which due to its placement close to the quarter of a string’s length, exposes even overtones that create a mellow sound. The bridge position does the opposite, activating the bridge pickup, which due to its positioning closer to the end of the string generates a series of odd-number overtones that create a more piercing sound. By rapidly switching from neck to bridge, the vowel quality resembles either a subtle manipulation of a wah pedal or the
quick manipulation of the tone knob on the guitar. Moving quickly between the two creates the
tone sweep that is interpreted as a modification of a vowel. This mirrors to some extent the
vocal technique of switching from a full, heavy, round chest voice to a light, piercing head voice,
as in the chorus (1:01) of Helloween’s ‘Eagle Fly Free’ (1988).

A similar effect can be created through the manipulation of the volume knob. On a
distorted channel, the volume channel set to 10 will produce a screaming guitar tone, particularly
if the bridge pickup is activated. The more the volume knob is turned down, the more the sound
cleans up, especially on a good, expensive tube amplifier. Switching between high and low
mirrors the chest voice to head voice switch in vocalists. It can also be heard as the guitar
equivalent of a shift between a light falsetto voice and a full chest belt. A good example of this is
the beginning (1:30) of Steve Vai’s ‘Tender Surrender’ (1995) solo, where he constantly turns
the volume knob on the same repeated note, so that each repetition features more and more
distortion. This mirrors Latour’s (2018, 216) description of Carlos Santana’s use of the knob,
boosting “the guitar’s on-board volume control at the end of a note to subvert the natural decay
of sound” to “either sustain or swell the tone”.

Finally, the use of the sustainer pickups is another way of creating the illusion of a voice.
Sustainers prolong the sound of the guitar indefinitely by generating a magnetic field (Fernandes
Guitars 2015). While sustainers do not create a voice-like effect per se, they do, however, cut
the high frequencies of the guitar sound, thus making it less abrasive and more vowel-like, in a
similar fashion to turning the tone knob on the guitar all the way down. Moreover, the sustainer
also gives the guitar the possibility of sustaining notes at room-volume for considerably more
time than the instrument naturally permits. This option was not available to previous generations
of guitarists, as their explorations of sustain and feedback were limited by the extreme volumes
necessary to get the specific effect without the aid of the sustainer (see any Jimi Hendrix
performance for an example). The fact that the guitarist (rather than the guitar or other pieces of
gear) is now in control of the duration strengthens the parallels between prolonging a vocal-
sound by controlling the breath and prolonging a guitar sound by controlling its duration with the
sustainer (the ‘air-supply’ of the guitar). While the sustainer prolongs the notes, it is not its sole
function, as it is also capable of generating a sound an octave/fifth higher than the actual pitch

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35 Even though the sustainer is technically mounted on the guitar itself, I consider it as outboard gear because the
overwhelming majority of guitars do not come equipped with one.
being played. The transition from one sound to its harmonic changes the vowel quality of the original pitch, with the peak being particularly bright, full of high harmonics (thus annulling the effect it has in standard mode), and creates what Brian May (2006) of Queen calls the “screaming quality” of a note. The Digitech Whammy pedal can also be used to simulate these guitar ‘screams’, by alternating between the octave and natural positions on the pedal, thus generating an unusually fast alternation between natural and scream that, while not exactly human, still creates the illusion of a voice.

Techniques: While electric guitarists utilize a range of techniques to produce voice-like results, the most important one is by far the vibrato. Players such as BB King, Vai, Malmsteen, or Clapton are praised for their unique way of vibrating strings, with the technique being one of the key components of their instrumental voices. This association is easy to make, as, historically, the human voice has arguably been the first one to produce vibrato. Furthermore, it is also produced solely by the human body, with no extra appendices such as stringed instruments or wind instruments needed. However, the guitar vibrato is more varied than the vocal one, in the sense that it can be created in three separate ways, each producing a different sound. (The speed of the vibrato is not important to this discussion). The first one is the classical vibrato, which takes its name from the repertoire and the type of guitar it is mostly associated with. It involves rocking the finger from side to side on a specific fret. The sonic result is of a rapid alternation between a main note and its microtonal (almost semitonal) lower neighbour. The second type is the rock vibrato, which, again, takes its name from the repertoire. This is the most common type of electric guitar vibrato and involves slightly bending the string up and down on a single fret, thus causing the main note to oscillate between its natural and sharpened states. Three out of the four guitarists of my case study use this type of vibrato. Steve Vai is the only one who uses the third type, the circular vibrato, which is essentially a combination of both, as it involves both rocking the finger from side to side and slightly bending the string at the same time, all in a circular motion. Of course, vibrato itself can be achieved in more ways, say by beating one’s chest while singing and by bending or hitting the guitar neck/body to produce a similar effect on the guitar. Nonetheless, the above three are the main ones used in instrumental rock.

Bending the strings is another technique employed to produce vocality. The technique literally involves bending the string with the fingers or with the whammy bar. The latter is less common, but is used extensively by guitarists such as Steve Vai to bend down from a certain
note, which is impossible to do without the whammy bar. Nonetheless, the main technique involves bending up using the fingers alone. Often, rock guitarists prefer whole step bends, but all four guitarists incorporate multiple intervals into their bends. Govan is probably the most creative of the four, incorporating everything from microtonal bends in a blues context (usually on the third and the seventh) and perfect fourth bends. Examples of sections reminiscent to David Gilmour’s solo (2:16) in ‘Another Brick in The Wall (Part II)’ (1979) abound in the music of Vai and Govan. (Malmsteen and Satriani are more conservative, utilizing mainly semitone and whole tone bends.) In a track such as Steven Wilson’s ‘Ancestral’ (on which Govan plays the solo), where the solo plays melodies in which most of the notes emerge out of a single attack and multiple bends (4:05), subverting the notion of the guitar as a tempered instrument. Here, bending the strings creates a portamento effect that pulls the notes from one to the other. The resulting un-tempered articulation resembles singing.

*Sliding* produces one of the most vocal-like sonorities, mainly because it involves traversing all the possible frequencies between one note and another, in a similar way to bending. This glissando effect is produced by literally sliding the left-hand (or right-hand, but this is less common) fingers on the strings during a melodic line. Here, one can either hit a note and then slide up or down from it, or can hit a note and then play a melody without attacking any of the following notes, using the left hand alone. Players such as Vai or Govan even use sliding to reproduce mordents or trills. However, guitar players generally use sliding as part of their melodies, interweaving it in melodic lines where some of the notes are plucked. Sliding removes the unavoidable noise that the contact between the plectrum and the string generates and replaces it with smooth rises and falls that resemble the rises and falls of (un-tempered) human speech. Coupled with the occasional plucked notes, it creates an illusion of vowel-consonant alternation that facilitates instrument-voice comparisons. Furthermore, this technique can be enhanced by using metal/glass slides. By freeing the string from the pressure of the finger, the metal/glass slide can freely move on the string, unperturbed by the metal frets on the neck. One can even go a step beyond and play a completely fretless guitar (Vai and Govan have done this on several occasions throughout their career), which even though harder to control in terms of intonation, frees the guitar from the tempered framework even more.

Another technique used by guitarists is the *grace note*, or acciaccatura. This ornament can be achieved in three ways on the guitar: by hammering on/pulling off, by sliding, or by bending.
The first one is the most common. As the name of the technique suggests, guitarists quickly hammer on from a lower note to a higher one or vice versa. Generally, the distance between the notes is no more than a minor third, mainly because the technique came into rock through the blues, which is based on the pentatonic scale (only major seconds and minor thirds). Often, these scales were played in boxes of two notes per string, so the distance between one note and its neighbour would be either a major second or a minor third, and sometimes a minor second if the blues scale was used instead of the minor pentatonic. The second method enlarges the distance between the notes, as one can slide in (or out) from any point on a string onto a note. Sliding in from below is the most common approach, but guitarists such as Steve Vai use the from-above slide at least as often. The latter method generates a vocal-like that is found in Eastern European vocal folk music, for instance (Oprea 2002). The third method is unique to the guitar and involves striking a note and then quickly playing the lower semitone/tone neighbour while also bending the string back up to the original pitch. Essentially, there is no written-pitch difference between the two, but what we do hear is the wobble of going from a basic note to a bend. This creates a specific effect of a ‘hanging note’ (Brian May also uses it extensively), which, again, is also a feature of some folk musics, although the overall effect is slightly different.

The modification of the vowel quality of a series of notes can be achieved without the aid of any effects pedal, by playing everything legato. As I previously mentioned, legato can be both a technique and a way of articulating a passage. I am essentially addressing the former. Players such as Satriani and Govan are known for their extremely fast legato passages, which involve quickly alternating between three notes (most of the time), in three-note-per string patterns, or soar through large parts of the fretboard in melodies that span two or three octaves. Hammering on and pulling off is the way to achieve this sound, using the left hand rather than the picking hand to provide the attack. When the string is pulled back off, it is often bent down or up, depending on which string it is played on, which introduces an extremely fast grace note into the legato passage at the micro level.

The fluid sound of legato playing is expanded upon through tapping. The technique involves an extension of the hammer on/pull off, as one or multiple fingers on the right hand are used to tap an extra note that is usually out of reach of the left hand. In this regard, it could be catalogued as a legato technique. Tapping brings to the fore certain overtones (due to a combination of factors such as trills, the tap itself, the fret where the trills and tap is occurring
etc.), and thus modifies the spectral content that the listener perceives. The result is a change of the vowel quality of the tapped passage.

The final technique I want to draw attention to is **harmonics**. Depending on how they are used, harmonics can resemble the guitar screams achievable through whammy pedals and sustainers. There are three main types of harmonics: **natural, artificial, and pinched**. To produce a natural harmonic, the finger needs to lightly touch the string at its half, third, quarter etc. point. This type of harmonic is not vocal-like in itself, but by pulling sharply up the whammy bar, it creates the characteristic scream that guitarists such as Satriani and Vai use religiously. Vibrating the string using the whammy bar also creates a lesser version of the same effect. The least vocal-like harmonic is the artificial one, where the left hand frets a note while the other plays an appropriate harmonic. This technique is mostly used in static form, often to adorn a chord or set of chords (as in the music of Tommy Emmanuel). The most vocal-like type is by far the pinched harmonic, which is a type of artificial harmonic where the right-hand thumb picks up the attack of the plectrum, annulling the original fretted note and replacing it with an overtone. Moving the position where the plectrum attacks the strings creates different overtones. Zakk Wylde uses this technique on most of his solos and riff work. Finally, harmonics in conjunction with trilling can be used to produce a proper spectral glide. This is achieved by quickly alternating between two notes on the same string (a trill) while lightly touching the string with the right hand in specific places so that the harmonics become audible. While the overall effect is of a spectral glide, as opposed to perceiving the harmonics as by-products of a pitch, the overtones become central. Again, this changes the vowel quality of the notes, producing a similar sound to a wah pedal.

Each of the elements discussed throughout this chapter coalesce to form vocality (fig. c) and the instrumental persona. Neal (2018) describes how the placement of the pick, the pick’s width, the angle of attack, the placement of the finger on the fretboard, the sympathetic resonance of other strings and guitar parts, all combine with various other factors (such as amp setting or effects) to determine the final tone of a pitch. Since there are so many variables involved, there is much room for individual, unique manipulation of one or multiple parameters. And I stress uniqueness here, as it is arguably the crucial factor in the discourse of my case studies. On this note, Théberge (1997) observes the shift from musicians discussing their pursuit for a unique sound to the way older generations of musicians talked about creating a unique style of composing or playing. Sound now encompasses everything from the composition itself to
specific phrasings and actual timbres used by artists to create their personae. However, as Waksman (2018) notes, a unique sound is less about the sound itself and more about what the artist does with it. Nonetheless, especially in instrumental rock music, the actual “timbre of the voice [or guitar, in this case] is the mark of distinction” (Samples 2018, 130), further showing how important distinctiveness is in popular music. The following section will fuse all of these various threads and present a model that will be used in the analyses of Chapter III.

![Diagram]

fig. c
CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

After exploring the literature on persona, vocality, the guitar, and their relationship to instrumental rock expression, I will now proceed to presenting the how of the subsequent analysis. As I mentioned in the introduction, the analysis will be twofold, focusing on both music and discourse. I will first touch on my case studies, the rationale for choosing them, and talk about the track selection. I then delve deeper into the means used to analyse the four guitarists’ music. Finally, I will present the framework for analysing their discourse on issues of expression and persona. My endeavour is both inductive and deductive, as I base my assumptions on previous knowledge and theories but I also aim to contribute to theory development.

Qualitative analysis has been prioritized over quantitative. I limit my detailed descriptions to three representative tracks for each guitarist (detailed below), providing terser observations on many more. These analyses do not function as exhaustive descriptions of the music in question and must be read in conjunction with listening to the actual recordings. The vignette-style investigation of individual tracks is used to highlight key common elements that help create each guitarist’s persona. The discussion aims to inform the reader on how the features presented in the individual guitarist breakdowns that open each sub章 are utilized in specific cases rather than in an abstract synthesis or general survey. While the persona has a historical dimension, the thesis focuses on these four players as case studies in persona-formation. I am not interested in presenting an exhaustive account of Steve Vai’s persona, for instance. Rather, my interest lies in how he constructs his persona and how this relates to the other three personae and the player’s discourse on issues of persona and expressivity. The aim of the thesis is to provide an approach, a tool for analysing other guitarists and, perhaps, other instrumental music genres as well.

Maintaining the same focus throughout these four analyses makes for a consistent and logical read, but it does not make for a very engaging one. Nonetheless, I shall not surrender to complete chaos, and will use vocality as the glue that holds everything together. One could be tempted to consider vocality a default trait which every guitarist achieves, but I think the unique variation in each guitarist’s tone is enough to distinguish between them, in the same way as the timbre of a singer separates him/her from any other, even though all share the capacity to sing. While each case study will follow a similar narrative, the aim will be to show what is distinctive about a given case study and how each of them contributes to the argument in unique ways.
Case studies

The reasons for choosing Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Guthrie Govan specifically are: (1) guitar music is the focus of their entire output; (2) they have their own compositional and stylistic idiosyncrasies, and are not perceived as part of a band (as is the case for guitarists such as Brian May of Queen, for instance); (3) they are technically accomplished, virtuoso performers; (4) they are acknowledged as such by listeners and professionals alike, in guitarists polls – such as Ranker (n.d), The Top Tens (n.d.), or Guitar World (2015) – or fan postings (even an innocuous Google search of “top guitarists” reveals their names – https://goo.gl/AFiaxG); (5) they have been extremely influential for electric guitar playing, pioneering techniques and modes of playing that have inspired hordes of followers, each of them still releasing music that pushes the boundaries of virtuosity; (6) they have all shared the stage on the G3 series of tours, a benchmark in electric guitar playing performances for the past twenty years. Finally, I cannot ignore the personal factor in choosing these players over others. Given that this project took close to four years to complete, having to listen intensely to music that I actually enjoy was an important factor in my decision.

I opted to only analyse music that was featured on each of the four guitarists’ standard studio releases, as these are the versions most people will be accustomed to (thus excluding deluxe, special, or regional editions). I also used standard live albums to analyse tracks with no studio version - such as Vai’s ‘I’m Becoming’, appearing on Sound Theories (2007) - as well as regular live albums for studio-live comparisons (particularly for Joe Satriani). For Steve Vai, I cover from Flex-Able (1984) to Modern Primitive (2016); for Satriani, from Not of This Earth (1986) to What Happens Next (2018); for Malmsteen, from Rising Force (1984) to World on Fire (2016). For Govan, given his years as a studio and gigging musician, I also include albums that he has performed on, such as Steven Wilson’s Hand. Cannot. Erase. (2015), alongside his Erotic Cakes (2006) and the albums released with The Aristocrats, from The Aristocrats (2011) to Tres Caballeros (2015).

The different aspects of recording (overdubs, sound manipulation etc.) make a track “something quite distinct, both conceptually and practically, from a recording of a live performance” (Zak 2001, 34-35). As Zak (2001, 12) argues, (instrumental) rock is “first and foremost a recorded music”. While the focus throughout will be on an artist’s studio output, I will not exclude live performances, as they offer a way of examining the relationship of
live/recording processes in the construction of persona. I will focus on live recordings more for Satriani than for the other three case studies. To date, he has released four (Live in San Francisco (2001), Satriani Live! (2006), Live in Paris: I Just Wanna Rock (2010), Satchurated: Live in Montreal (2012)), or seven if we include the G3 recordings (G3: Live in Concert (1997), G3: Rockin’ in the Free World (2003), G3: Live in Tokyo, 2005), more than the other three.\(^3\) Satriani’s releases are particularly valuable for my analyses, as they feature most of the same setlists. While the musicians themselves have changed from one release to another, observing what has remained constant and where differences lay between the studio and the live performance will help uncover where the real Satriani lies, so to speak.

Of course, using live recordings has both its pros and cons. While I do agree with Frith (2015) that “the pleasures of live music are more immediate, more visceral” than just clinically comparing it to an original recording that is not there, I think the nature of the persona in instrumental music requires a holistic, historical perspective of the listening experience. This instrumental music by personalities benefits from comparing the studio versions to the live versions, as the two quite different mediums force the musicians to approach their music in equally diverse ways. As Frith (2015) notes, live performances are more than mere reproductions of recordings,\(^3\) so comparing studio recordings to live performances of a track not only sheds light on the diverse factors that come together to create the studio version (from the overarching persona to the multitude of protagonists, sound-box placements, and other mixing gestures). It also helps expose a distinct set of issues, in contrast with those discussed in the studio analyses.

In terms of track selection, each analytical case study will be thematic and address one of the threads from the theoretical model. The three tracks for each vignette analysis were selected to fit the theme of each sub-chapter. The three Steve Vai tracks all relate to vocality: ‘I’m Becoming’ (2007), ‘Fever Dream’ (1999), and ‘Freak Show Excess’ (2005); the Satriani tracks deal with the difference between an individual and a band persona: ‘Midnight’ (1987), ‘Borg Sex’ (2000), ‘Searching’ (2004); the Malmsteen tracks deal with the consolidation of a composer persona: ‘Black Star’ (1984), ‘Molto Arpeggiosa’ (2000), ‘Look at You Now’ (2010); and the Govan tracks deal with heterogeneity and chameleonism: ‘Boing!... I’m in the Back’ (2011),

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\(^3\) I do not consider records such as Malmsteen’s Concerto (1998) or Vai’s Sound Theories (2007), for instance, as these feature orchestras and mostly new music (which is also the reason for not counting Vai’s Alive in an Ultra World (2001) either).

\(^3\) Even when not analysing live versions, my investigation should be read with an awareness that such versions exist.

**Musical analysis**

A key issue that needs to be addressed before any type of analysis can take place is *listening*. I adopt Dockwray and Moore’s (2010) method and will analyse the music primarily by listening through headphones, mainly because listening through headphones creates “a private acoustic space” (Schafer 2006, 35) in which all the real-life environmental sounds are removed, leading to a “consistency in listening conditions” (Dockwray and Moore 2010). Headphones also enable the listener to perceive the stereo image more clearly, guiding him/her in perceiving locations in the sound-box more precisely, as opposed to listening through speakers and “interact[ing] with a playback environment”, as Moylan (2007, 23) points out. Of course, every pair of headphones has a different frequency response and other characteristics that can colour the sound in many ways, which is why I have used a variety of them to listen to each track, from high-end studio headphones to consumer earbuds.

While I briefly discuss the ‘written’ element of their music (modes, meters etc.), I will focus on the way the instrumental persona is constructed from the perspective of the sound itself (processing, the quality of the sounds themselves etc.). Consequently, as eager readers sifting through the thesis might notice, scores are missing throughout the entire analysis. The rationale for omitting them is not fear of litigation, an issue which hinders many YouTube pop, rock, and jazz analyses - Beato (2017) or Neely (2017) -, however. My particular brand of persona analysis focuses on the sound of the guitar (along with the other instruments found on a record), and not on issues surrounding harmonic movement or melodic contours. While I do on rare occasion refer to melharmonic characteristics to provide context for each guitar player’s strand of instrumental rock, my concern throughout is with the way these guitarists construct their personae on a sonic level.38 How they create their tone, how they process their guitar, what equipment they use, and what production techniques they prefer are all questions that can be

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38 This ties in with the idea that probably the most overlooked factors in rock are the timbral and production values of recordings (Walser 1993, Zak 2001, Frith and Zagorski-Thomas 2012).
answered by looking solely at the recording itself, at the ‘primary text’ (Moore 2001). Furthermore, even though Vai or Satriani’s music is mostly clearly composed, they rarely use notation themselves, some even having a limited understanding of it, as is the case for Malmsteen (Rosenthal 2013). I am confident that readers will be able to navigate the analyses by listening to the track, which is why I provide CD times for all analysis points.

Not relying on scores allows for a more focused exploration of specific guitar phrasings and techniques, and various electronic means to manipulate the sound, trying to pinpoint what defines their electronic persona. Instrument gear, recording technology, elements of the recording process (overdubbing, sampling, etc.), all will be looked at and analysed to uncover their relationship with the persona that they help create. Each section will follow a similar pattern as a starting point. I shall discuss quintessential elements of each guitarist’s persona, features that distinguish them from any other guitar player. Since I do not linger too much on the classical musicological elements of analysis (modes, harmonic structures, meters etc.), my analysis will offer potential answers to a separate set of questions than those commonly posed by musical analyses.

The analysis aims to address production issues such as sound-box configuration (is the persona static in the sound-box? does it move throughout the track? are there more personae positioned in different points in the sound-box? is the persona doubletracked, triple-tracked etc.?), volume modifications (is the persona at the same volume throughout the track?), and textural matters (how is the texture constructed? does the texture change throughout the track?). It also focuses on a series of essential issues (first explored by Moore 2012), such as the relationship between the persona and issues of proxemics, the fictional/realist protagonist, and the relationship between the guitar persona and the ‘background’, what Moore calls the ‘environment’ of a track. This process will be aided by detailed tables that point the reader to important moments in a track and guide him/her through each piece’s structure, section duration, environment description, proxemic zone, protagonists and their placement in the sound-box. These various musical factors coalesce to create the electronic persona, and each brings a nuance that helps paint a clear picture of each individual guitarist’s persona.

39 As Zak (2001, 63) notes, while rock tracks often feature unusual melodies, harmonies, and meters, it is “the vast and ever increasing” range of possible sounds that sets rock apart from other types of music.
40 This model is derived from Zak’s (2001, 49) five categories which “represent all of the sound phenomena found on records: 1) musical performance, 2) timbre, 3) echo, 4) ambience (reverberation), and 5) texture”.

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I will also look at how the use of common (EQ, compression, reverb, delay) and creative mixing techniques (automation, saturation, panning etc.) affect the way the persona is perceived. For this type of analysis, Cockos Reaper has been used as a DAW, with various native and third-party VSTs (from FabFilter and iZotope) being utilized for the analysis of stereo spread, volume, compression level, EQ etc. Where available, multitrack stems were also consulted, in order to better isolate particular guitar or other instrumental parts. The difference between a guitar sound featuring heavy reverb and one that is completely dry can completely alter the meaning of a melodic line and alter its expressive potential, which is why these technologies were crucial for certain parts of the analysis. Equally important was the analysis of phrasing and techniques, for similar reasons. Particularly in terms of expression, a D note on the G string that is bended up a whole step to an E and vibrated slowly will be much more expressive (perhaps because of the parallel with vocal production) that the same note played as an open string. Besides the many years of teaching guitar and performing with various rock bands that have equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary to approach techniques and phrasings such as bending, tapping, grace notes, slides etc., I have also used the time stretch function in Reaper to look at virtuosic passages in detail and address issues that would otherwise have remained hidden. This exploration of techniques and phrasing will be preponderantly used in the discussion on vocality. I now move on to describing the model and framework for persona-analysis that will be used in every subsequent musical analysis.

**Instrumental rock persona model**

In vocal music, due to the prominence of the vocal strand and the standard centre-stage placement in the sound-box, we will view the voice as the principal character. But what happens in a strictly instrumental setting? Is the lead instrumental line being accompanied by the other instruments now? Has it taken the place of the vocals of a song, as the central figure around which the rest of the track revolves? This relationship between figure and background needs to be reassessed. Sometimes, vital details of a scene are found in the background. I shall make a parallel with film here and take scene from Scorsese’s *Goodfellas* (1990) as an example, the famous ‘Copacabana’ tracking shot.\(^4\) While the shot does not feature an extremely deep focus, it is not an extremely shallow focus either. Most elements are in focus, which disorients the viewer,

\(^4\) Can be viewed on YouTube by following this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBMKyJjvNV8.
to some extent, as it is all too tempting to focus on the background and what the secondary characters are doing rather than pay attention to Ray Liota and Lorraine Bracco’s characters. When watching the scene, one can choose to focus on the two central characters (and go even deeper and concentrate either on their clothes, hands, hairstyles, dialogue etc.), on the various rooms they pass through, on the reactions of and interactions with the various supporting characters that dwell in each room, and so on. It is true, however, that there is a major difference between what we perceive at the first glimpse and what we perceive once we get more acquainted with the scene, which is why shots such as this one reward multiple viewings. The reason for departing from Tagg’s (1979) model is that the possibility of choice arises rather quickly in the case of a painting, due to the lack of a temporal strand, whereas in music, even though one might get a good idea of what the song is ‘about’ from the first bars (the texture, in particular – as Walser 1993 notes), to get a definite picture, listening to the full song is generally required.

If we are familiar with a piece of music, we can, in a similar fashion, choose what to focus on. Even less astute listeners will tend to concentrate on one feature at a time, most probably the vocal line, paying little attention to what is going on in the background, in the same way as a film viewer might focus on the person speaking in a monologue rather than on the wallpaper in room of the shot. Listening to instrumental music arguably requires more (musical) training on the part of the listener and this leads me to suppose that he/she will not be so oblivious to whatever else is going on in the music. Due to my own musical training, I often find myself breaking down songs into as many fragments as possible. However, I cannot pay (the same) attention to all these pieces at the same time. I constantly find myself jumping from one instrument to another in the hopes of perceiving the unity, but I am never able to do it perfectly. This does not mean that every listener will experience music the same way, but, in my case, it makes me aware of each instrument’s presence, which is helpful here.

Assuming we do not know whether a certain guitar player is also a proficient drummer, we would have to suppose that it was not the same person who recorded the drums, as we imagine he/she is only in charge of the guitars. The same applies to the other instruments. Although it can be argued that the artist composed every note and hit, and recorded the lead guitar, the rhythm guitars, the bass, the drums, or other instruments, it would have been impossible to play everything at the same time. Consequently, we cannot hear the music as the result of a single
persona. This creates a certain awareness that each instrument is played by a different musician. Thus, the music is experienced not as if an individual is pitted against a background, but more as if many individuals are playing at the same time, with any of them having the potentiality for becoming central, regardless of their placement in the sound-box.

We are constantly aware that there are multiple musicians (or at least instruments) interacting during a performance (recorded or not), each creating a unique persona. Thus, when we interact with an instrumental rock track, we interact with a conversation, so to speak, between multiple personae, and one can choose who to pay attention to in this cacophony of personae. It is true that in some instances such as sections containing massed strings or other extremely thick textures, one would not have the same degree of choice. However, these latter scenarios are less common in rock, so I will take the former as being the norm. Moreover, if a track features multiple parts, each being either too complex or featuring a very dense texture, the live environment usually exposes the key elements of a piece. For instance, what happens if there are multiple guitars playing at the same time? The best solution seems to be constantly comparing studio recordings to live recordings. Since rock is, as Moore (2001, 4) notes, “both a recorded and a live music”, although my focus will be on the former, I will also consider the latter, as there are cases where the live version of a track offers illuminating insights into the persona. Even if a track on an album has not been performed live, it is highly unlikely that no track has been performed live. Studio albums usually feature the same sound throughout (as studio practice dictates the use of a setting on more than one section/song, at least for the backbones of the track – Zak 2001), and if a single piece from an album has been performed, one can get a decent idea of how the other ones would have sounded.

This instrumental conversation could also refer to rhetorical analysis, to the way in which conversations sound differently in musical terms per the relationship, situation and purposes of the speakers. Conversation can be about seduction and selling things, or cheering someone up, sympathizing and consoling, can involve being angry with someone, agreeing or disagreeing with them, etc. Such rhetorical use of voice conveys what is at stake through tone, rhythm, pitch, volume, etc., rather than through the actual words (in everyday conversation the rhetorical sound is probably a better indicator of the nature of the conversation than the words being spoken). In general terms, though, this is often how instrumental music is heard as conversation, and I shall develop these ideas in the latter section of this chapter.
For now, I focus on how these personae are constructed. I use Frith’s and Moore’s models as the basis for the discussion below (fig. 4, my own illustration). First, we are aware that each individual instrument is played by a real person, an individual with a discernible biography.\footnote{It is true, however, that in some cases instruments are performed by machines/computers. The arpeggios from Muse’s ‘Take a Bow’ (2006) or ‘Starlight’ (2006) - the intro and at 1:27, respectively - are even in a live setting played as samples, as pre-recorded parts. Nonetheless, even in such instances, we are still prone to attribute those parts to a real human player. In our minds, we rationalize that someone must have triggered the sample or programmed the computer to play the respective parts. We might not be aware of who the person is, but it is rather hard for us to imagine that a sentient artificial intelligence was behind it.} We know that Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Guthrie Govan are real people who you could potentially meet on the street (although, of course, you would interact with a persona, even in that case). Secondly, the sonic illusion Moore (2012) describes (his persona-proper) can easily be constructed in an instrumental setting as well. The natural sound of the guitar (or any other instrument, for that matter) is recorded through a microphone, and the signal passes through at least a pre-amp before being recorded. Consequently, we do not (and cannot) have access to the actual sound coming out of the amp in the recording room, based solely on a recording. Unless we are in front of the amp ourselves, we are left only with the illusion of the real sound. This recorded sound is what people usually refer to as tone, a key issue in understanding each guitar player’s persona.

Carlos Santana describes his and Eric Clapton’s tones as “female sounds”, contrasting them with Stevie Ray Vaughan’s “male sound”, arguing that “overtones are what give you one sound or the other” (Latour 2018, 222-223).\footnote{This gender tension between Clapton and Santana’s male identity and the way they discuss their ‘woman tones’ is fascinating, but falls outside the scope of this dissertation.} However, the construction of this tone is complex, as it represents a combination of timbre (resulting from equipment) and phrasing (resulting from each player’s approach to techniques, from right-hand attack to legato and tapping, and so on). Guitarists’ tone changes throughout the years (an issue which is common to vocalists as well, as the voice changes with age) without them losing their identity. While it is far more common to talk about the tone of the violin rather than the tone of Yehudi Menuhin or Maxim Vengerov, it is quite common to hear about Brian May’s or Carlos Santana’s tone. As Guthrie Govan notes, “trying to get a good tone, trying to get a range of good tones, having some sort of control over the nuances of every note you play” is “how you kinda project your personality as a player” (Govan 2017). There are at least three factors to consider in the creation of this tone: equipment/gear, technique, and phrasing.
One can find numerous rig rundowns online where guitar players describe the gear and setup they use to create the various sounds that we hear on recordings or live performances. There are three stages to pass through until sound comes out of an amp. The first stage is, obviously, the guitar itself. Different combinations of woods, pickups, and other components such as tremolo systems or sustainers create different nuances in the resulting sound. (The pickup selector is probably the most important out of these, as the bridge pickup generates a completely different sound from the neck pickup). Before the signal reaches the amplifier (and how this happens, i.e. cables/wireless systems, also affects the quality of the sound), it gets, in this second stage, processed through effects pedals and other rack-mount units (ranging from phasers, delays, tremolos to pitch shifters and wah-wahs). The third stage is the amp itself, which usually has two (clean and distorted) or three (clean, distorted, and overdriven) channels. Here, multiple factors (tubes, EQs, amp reverb) interact to create the finished tone. The sound that we hear, even in a live situation, passes through a microphone, mixer, and PA before reaching our ears, so we never get to hear the real tone of a guitarist.

Technique-wise, most virtuosos use an entire range of guitar pyrotechnics when performing and recording. They will have mastered techniques such as legato, alternate-picking, tapping, string-skipping etc. Beyond this point it is a matter of preference what technique is used preponderantly, either as a main trait or just used in a track or sections of a track to create a certain mood. With techniques such as legato we enter the realm of phrasing, as legato could be both a technique and a way of articulating a musical passage. It is here where both Frith (1996) and Barthes’ (Barthes and Heath 2009) remarks on the sounds/noises around the words become vital, and I shall analyse these ‘prosodic’ features in depth in the concluding section of this chapter.

The final element in instrumental persona construction is derived from Moore and Frith’s third layer, where the vocal protagonist now becomes an instrumental protagonist. Most guitar players tend to use additional processing on specific tracks, from light delay and reverb to massive amounts of phasing, distortion, pitch-shifting and even guitar-synth fusions. The resulting sound does not really have an identity outside of a specific track, or even outside of a specific section of a track. I share Moore’s (2012) belief that one should not necessarily

44 Vai (2012); Satriani (2011); Malmsteen (2011); Johnson (2011); Govan (2011); and the list can go on.
45 The sound can, however, bypass the effects or just go straight into the amp.
46 Although these timbral qualities could be applied to vocal music as well (as in the bridge section (2:50) from Bon
concentrate on full songs (not to mention full albums) because often these are not unified entities to start with (nor are they perceived as such, for the most part), but are actually formed of non-unifying musical ideas, sometimes even contradictory ones. Moreover, I disagree with Auslander (2009), who argues that what he calls ‘the character’ (the song personality of Frith’s model) is an optional element of the persona, because that would imply a breaking of the barriers between the stars themselves and the personae that they project in each track. No matter how close the distance between protagonist, persona, and real person, they are never coextensive, they are never unified. Even though the voice might provide an element of stability (which, in turn, might create the illusion of unity), these layers of personae do not obey the same rules. Particularly in instrumental music, there can be multiple personae present (each instrument creating a distinct one), and multiple protagonists of the same instrument, the latter which could be interpreted as either a non-unitary protagonist or literally more than one protagonist in any given piece of music. Consequently, I argue that the best way of approaching personae and protagonists is through the notion of a non-unitary persona, of a fractured persona. Even though the tone of a guitar player might provide an element of stability (so that we are constantly aware that it is Vai or Satriani who is playing), episodic instrumental protagonists do not obey the same rules. The persona can be fractured, made up of multiple protagonists (based on deviations from the main sound). I return to these issues in the final section of this chapter, in my discussion of unity.

I shall give a short example to show the viability, ramifications and inner workings of my model. In Jeff Beck’s ‘Blast from the East’ (1999) we encounter the three layers of the persona. (1) Real person: We know Jeff Beck is a real person, with a discernible biography. He was born Geoffrey Arnold Beck in Wallington, England, on June 24, 1944 (Beck and Editors 2015). Of course, this layer of his persona does not concern me, as I cannot know Beck the person. (2) Persona-proper: While Jeff Beck’s sound and music have changed throughout the years, some

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Jovi’s ‘If That’s What It Takes’, 1995), I believe them to be more relevant in instrumental music, as it is the sound itself which assumes central position in a wordless medium.
elements remained constant. One of the most important ones is his guitar, which has been a custom Fender Stratocaster with custom noiseless single-coil pickups, a guitar that he plays almost exclusively (Prior 2008a) since 1993 (Prior 2015). As for amps, regardless of the model he uses (currently a Marshall JTM 45 Plexi), the main distinguishing feature is the fact that he turns the bass all the way down, shaping his tone from the mid, treble, and presence controls on the amplifier, with most of the fine tuning being done with the tone knobs on the guitar itself (Prior 2008b). The sound of the JTM is not overtly distorted, which is why Beck also uses a Klon distortion pedal to get more sustain and attack out of the notes. It is this tone that I dub Jeff Beck’s standard tone. (3) Track protagonist(s): In his ‘Blast from the East’ (1999), there are at least three different protagonists interacting during the track. The piece starts with an acoustic guitar (protagonist 1 - P1), followed by a doubletracked modified version of his standard tone at 0:09 (P2), in the sense that stereo delay was added to the sound of P1. The third and final protagonist is another variation of his standard tone, but this time it features heavy reverberation and slap-back delay (0:41). Throughout Beck’s repertoire it is easy to find tracks which feature different protagonists, such as the wah-wah version of his standard tone in ‘Trouble Man’ (2003) or the more esoteric and distant tone of pieces such as ‘Nadia’ (2001) or ‘Where Were You’ (1989), as well as the highly processed (heavy amount of reverb and delay) clean tone on ‘Suspension’ (2001). I now move to exploring the methodology that will take the various factors discussed so far and apply them to the analysis of instrumental rock.

**Discourse analysis**

The second layer of the investigation will consist of interview analysis. As I agree wholeheartedly with Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954) in their assessment of the intentional fallacy, I do not intend to use the artist’s comments on their work as authoritative in any way, because “musical works can express emotions independently of the occurrent emotional states of their performers or composers” (Cochrane 2008, 329). Nor do I intend to focus on fans online blog and fan-forum postings unless fan interpretation is unavoidable and essential to the points I make. (I only do this once throughout the dissertation, in a questionnaire discussed later on, mainly to see if the notion of the persona is something fans think about when listening to any of the four guitarists’ music.) I do believe, however, that looking at how the artists themselves think about the issues and suggestions that I raise is beneficial. I need to stress the fact that this is not
necessarily to assume intentionality but, rather, to see how close or far apart artist and analyst may be. For example, what sort of gap is there between how these musicians see themselves and present themselves as music makers? Do they see music as self-expressive? Do they see their music as involving constructed personae? Are ideas of uniqueness, vocality, or compositional practices integral to their understanding of musicmaking? The interview data is not a form of verification of my analytic findings. If there is no gap between the analyses and these artists’ philosophy on expressivity, then the discourse analysis provides an alternative source of information about expressivity to which the persona approach can be compared. If, on the other hand, there is a considerable deference between the results of the musical investigation and their thoughts on the matter, then the research becomes that much more relevant. I will return to these issues more in depth in the analyst-artist contradictions section of the thesis’ conclusions, but for now I only mention that any differences found only bring extra layers of meaning to the relationship between expression and persona, as these divergent threads each bring a different set of characteristics to the fore when dealing with purely instrumental music.

Essentially, this section acts as a form of discourse analysis, for a lack of a better term. I do not use this segment of my thesis to address the “semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak 2011, 357). I reference critical discourse analysis as it is arguably the most pervasive of the many genres of discourse analysis. While these analyses are presented under the banner of discourse analysis, I need to stress what I do not use it for. analysing the “complex area of practice” (Fairclough 1995, 185) known as discourse analysis helps uncover how “social knowledge and social reality are produced, reproduced, and transformed through a variety of speech genres, mediated by a variety of communications technologies” (Androutsopoulos 2009, 43). I do not use this term to refer to the type of analysis that deals with dimensions of power or injustice etc. (Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak 2011, 357), regardless of how pervasive and persuasive it is as a genre of discourse analysis.

As Dijk (2011, 2) notes, discourse analysis “combines the study of language use, verbal interaction, conversation, texts, multimodal messages and communicative events” and it can “range from formal analyses of abstract sentence (...) to laboratory studies of cognitive processes or mental representations”. What I want to uncover has no relationship with language use or social interaction. It has more to do with information processing, in the sense that I am
literally only interested in the information, the idea that the guitarist expresses, so I can contrast their views with the musical analyses. I will be using excerpts from a multitude of audio or video interviews (websites, online magazines, YouTube and similar platforms) to see how these guitarists relate (if at all) with the notion of the persona, how they present themselves as musicians, and what their account of expression can reveal about their music.

This second section of my analysis functions as an alternative source of information about expressivity and the persona. I believe that looking at how the artists themselves think about expression is beneficial and complements my musical analytical work. As Atkinson (2006, 164) notes, the dual identity of an artist (being at the same time both performer and real person) lends itself well to analysing the relationship between what they do onstage and in the studio and what they themselves say about these practices.

To address these issues, I have watched, listened to, and read numerous interviews with each guitarist (see bibliography for a complete list). At the time of writing the final draft of this thesis, Google/YouTube searching each of the guitarists’ names followed by “interview” produces the following results: Steve Vai - 450,000 on Google and 165,000 on YouTube; Joe Satriani - 348,000 on Google and 66,700 on YouTube; Yngwie Malmsteen - 223,000 on Google and 55,900 on YouTube; and Guthrie Govan - 89,800 on Google and 43,600 on YouTube.47 Not all entries were consulted, mainly because of the sheer volume of interview material available. Nonetheless, common patterns emerged early on and were confirmed in subsequent interviews, mainly due to the nature of the questions asked. Interviewers approached similar topics in similar ways, so I aggregated the responses. Of course, the answers that the guitarists gave to some of the questions occasionally changed throughout their decades-long careers (this could be a research topic itself). There were contradictions in how they discussed certain topics, even when the time-frame was not very long, and I will address the implication of these contradictions on a case by case basis, should the situation require it.

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47 There is a considerable difference between these numbers. However, in the case of Satriani, it should come as no surprise, because he admits on more than one occasion that he does not enjoy sitting interviews (Satriani 2011b). Surprisingly, Malmsteen’s number of entries is considerably lower than Vai’s and even Satriani’s, even though he has been part of the music business for as long the two. This could be due to Malmsteen’s nature, as he notes that he prefers playing live to sitting interviews, arguing that he is less “comfortable” in the later scenario (Malmsteen 2015d). His relationship with the press in general could be the main reason, however, as I will explore in the dedicated Malmsteen subchapter. Finally, Govan’s entries are considerably lower than those for the other three, but this again is to be expected, as Govan (44) is nine, twelve, and sixteen years younger than Malmsteen (53), Vai (56), and Satriani (60) respectively, and has only in the past ten years become a household name in the guitar community.
A note on the problems of using interview material is warranted here. For instance, Steve Vai himself admits that his relationship with the press is a calculated one. He stresses the fact that one of the lessons he learned early on in his career was “how to conduct [him]self in the press”, because “the press takes what you say and they filer it through their own mind and then edit it and put it out there” (Vai 2012j). Accordingly, he argues that one should “be pretty unequivocal when (...) say[ing] things” (Vai 2012j). Furthermore, he is clearly aware what the press is saying about him as a person, as a guitarist, and as an entertainer. For instance, when discussing the reasons for choosing the name of the track ‘Freak Show Excess’, he recalls reading a review of one of his shows (written by a journalist who apparently left two tracks into the set). In it, the author was “shredding me”, but “I liked the phrase [that he used as the headline of the article], [s]o I decided to use that title for a song” (Vai 2005c). Judging by the consistency of his music (in terms of general sound and underlying musical material), the media does not have a strong effect on his musical output. However, it does influence how he wants to be perceived by the media and his audience. Consequently, all the previous and following statements made by any of the four guitarists need to be seen through this auto-imposed filter.

A good example of this would be the spiritual attitude that Vai adopts. He often discusses reading books on metaphysics, spirituality, and religion (Vai 2013d), particularly in his early teens (Vai 2015b). He also practices meditation (going on retreats at Buddhist monasteries - Vai 2013) and claims to meditate before going on stage (Vai 2012g). He practices meditation and inquires into the nature of the mind is because of the “wars that rage between my ego and my spiritual desires” (Vai 2011a). He even claims that “[a]t the time that I was recording ‘For the Love of God’ I was in the middle of [a] 10-day fast” (Vai n.d.1). The truth claim is of no interest to this section of my analysis, and I flag such statements only to highlight the fact that they are part of the public discourse surrounding these guitarists, while acknowledging the calculated relationship with the press. It is here where Atkinson’s (2006, 161) notion of “autobiographical performances” becomes useful. He argues that such interviews will automatically bring fourth narratives that represent “performed identities” (Atkinson 2006, 161) which bring the artist “into being through a performance of the self” (163). Of course, this does not mean that such accounts are false, but that they are highly personal and subjective. Consequently, “a certain degree of caution and rigour” is needed when discussing interview-derived data (Atkinson 2006, 161), and all the following statements made by the four guitarists should be viewed accordingly.
This chapter presented the various tools for analysing the persona in instrumental rock. As I previously mentioned, the following one (Chapter III) will explore how the instrumental rock persona is constructed at the sonic level (where I will use the model I have developed), while Chapter IV will focus on the artists’ discourse on issues of expression, vocality, and persona. I now move to putting all of these methods to good use in analysing the music of Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Guthrie Govan.
CHAPTER III: MUSICAL ANALYSIS

III.1 The unifying voice: Steve Vai

Shredder is a common term used to describe modern guitar heroes, and Steve Vai has not been a stranger to the adjective. His technical prowess is sometimes seen as the endgame, but, as Vai himself suggests, “to actually make something speak, with articulation, is a very different thing” (Vai 2008). While vocality is a key element of the guitar persona, I argue that this notion is precisely what separates Vai from his peers. He uses a plethora of techniques and effects pedals to simulate speech, but I shall focus on two distinct ones which I feel are quintessential to Vai’s general approach to guitar playing. The imitation of the human voice has been a common trope in Steve Vai’s music ever since his early years working as a guitarist in Frank Zappa’s band, and represents the element that unifies the various seemingly heterogeneous strands of Vai’s work.

It is worth mentioning that the voice has a multidimensional aspect, particularly from a listener’s perspective. It can act as a sound, as an indicator of emotion/personality, as a bodily performance, as a carrier of words, semantic meaning etc. Of course, in talking about the voice of instrumental music, not all these aspects are relevant, and I shall only focus on the first two. Vai’s humanization of the guitar can be divided into two basic approaches. The first one deals with instances in which the guitar-lines stand in for a voice. Here, the guitar-persona can (1) act as a human voice, as the protagonist of a monologue (as in the entire ‘Yai Yai’ (2005) or the intro to ‘Kill the Guy with the Ball’, 1995), (2) act as a protagonist in a dialogue with a human voice (as in the intro to ‘The Audience is Listening’ (1990), the entire ‘Ya-Yo Gakk’ (1995), or the intro to David Lee Roth’s ‘Yankee Rose’, 1986), or (3) act as a unison in a duet with a human voice (as in ‘So Happy’ (1984), ‘The Jazz Discharge Party Hats’ (1983), ‘The Dangerous Kitchen’ (1983), or ‘Ooooo’, where both the voice and vocal lines ‘vocalize’ rather than utter particular words). The second instance has more to do with his general approach to musicmaking, in the sense that vocalization is an integral part of his overall sound, and it is achieved through distinctive takes on standard guitar techniques and effects pedals. However, before proceeding to dissect the many ways he achieves this vocality, some general musicological and technological observations on his music are warranted.
Regarding the melharmonic fabric, Vai is a modal player, using the diatonic lydian, dorian, and the standard Ionian (major) and Aeolian (minor) preponderantly, along with ‘exotic’ modes\textsuperscript{48} such as the chromatic 1,\textsuperscript{49} the chromatic 2,\textsuperscript{50} acoustic 1,\textsuperscript{51} and acoustic 2.\textsuperscript{52} While most of his tracks are in 4/4, very few stick to any specific meter for their entire duration, with Vai often incorporating odd meters even in his even-metered tracks. Finally, the influence of Frank Zappa and Eastern European folk music are the strongest, which is to be expected given the above mentioned musical features.

Sound-wise, Vai either uses his signature ‘EVO’ Ibanez JEM guitar or other Ibanez JEM models, as well as his custom Carvin Legacy amps (after a stint with Bogner in the 90s) almost religiously. Both pieces of gear remained constant throughout his career and, consequently, are the key features of Vai’s tone, giving it a historical dimension as well. The result of the JEM-Legacy/JEM-Bogner fusion is what I dub Vai’s standard tone (fig. d). However, the standard tone takes on two facets, as the setup can generate both a clean and a distorted sound. Granted, Vai mostly uses the distorted tone but this does not mean that his musical persona is represented by this sound alone. This standard tone is accompanied by at least two others. Acoustic guitars are a common occurrence in Steve Vai’s music, and these are usually found unprocessed, recorded with their natural sound in both studio and live settings. Moreover, Vai also occasionally uses the Jerry Jones Master electric sitar. I dub these four different sounds as main protagonists of Vai’s persona, because they appear (unaltered, to some extent) on most of his recordings. This carries the implication that there are also secondary protagonists to be found in Vai’s music; and there are. These secondary protagonists derive from the four main ones, but it only habitually happens as a derivation from Vai’s distorted standard tone. Here, there are at least two secondary protagonists, described using the Digitech Whammy and his signature Morley ‘Bad Horsie’ wah pedal, respectively. Last, but certainly not least, there are also episodic protagonists that do not appear constantly throughout his music, some of which being heard only on a single track. The second section of this chapter provides analyses of three representative tracks from Vai’s repertoire in which all the above characteristics will be explored and expanded.

\textsuperscript{48} I utilize Gheorghe Ciobanu’s classification, taken from Ripă (2001, 371).
\textsuperscript{49} 1, 2, b3, #4, 5, 6 (b6), b7.
\textsuperscript{50} 1, b2, 3, 4, 5, b6, b7.
\textsuperscript{51} 1, 2, 3, #4, 5, 6, b7.
\textsuperscript{52} 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, b6, b7.
upon. The analyses also bring to the fore implications for understanding vocality in the music of Steve Vai.

**Vocality: Substitution and imitation**

I have already signalled the use of the Eventide Electronic DSP 4000 effects-processor to modulate the vowel quality of each long note in ‘Yai Yai’, sweeping through the frequency range and generating an ‘i’-’e’-’a’-’i’ pattern. There is a single guitar-persona in ‘Yai Yai’ (2005), one that seems to infiltrate into the realm of human speech, as a form of artificial intelligence (particularly if we consider the metronome-reference, with its ASCII binary code-system overtones). A similar effect has been used in the opening section of ‘Kill the Guy with the Ball’ (1995). However, the pattern of the processor is not ‘i-e-a-i’, but ‘i-a-i’. The resulting sound is more direct, and the shorter time needed for each repetition (due to the lack of a vowel) means that almost all notes feature the complete ‘i-a-i’ pattern. This might be interpreted as a less developed language than featured in ‘Yai Yai’, but Vai uses additional sound processing to strengthen the illusion of a real voice. The Eventide DSP 4000 is still the backbone of the guitar sound, but this time it is programmed on a vocal filter. The signal is also sent through a Whammy Pedal (which is set to an octave) as well as through a wah-wah pedal, both operated at the same time by Vai. The final elements that generate the voice-like effect are the aggressive right-hand bends and vibratos with the whammy bar (Vai and Noble 1995). Thus, the intro to ‘Kill the Guy with the Ball’ incorporates most of the techniques and pieces of gear that Steve Vai uses to create the illusion of a human voice.

While the voice of these two examples is mainly the result of technology, this is not the case in all Vai’s monologue pieces. In ‘K’m-Pee-Du-Wee’ (2005) this is achieved by associating
the title of the track with a melodic line. While I find Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954) intentional fallacy argument convincing, I think Vai’s comments on the track can, to some extent, be trusted. He claims that “[e]very note of this song has a lyric to it” (Vai 2005b). Apparently, some of the lines should be as follows: “Don’t go in the Garden, It’s bad in the garden my little K’m-pee-du-we” and “K’m-Pee-Du-Wee, anything you wanna be”. Although the exact spot these lyrics should be heard in the music is hard to pinpoint, the hook of the track does indeed sound like a human voice uttering the non-sense syllables. Nonetheless, one must wait to see if the fourth instalment of his Real Illusions (forthcoming) trilogy will elucidate the mystery, as Vai intends to “add or replace some of the melody parts with vocals”, to “form a cohesive story that’s very linear and comfortable to follow” (Vai and Cauvoto n.d).

The human voice has not been the only one Vai has imitated (or at least sought to imitate) in his pieces. In ‘Bad Horsie’ (1995), as the title suggests, the mammal which is imitated is a horse (1:12), not a human. However, as opposed to the various effects processors used to generate voice-like qualities in the guitar lines, the horse-effect of ‘Bad Horsie’ is the result of technique alone. Vai describes the process of creating the desired effect as follows: “You bend the bar down, strike a harmonic on the second fret of the G string, raise the bar and flex the [wah-wah pedal], (...) [t]hen dip the bar back down, while [violently] vibrating the note with your finger” (Vai and Cardy 2013). This association is also helped by the various horse neighs that are superimposed over the instrument throughout the duration of the track. Moreover, Vai also uses his ‘Bad Horsie’ wah pedal in conjunction with the techniques described above (Vai 2009), which makes for an interesting extra-musical association.

In ‘The Audience is Listening’ (1990), the guitar acts as the partner of a dialogue with a human voice. In the opening section of the track, a female voice (the teacher in the guitar-persona’s school) pep-talks ‘Stevie’ into performing in front of the class, noting that she will be in the back of the room to support him. There is a whole conversation going on between the teacher and Stevie, but I shall concentrate on two exchanges, both consisting of a question from the teacher and an answer from the guitar-persona. The teacher asks Stevie not to be nervous, ending the sentence with an “okay?”, to which the guitar-persona responds with a line that resembles a human uttering ‘o-kay’ (first note higher, second note lower; stress on the first). The discussion ends with a similar question and answer (“I’ll introduce you, okay?”, “[OK]”). However, the okay at the beginning of the dialogue is different to the one at the end. While the
first seemed apathetic (longer notes played in a lower register of the guitar), the second is considerably more enthusiastic (shorter notes played in the upper register), suggesting that the pep-talk was successful.

An analogous situation occurs in David Lee Roth’s ‘Yankee Rose’ (1986), on which Vai plays guitar. This time, the conversation is initiated by the guitar-persona. It plays a line consisting of two short notes, the first higher than the second, in the mid-range of the guitar. To this, David Lee Roth answers with the question “what?”. Listening to the conversation, it is impossible not to think about it as a proper dialogue, since the guitar line perfectly emulates the way an individual might utter the name ‘David’, in a manner fit to the start of a conversation (two short syllables, the first higher than the second). This conversation continues, but, in a comparable way to the previous examples, the exact words that the guitar is emulating are hard to pin down. However, what is being said is less relevant. What is important is the fact that the guitar line stands in for another human voice and creates the illusion of a dialogue between a human and a human-like being.

An even more interesting example is ‘Ya-Yo Gakk’ (1995). Here, the guitar line simply repeats the vocal line in a call-and-response fashion. This is not particularly remarkable, as the practice is well established in African-American-inspired musics. What is striking, however, is the fact that the vocal line consists of nothing more than the meaningless syllables ‘ya’, ‘yo’, and ‘gakk’, uttered by Steve Vai’s son, Julian (Discogs n.d.b). The guitar lines imitate the microtonal features of the vocals and bring the two instruments even closer than the previous examples. Since the words are missing in both versions, it is extremely hard to argue that one is more important than the other. As I suggested in the theoretical framework, although I can see arguments both ways, there is no definitive position to take, and one should not assume that the vocal line is central merely because of the presence of the vocal strand.

Another way Vai achieves vocality is by doubling the vocal line, overdubbing it either on an electric (‘So Happy’, 1984) or acoustic guitar (‘The Jazz Discharge Party Hats’ or ‘The Dangerous Kitchen’, both 1983). In all three examples, the guitar line doubles a Sprechstimme vocal track. Both Frank Zappa songs were recorded in a live setting, but while the vocal track on ‘The Jazz Discharge Party Hats’ was completely improvised by Zappa, ‘The Dangerous Kitchen’ featured pre-composed music. The vocal tracks do have some sort of melodic contour, even though the melodies deviate quite often from the tempered system common to vocal melodies,
and feature many microtonal inflections (Vai having to detune his guitar in some sections to compensate for these). The guitar mimics the voice perfectly (or, if one were to trust Zappa, “99 per cent” – Slaven 2003) and doubles it throughout the entire song.

‘So Happy’ is an even more interesting example. The track features a main female protagonist (recorded by Laurel Fishman) among a multitude of other protagonists (recorded by Stu Hamm, Joe Despagni and Lill Vai) (Discogs n.d.a). The female protagonist (Laurel) is the main character not only because of the placement of the vocal track in the sound-box (centre, as opposed to the other voices, which are panned left and right), but also because it is the only one to utter actual words (as the other vocal tracks feature only moans or screaming). Her speech is addressed to ‘Steve’, whom I presume to be the electric guitar that comes in at 1:06 (as we assume it is Steve Vai himself who recorded it), mimicking every nuance in her talk pattern. However, what is particularly interesting here is the fact that while the part of the speech up until 1:06 is spoken in a natural way, the section that follows sees her speech modified, with a more prominent melodic contour. This is presumably done to facilitate the overdubbing of the guitar.

In ‘Oooo’ (1999), the guitar, which itself “takes the part of two vocalists” (Moore 2012), plays a melodic line which resembles a human saying the same vowel. Here, the lack of lyrics and the unison context create a quite different power-relations between the two timbres. In the previous examples, we would be tempted to consider the voice track as central, due to the lyrics. Since here both instruments ‘vocalize’ and are both placed in the centre of the sound-box, it is considerably more difficult to attribute central position to one or the other (in an equivalent manner to ‘Ya-Yo Gakk’). However, I think that in this case the guitar should be considered central. In a song, we tend to attribute central position to the voice because we expect it to be the main character, basing our judgement at least on the fact that the word ‘song’ derives from the Old English ‘sang’, which means ‘voice, act of singing’ (Wallin et al 2000). Since singing is (primarily) a human endeavour (Payne 2000), a great degree of internal negotiation needs to take place to imagine that a non-human/inanimate object can sing by itself. Nonetheless, pitched sound is not a human creation, and if the words of a song are missing, we could very well consider the resulting sound as a sample or some sort of synth patch that is set to reproduce voices.

Two other factors need to be considered in Vai’s approach to imitating the voice: technology and technique. Focusing more on outboard and native gear, while I have already
noted the usage of the DSP 4000, but the range of effects that Steve Vai uses is considerably larger. For instance, Vai uses guitar synths to create fictional protagonists, which brings an extra layer of complexity to his persona. In ‘Midway Creatures’ (2005), Vai’s EVO goes through the DSP 4000, then straight to a Digitech Whammy pedal (set to an octave below) and then to a heavily EQed Sans Amp (Vai 2005d). At the same time, a Roland guitar synth pickup captured the midi signal and processed it through a Roland guitar synth. The guitar sound was mixed again with samples from a Korg Triton, and this is the sound we hear. Besides the use of his signature ‘Bad Horsie’ wah pedal, he also uses a phaser extensively (his choice is the MXR Phase 90 Eddie Van Halen signature model – Vai 2009), particularly in live performances (in ‘Giant Balls of Gold’, for example), to create spectral glides. The most commonly used pedal for achieving this is, nonetheless, the wah pedal, as heard in tracks such as ‘For the Love of God’ (1990) (3:17-3:56), ‘Whispering a Prayer’ (2001) (5:34-6:22), ‘The Moon and I’ (2012) (5:19-5:33), or ‘Gravity Storm’ (2012) (3:48-4:13).

In terms of native gear, Vai also uses the Fernandes Sustainer pickup to profound effect in ‘Mullach a’ tSi’ (2012) and ‘Whispering a Prayer’. Both tracks are inspired by vocal Celtic music (Vai 2001), the former being Vai’s take on Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin’s version of the lullaby of the same name (Pádraigín 2012). Finally, Vai is one of the most influential whammy bar operators, particularly of the floating version. He even claims to have invented this system, or at least provided the idea for it, when he “wacked the wood away” behind the bridge of the guitar with a “hammer and a screwdriver” (Vai 2010). Guitar manufacturing company Ibanez incorporated the design into Vai’s signature JEM guitar model, and is now a common feature of other manufacturer’s guitars.

Steve Vai takes full advantage of the possibilities that the modern whammy bar offers, from the grace notes of ‘Whispering a Prayer’ to the extreme abuse the lever sees in ‘Kill the Guy with the Ball’ (1995). I am not aware of any studio recording in which this is used, but during live improvisations Vai bends the bar down while sliding the fingers up the neck (the pitch thus remaining the same), creating a sound that resembles “a purring cat” (Vai 1984). Onomatopoeias aside, Vai also uses his whammy bar to articulate the pitches in specific places, particularly at the beginning and the end of notes. Instead of the usual right-hand attack with the plectrum for the start of a note and the left-hand finger release of the string for muting a sound, he uses the whammy to come into the note from bellow and to slide it back down again at the
end of a phrase or even a single note, thus creating a vocal-like sound by removing the harsh pick attacks. He also does the reverse of this, coming into the note from above and sliding up one more at the end of the note. Furthermore, even though the guitar has been historically categorised as a tempered instrument, on ‘The Attitude Song’ (1984), for instance, Vai expands its microtonal possibilities by hitting a harmonic and playing a seven-note melody using the whammy alone (0:21). Even though he is aiming for specific notes, the resulting sound resembles the un-tempered quality of the human voice.

Finally, when it comes down to techniques, while some are part of every guitarist’s arsenal (legato, alternate picking, tapping, etc.), others are specific to Steve Vai’s playing, or, at the very least, the way he approaches them is unique. The first technique I want to draw attention to is a derivative of the whammy technique, where instead of coming into the note by releasing the pressure on the bar, he uses a glissando/slide to come into the note. However, this is a common ploy in most guitar players’ bag of tricks. Vai’s unique spin on it involves not only coming into the note from below, but also from above, sliding into the note from a (usually unspecific) higher pitch. Again, as I discussed above in relation to the spectral glide, this technique is common in folk music, particularly vocal folk music (Oprea 2002). Another technique is the grace note. Vai often strikes a note and then quickly plays the note that is a tone/semitone below, by bending the string so that there is no pitch difference between the two. This consists of a three-stage bend in which the first note is fretted (1) and then the note below is bent (2) to the initial note (3). By doing this, he creates a specific effect of a ‘hanging note’, which is also a feature of some folk musics. The technique, as used in rock, is not new, Brian May, for instance, using it as early as 1983 (May 2015).

‘I’m Becoming’: solitary persona

I shall start my vignette analyses with ‘I’m Becoming’ (2007), an interesting little piece that has become a mainstay of Vai’s live shows. The track does not have a proper studio version, but the recording that has achieved ‘studio album status’ was released on the 2007 Sound Theories (Vol. I & II) live album, recorded with the Holland Metropole Orchestra. The signal chain is as simple as it gets on this track, as Steve Vai sends his EVO guitar straight into the
clean channel of the Carvin Legacy I amplifier.\textsuperscript{53} Whether added to the effects loop onstage or during post-production, the guitar signal is also coloured by the addition of a delay and the use of the sustainer pickup. The stereo-panned delay gives the notes and chords depth and create the illusion of an echo, which suggests that the protagonist might address the listener from a large room. A relationship between the protagonist and the environment is quite hard to establish here, as there is no environment to speak of. Nonetheless, the delay might suggest some sort of room in which the sound of the protagonist bounces off of (as a sort of echolocation). The environment would fit the \textit{blurred} category, as it does not offer any stylistic and genre expectations for the listener. We focus exclusively on the protagonist.

The question of meaning and expression is interesting here. Since it is a piece for solo guitar, the meaning of the track might seem straightforward: Steve Vai is becoming the music, or Steve Vai is becoming music. He is expressing the symbiosis with the music he is playing. He is thus unified in a single persona that is coextensive with the music, mirroring Cone’s (1992) revised model. However, the textural elements of the track point towards an even grander unification process. The sustainer creates a bell-like sound, which, together with the delay and clean tone of the guitar, resembles an organ played in a church. In this context, the infinity of the notes as well as their bell-like qualities carry the implication that this ‘becoming’ is a religious experience, a scenario in which Steve Vai and an imagined collective of worshipers become one single entity unto God.\textsuperscript{54} As Moore (2002, 5) notes, “rather than express the response of an individual to his or her circumstances as we find in a solo guitar blues, spirituals express a communal response, frequently using biblical texts which would have been common currency”.

Regardless of the degree of unification, ‘I’m Becoming’ seems to support Laing’s (1985) and Frith’s (1996) observation that the voice provides a singular point of view, since the guitar is the sole instrument on the recording. This view is backed up, however, by the more complex unification that occurs if both the title of the track and the effects added to the guitar melodies are considered. Not only is the track about a single entity (“I”), about some sort of religious or other metaphysical transformation, but the recording itself also provides ample evidence for both the persona and the protagonist being unitary. There is a single guitar, placed firmly in the centre of the sound-box, and neither its position nor its tone change throughout the entirety of the track.

\textsuperscript{53} The Carvin Legacy I was released in 1999 (Carvin Museum 1999); The Carvin Legacy II was released in 2009 (Basso 2009); his current Carvin Legacy III was released in 2012 (Smitchens 2012).

\textsuperscript{54} These assumptions are also based on the track’s slight resemblance with the spiritual ‘Amazing Grace’.
Throughout his many interviews, Vai commonly refers to an amalgam of Eastern and Western religious practices and beliefs (Vai 1989), so it would make sense that the persona projected by the track would suggest some sort of universal unification (if one were to take Vai’s words into account).

‘Fever Dream’: musical schizophrenia

A different type of unification takes place in ‘Fever Dream’ (1999). On first listening, the track seems to subvert the idea of a fractured persona, particularly in the live performances, because of reasons explained below. ‘Fever Dream’ starts off with protagonist 1 (P1 - Vai’s standard tone) positioned firmly in the centre of the sound-box, playing short melodic phrases. This initial protagonist is accompanied by two quite different ones, panned hard left (P2 – Vai’s standard tone with chorusing) and right (P3 – Vai’s standard tone with phasing). P1 provides a melodic phrase that receives answers from P2 and P3 alternatively, which creates an exciting, yet not uncommon, polyphonic call-and-response texture. What is unusual, however, is the fact that throughout the subsequent development, P2 and P3 play the same material as in the beginning of the track. Moreover, at 0:54 and 1:53, the three protagonists start merging, in the sense that the three distinct melodies are played at the same time.

From 3:47 to 4:42, while all three melodies seem to be playing at the same time, they come in separately, at specific time intervals (P1, followed by P2 and then P3). Obviously, this can easily be achieved in the studio, by overdubbing distinct melodies. However, during live performances, Steve Vai plays all three melodies himself. I should note that this is not achieved by switching quickly from an effect-setting to another, but by playing the three melodies on the same guitar, with all three settings (distorted, chorused, and phased) being active at the same time (Vai 2003). The secret behind this feat is Vai’s custom Ibanez heart-shaped triple-neck guitar, with each neck being set up to work as a separate guitar, each of the three outputs being connected to a different effect-setting and amplifier (Vai n.d.). The reason for P2 and P3 playing the same material as in the beginning of the track is elucidated here, as it is easier for Vai to focus on a single specific melody and just strum the other two guitars’ strings.

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55 One of these performances can be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLY5WkoBo98.
56 This also occurs at the end of the track, but only between P1 and P3.
I have previously argued that in cases where multiple simultaneous protagonists are present in both studio and live versions of a track, they are either played by different musicians (they are different protagonists) or are contracted into a single line which the guitarist plays (they are afterimages of the main protagonist). But in the case of ‘Fever Dream’, the three completely different lines are all played by Steve Vai himself, at the same time, even though under specific conditions. Here, I think the title of the track helps shed light on what this apparent unification process might be, in an analogous way to ‘The Story of Light’ (2012). A fever dream, as its name suggests, is a type of dream caused by intense fever. Steve Vai himself recalls that the main melody came to him in a dream (Vai 2003). Of course, we do not need to take his word for it, but it does provide a neat tie-in with the title and my interpretation of the piece. I would suggest that in this instance, the three distinct melodies represent different facets of the same persona/protagonist. I interpret this as the musical representation of the Marvel Comics character The Living Tribunal, a humanoid entity with three faces, each with its own personality and characteristics. This might seem as a stretch, but the fact that fever dreams are, as people who have them describe (Physics Forum 2008), surrealist and abstract, make the explanation plausible. A form of ‘musical schizophrenia’ is in place here, and the ramifications extend to the persona itself, in the sense that it is constantly divided between three distinct perspectives. In hindsight, after listening to the whole piece, the introduction and the subsequent dialogues between the protagonists represent a conversation between the persona and (two facets of) itself. This “doubled voice - the image of a person singing with himself - moves things into a sound world that is unique to recording” (Zak 2001, 34).

This interpretation is also supported by certain musical cues. What is particularly interesting here is the inarticulate elements that we hear before the guitar starts playing the solo-proper. These sounds can be interpreted as a perplexed protagonist trying to figure out what is going on, since the other two personalities seem to have vanished in the sections leading up to the solo, being probably destroyed by the wall of sound of the transition section. Furthermore, whenever all three protagonists are playing, they appear in the private or intimate proxemic zones. Since talking to ourselves or suffering from an illness such as schizophrenia is frowned upon and even medically treated by society in the case of the latter (mental institutions, medication etc. to prevent disruptions in society), it would be easy to assume that the extra protagonists are ‘holding back’ whilst in public. Only when the proxemic level is in an intimate
or private zone does the protagonist express its most-inner feelings. Talking to ourselves is not particularly disturbing and unusual, as we all do it; we just don’t (usually) do it out loud. As Harris (2014, 14) notes, we are “continuously spellbound by the conversation we are having with ourselves”, “as though some blind person were inside our heads who required continuous narration to know what is happening” (94). Of course, there is no such blind person in our heads, but we still go about our daily lives as though there was. In this context, this schizophrenic side of Vai’s (or any other guitarist’s) persona gives credence to the notion of a fractured persona. Based on our day-to-day experiences and the curious processes that go on in our brains, we are interacting with a conversation between Vai and other instances of the same entity, some other blind persons within Vai’s own musical persona.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steve Vai – ‘Fever Dream’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{57}$ The ‘=>’ symbol means that the environment or the proxemic zone changes from one to the other. If ‘/’ is used, it means that the environment or the proxemic zone lays somewhere between the two categories.

$^{58}$ Horizontal separation in the sound-box (as in section A) means that the protagonists follow each other. Vertical separation means that they are played simultaneously (overdubbing).
‘Freak Show Excess’: the voice of Vai

‘Freak Show Excess’ (2005) offers insights into the various musical influences that came together to produce Steve Vai’s compositional palette. Vai himself cites Bulgarian folk music and Ivo Papasov’s Wedding Band as an influence (Vai 2008). This music is articulated by Bulgarians as authentically Bulgarian, but it is a hybrid genre which originated during the 1970s, when Bulgarian musicians began assimilating folk styles from Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia, and Romania (Biddle and Knights 2007, 9). Even though Vai was probably influenced by Papasov, he was at the same time exposed to Papasov’s own Eastern European folk influences. This music is melismatic and quite often in odd time signatures, utilizing ornamentations which are rarely encountered in other types of music (specific ways of articulating notes, as discussed earlier). More importantly, Eastern European folk music is always modal and characterised by modal interchange and the use of modes with mobile degrees. These elements define Vai’s music and are abundant in ‘Freak Show Excess’. Theme A (a) is in A Mixolydian (with the second, third and sixth degrees acting as mobile degrees), theme D (a) is in D Chromatic 1 (with a second mobile degree), theme D (b) is in D Aeolian mode (modal centre shift, from A to D), theme E is in E Lydian (with a lowered 6th degree – modal centre shift from D to E); there are even pentachordic (on G, theme F) and hexatonic (on F, theme E) modes. Meter-wise, while most of the track is in 4/4, Solo 1 is in 7/16, which is a common trait of Vai’s music, as tracks such as ‘Incantation’ and ‘Die to Live’ are also in odd time signatures (5/4, 11/16, and 7/4 respectively).

From Zappa and Led Zeppelin to Ivo Papasov and Igor Stravinsky, Vai celebrates the plurality of globalized culture, in which borders and boundaries become increasingly blurred and permeable, creating a world dominated by globalization, deterritorialisation, and forms of cultural hybridity (Biddle and Knights 2007). As Daughtry (2003, 9) observes, music can easily be resignified, especially cross-culturally. All of this is reflected in ‘Freak Show Excess’, from the quasi Tibetan monk throat-singing sample of the intro to the Easter European modes and meters of the melodies and the tribal drums of the various sections. This fusion is a peculiar vision of folk music, sometimes full of stereotypes, elements which are associated by foreigners

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59 This is the case for old folk music, as more recent examples are heavily influenced by Western popular music, in terms of both melodic and harmonic features.
(in this case, Vai himself) as being part of the flavour of a country’s traditional music (Maurer 2011, 257).

‘Freak Show Excess’, however, is one of the best tracks for the study of Vai’s persona, as it continues the process of mixing different protagonists to the point of unification, offering the most complex view of Vai’s musical persona, not only because of the various musical elements, but also because his voice is heard in two key points on the recording. The piece starts off with an unspecified musical instrument playing a sample that resembles throat-singing, followed by a theme played by an electric sitar (the Jerry Jones Master). The presence of the sitar is important, as it appears in many Steve Vai tracks such as ‘For the Love of God’ or ‘Fire Garden Suite’. It also raises some critical issues. Since it is a completely different instrument and the sound of it is so different from the guitar, should one consider it a different persona altogether? A different sound would point toward the fact that it is another facet of Vai’s musical persona, in the sense that it represents just another protagonist among the many others that I have described thus far. However, most live recordings feature Mike Keneally or, since 1999, Dave Weiner on sitar, and not Vai. Nonetheless, it makes more sense to consider that it is just another protagonist which defines Steve Vai’s persona. Firstly, the fact that listeners know, based on the linear notes on the album booklets, that the sitar was recorded by Vai on studio releases is reason enough for them not to question the integrity of the persona. Secondly, the sitar itself has such a specific sound that it is harder to find ‘personal variations’ that would render it on any Vai track as quintessentially Vai’s. Consequently, while not part of his standard sound, the electric sitar defines Vai’s output, and has become a mainstay of his live performances.

The most interesting element in ‘Freak Show Excess’ is Vai’s voice. He does not sing, but utters the word “meltdown” in the prelude to Solo 2 (2:51), and the sentence “Alright, that’s enough of that nonsense” after the cadenza (6:23), right before the reiteration of the main theme. These moments do not seem to have been chosen randomly, as they coincide with the beginning and the ending of two improvisatory (as they are different in live versions), virtuosic sections of the track. The solos are not only difficult to play (employing a multitude of techniques at extreme speeds), but Solo 2 also requires a virtuosic use of the wah pedal, for example. These “site[s] of virtuosic transcendence” (Walser 1993, 119) symbolize a musician’s control over the instrument, and the principal theme of the track is reinitiated after Vai points to it being just nonsense, which signals that Steve Vai’s composer persona (Cone 1974) is possibly in charge of
the entire piece. Here, Vai literally inserts himself into the recording, strengthening, perhaps, the perception that he is the one expressing the music we hear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Proxemics</th>
<th>Sound-box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>0:00-0:31</td>
<td>Interventionist</td>
<td>Private=&gt; Public</td>
<td>P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (a+b)</td>
<td>0:31-1:08</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Private=&gt; Public</td>
<td>P2 P3 P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1:08-1:28</td>
<td>Interventionist</td>
<td>Private=&gt; Social</td>
<td>P2 P3 P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>1:28-2:00</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>P2 P3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2:00-2:13</td>
<td>Interventionist</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>P3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (a+b)</td>
<td>2:13-2:45</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Private=&gt; Social==&gt; Public</td>
<td>P3 P3 P3 P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo 2 (voice)</td>
<td>2:45-3:41</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Private/Public</td>
<td>P5 P4 P5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3:41-4:06</td>
<td>Interventionist</td>
<td>Public=&gt; Social</td>
<td>P6 P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (a+Db)</td>
<td>4:06-4:34</td>
<td>Active=&gt; Interventionist</td>
<td>Private=&gt; Public</td>
<td>P3 P3 P3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo 3</td>
<td>4:34-5:27</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Intimate/Private</td>
<td>P1 P1 P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadenza (voice)</td>
<td>5:27-6:62</td>
<td>Blurred</td>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>P8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>6:26-6:34</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>P2 P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (a)</td>
<td>6:34-6:51</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>P2 P3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III.2 The band sound: Joe Satriani

The three main components of Satriani’s persona are the blues influence - which is reflected in track structures, modes of articulation, and his propensity for using the pentatonic and blues scales - and the compositional technique that he calls ‘pitch axis theory’, along with vocality. Sound-wise, even though the specifics of each component has changed throughout his career, he has used his signature JS Ibanez model since 1987 (Coudray and Saturax n.d.). Regarding amps, he currently uses his signature Marshall JVM410HJS, after a long run with the Peavey JSX signature model. The default settings that Satriani uses (both in terms of guitars and amplifiers) generate the standard Satriani twofold tone (fig. e), the distorted and clean main protagonists. There are three secondary protagonists, each characterized by a specific sound generated by a single effects pedal: distorted tone through a Digitech Whammy pedal, distorted tone through Satriani’s signature VOX ‘Big Bad Wah’ pedal, and distorted tone through a Progtavia fuzz pedal. Of course, there are also episodic protagonists that appear sporadically throughout his music, the phaser/flanger flavour being the most common.

Musically, Satriani operates at the intersection of blues/classic rock and Eastern world music, as well as a compositional technique that he calls pitch axis theory. He cites Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Cream, Led Zeppelin, Jethro Tull, as well as country rock as the foundation for his musical sensibilities. While the blues influence is common among most guitar players, or at least among guitarists from Satriani’s generation, it is less evident in the music and playing of guitarists such as Steve Vai, Eddie Van Halen, or Yngwie Malmsteen. I utilize ‘blues’ rather loosely, and use it to describe a set of genres that derive from the original African-American form, such as gospel, electric blues, and even rock ‘n’ roll. Some of the genre’s identifying features are the predominant use of the minor pentatonic scale, the use of seemingly ambivalent

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60 Acoustic guitars are a rare occurrence in his music. In recent years, he has been using his signature Ibanez JSA acoustic guitar.
“‘blue notes’ at certain points in the scale”, experimentation with “sound quality, using growling, screaming, wailing, and falsetto singing and the muffling, snapping, sliding, and bending of notes” (Evans 2002, 21). Other characteristics include “the call and response of voice and instrument, the use of repeated riffs, flexibility of pitch, timbral variety, the mixing of tonal and percussive sound qualities, and the use of instruments as voices” (Evans 2002, 24). Blues singers “perceived the ‘grain’ of the voice, as well as glissandos, slurs, and shadings of tone” (Schwartz 2007, 244) as key features of the idiom, which were then extended to the guitar sound, exploiting “the ‘vocal’ qualities of the guitar” (230) to achieve a “screaming guitar” (80). Finally, as Schwartz (2007, 245) argues, probably the “greatest legacy of the blues was (...) introducing improvisation into rock music”.

Satriani’s blues sensibilities are visible not only at the scalar level but also in the way he phrases and articulates certain passages and notes. The main themes of ‘Just Like Lightnin’’ (2006) and ‘Jumpin’ In’ (2013) (0:10 and 0:16, respectively) could have easily been recorded by Jeff Beck back in the late 60s/early 70s, both at the level of form and of sound. ‘Littleworth Lane’ (2010) has a pronounced “gospel tinge” (Satriani 2010) in terms of harmonic movement and a BB King inspired melody line (0:09), full of blue notes and microtonal bends on specific notes (mainly the third, seventh, and fourth). Also tied in with the gospel idiom is ‘Crowd Chant’ (2006), where the guitar and vocalised crowd exchange melodies in a call-and-response texture. As previously mentioned, the vocal melody repeats Satriani’s blues-infused licks (pentatonic melodies, microtonal bends, specific phrasings etc.), in an intriguing reversal of roles. Nonetheless, these influences are coloured by the music of Satriani’s time, particularly in recent years. A modern take on the blues is found in ‘Super Colossal’ (2006), where the unambiguously bluesy opening guitar melody (it is entirely in the blues scale, where the raised fourth degree is constantly played, often bent from the natural fourth) is contrasted with the modern guitar sound, completely alien to the blues idiom. For most of the duration of the track, the heavily distorted guitar sound is sent through an Electro-Harmonix POG pedal (Satriani and Chopik 2006) that generates both an octave below and an octave above what is played on the guitar (with the former being more prominent). This creates a larger-than-life sound that is at odds with the blues’ original stripped-down nature.

The Eastern influences are also prominent in Satriani’s music. ‘Oriental Melody’ (2002) is an interesting case, as it contrasts the Eastern-sounding Chromatic 2 mode (with a mobile fourth
degree – both natural and sharp) of the opening, main melody with another key theme that sits comfortably in D minor pentatonic (0:39), filled with blues-specific bends (minor third bent slightly towards a major third). A similar compositional device is used in many of Satriani’s tracks. In ‘The Extremist’ (1992), most of the track is based on rock ‘n’ roll melodies and phrasings (microtonal bends from the minor third), with the contrasting elements being the Chromatic 2 mode sections that appear in specific places in the track (2:18, for instance). Similar situations occur in ‘Crystal Planet’ (1998), where the solo section sees Satriani constantly fluctuate between Eastern modes and pentatonic blues licks for the entire track. His back catalogue is filled with tracks that feature similar designs, such as ‘War’ (1992), ‘Belly Dancer’ (2002), ‘Redshift Raiders’ (2006), ‘Shockwave Supernova’ (2015), ‘On Peregrine Wings’ (2015), or tracks that are almost exclusively in exotic modes, such as ‘The Golden Room’ (2010).

On tracks such as ‘Overdriver’ (2008), ‘With Jupiter in Mind’ (1998), and most notably ‘Not of this Earth’ (1986), Satriani utilizes a compositional technique he calls ‘pitch axis theory’ (fig. 3), which is quite unique to his music. The name of the technique bears a striking resemblance to what Lendvai (1971) describes as the axis system (fig. 2) in the music of Bela Bartók. In traditional tonal music, the circle of fifths pattern (F-C-G-D-A-E-B) coincides with the Subdominant-Tonic-Dominant principle (SD-T-D-SD-T-D-SD). If we complete the circle of fifths we get the whole SD-T-D circle as well. In Lendvai’s view, all twelve notes of the chromatic scale are grouped in the three typical tonal functions (fig. 2), granted that the relationship by minor third means maintaining the function. It is interesting to note that even though this system utilizes all twelve tempered notes (as in serial music), the notes are in a hierarchy and have certain roles and functions. In addition, the sharp fourth pole-counterpole relationship is an unusual feature, as it links two tonalities/chords that are far apart in the circle of fifths, thus providing a connexion between keys rarely found in the same progression in traditional tonal music. Satriani’s method, on the other hand, involves choosing a tonal centre and then picking out chords from the different modal areas, threading them together in a unified sounding progression (Fisher 1995, 68). Both Fischer (1995, 68-69) and Marshall (Satriani et al 1988, 6) provide graphs with some possible combinations (mostly Dorian, Lydian, Aeolian and Mixolydian), but other modes can also appear.

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61 SD--T---D
SD--T---D.
While the influence has never been acknowledged by Satriani himself, another technique that Bartok used throughout his compositions is key to understanding pitch axis theory: modal chromaticism. Bartók viewed chromaticism in a modal context in three ways: polymodality, modal chromaticism, and modal melodic chromaticism (Bartók and Suchoff 1976, 376-377). Polymodality is described as the juxtaposition of two static modes, with no mobile degrees. Modal chromaticism – which Bartók sometimes dubbed “polymodal chromaticism” (Bartók and Suchoff 1976, 367) – involves diatonic elements of the modes mixed with chromatic degrees. Finally, modal melodic chromaticism describes melodies where any note except the modal centre is independent and can be chromaticized at will. A more common variation on this is modal interchange on the same centre, where a myriad of modes form the basis of melodies over an unchanging harmonic root note. Even though Marshall (Satriani et al 1988, 6) suggests that ‘Satch Boogie’ (1987), for instance, utilizes pitch axis theory, the fact that there are no chords played underneath the tapping section does not support the model, as Satriani’s theory is dependent on harmonic support (Fischer 1995, 68). Pitch axis theory is indeed a form of modal interchange, but one in which the monodic syntax is replaced by homophony. It is a different take on Bartok’s third category of polymodality. Both Fischer (1995, 68) and Marshall (Satriani et al 1988, p. 6) suggest the Dorian, Lydian, Aeolian, and Mixolydian modes as central for this technique, but a considerably larger pallet of modes can be found in Satriani’s music, such as the Chromatic 1 and Chromatic 2 modes.

Probably the best example of pitch axis theory is ‘Not of This Earth’ (1986). All the themes are constructed on modes with E as their final: E Lydian, E Aeolian, and E Mixolydian, for the most part, on top of a chord progression made up of EMaj13, Em7#5, back to EMaj13, and E7sus4. The melody on top of the first chord is in Lydian, while the second chord cancels all
the previous accidentals and exposes a melody in the Aeolian mode. The next bar sees the return of the Lydian mode with an anticipated D natural from the next bars’ Mixolydian. At 2:04, a somewhat similar passage to the ‘Satch Boogie’ is heard, but the presence of chords underneath the melody signals the use of pitch axis theory rather than melodic chromaticism. (The Lydian-Aeolian-Lydian-Mixolydian pattern of the previous theme is reiterated). The theme that starts at 2:21 changes the pattern by substituting the Aeolian with the Chromatic 1, raising the fourth degree of the Aeolian (Ripà 2001, 371). In addition, a chromatic passing note is introduced in the form of a leading tone in the Mixolydian bar. Finally, in the less dense theme that starts at 2:38, Satriani emphasizes the important modal notes that run throughout the track: major third in the first bar (from the Lydian mode), minor third in the second (from the Aeolian mode), raised forth in the third (from the Chromatic 1 mode), and lowered seventh in the fourth (from the Mixolydian mode).

Returning to Satriani’s general traits, vocality is also key to his persona, achieved through both gear and technique. He uses the wah-wah extensively in both studio recordings and live performances.\(^6^2\) Intense uses of the wah pedal are found in tracks such as ‘Lies and Truths’ (2013) (3:07) and ‘Mind Storm’ (2002) (where he rhythmically presses and releases the pedal to create short spectral glide bursts that resemble discrete syllables, as heard at 0:27), or in ‘Theme from a Strange World’ (2006) and ‘Musterion’ (2008) (where he only affects the final notes of a melodic phrase, producing a wobble that is similar to human speech, or the end of belted vocal melodies, at 0:42 and 0:33, respectively). Satriani also uses flangers and phasers to achieve vocality. In ‘The Journey’ (2002), while a flanger is clearly audible in the mix, it does not seem to be fused with the guitar. It sounds as though it is somehow separated, even though it evidently follows the melodic contour of the guitar melody (0:21). The resulting sound does indeed create a somewhat different take on the idea of vocality, almost as if a whisper was accompanying the main guitar line. In terms of phasing, on ‘Satch Boogie’ (1987), for example, the sound of the tapped monodic solo is the result of a phaser being added to the distorted guitar sound used in previous sections of the track (1:50). Here, since tapping as a technique brings to the fore certain overtones, the spectral content that the listener perceives is modified. Finally, he also uses backward reverbs and backward delays to cancel of the noises produced by the plectrum hitting the strings at 0:15 in ‘Bells of Lal (Part 1)’ (1987), or digital technology at 0:33 on ‘Slow and

\(^6^2\) His signature Vox ‘Big Bad Wah’ (Satriani 2011).
Easy’ (2000) (Satriani and Brown 2014, 236.0/537). He added different digital effects to the original guitar sound, recording certain parts directly into the computer, unmediated by speakers and microphones, and spliced up and then reassembled the melodies (Satriani and Tarquin 2007). The lack of characteristic plectrum noises makes the guitar sound closer to a vocal sound.

Satriani produces a similar effect by sliding the left-hand fingers on the strings during a melodic line, as in ‘Until We Say Goodbye’ (2000) or ‘Clouds Race Across the Sky’ (2000), where he hits a note and then plays a melody without attacking any of the following notes with the right hand; the melody is played by the left hand alone, by gliding the finger from one fret to another (at 0:23 and 0:25, respectively). This takes the unavoidable noise that the contact between plectrum and string generates and replaces it with smooth rises and falls that resemble the rises and falls of (un-tempered) human speech. Here, these extensions often occur with less power and are felt like whispers at the end of a main line, as a sort of afterimage of the main melodic material.

A remarkable take on vocality is found in ‘Overdriver’ (2008) and ‘Jumpin’ Out’ (2013), where the guitar lines resemble less those of a human and more those of an animal growl. The peculiar effect on ‘Overdriver’ (0:23) is achieved by “scraping the string up by the bridge” of the guitar (Satriani 2008c), while a similar sound is attained in ‘Jumpin’ Out’ (0:18) by literally scraping on the fretboard, in a technique that combines scraping with tapping. Even more interesting is the fact that the note is tapped with the plectrum rather than with the finger, so the smaller distance that the plectrum needs to traverse (as opposed to using the right-hand finger) to reach the string creates a faster and more unusual sonority. However, probably the most outstanding example is found on ‘The Mystical Potato Head Groove Thing’ (1989). At 2:22, Satriani grabs the neck of the guitar with the right hand to mute the strings with his palm and prevent them from ring out. In conjunction with this, he frets two arpeggios (of chords made up of fifths rather than thirds), which are a minor tenth interval apart. Thus, the resulting two-octaves-and-a-perfect-fourth span creates the illusion of a spectral sweep.

Solo persona vs. band persona

Joe Satriani composes all his tracks and is responsible for all (or at least an overwhelming majority) of their arrangements (Satriani 2015), so he has a high degree of control over the end-product. While he is not the sole producer of any of his releases, he often shares the seat with at
least one other person (John Cuniberti, particularly on his early albums, or Eric Caudieux on the newer releases). He is in control of most writing, recording, and mixing, with additional colouring from co-producers and, obviously, the other musicians on the record. However, as opposed to recording one track at a time and then painstakingly assembling everything into the illusion of a single performance (by overdubbing, comping etc.), Satriani prefers the process of capturing the performance of the full band, recording everything at the same time in “one, magical take” (Satriani 2011a). Moreover, he states that he is somewhat suspicious of tinkering too much with his original ideas, both in terms of the composition itself and the recording, because he fears the magic of the initial musical idea or of the performance will somehow be lost (Satriani 2011a). There is a risk of turning the “attention away from the song as product of a deliberate and often arduous process of composition, toward the performance itself and the personality and uniqueness of the performer” (Evans 2002, 21). While any record is an illusion of a performance to some extent, recording as much of the music in live takes creates a different sonic experience that diminishes the hold of a single persona on the music.

The fact that we talk about Joe Satriani’s music and not a collective band sound has more to do with copyright rather than with artistic integrity, something I also flagged in the theoretical framework. As Frith and Marshall (2013) observe, copyright law is ill equipped to deal with collective efforts when it comes to composition. Even though Joe Satriani’s name is on all his releases and is credited as the sole songwriter of the project, judging what percentage of a record is the result of Satriani alone is extremely difficult. While he is not in complete control of what the other musicians play, he is still “largely responsible for creating the conditions under which [the music] could be created” (Heile 2015, 25), implying that Satriani’s name functions “more as a brand name than as an authorial signature” (Heile 2015, 25). The complex relationships that occur in the recording studio are almost impossible to quantify, and the resulting music will never be the sole creation of a single person and his/her persona.

‘Midnight’: solitary persona

This seemingly unassuming track creates a very interesting new layer of the persona because of the unusual practice of removing additional instrumentation from the studio version when performing the track live. The studio recording features a clean guitar (with chorus and

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63 This practice is subverted on albums such as Engines of Creation (2000).
reverb), minimal cymbal hits and hand-claps (the percussion persona), and piano and synth accents on the first beat of every bar of section 2 (the keyboard persona). There are three different musician-personae interacting in the studio version of ‘Midnight’ (1987). As discussed at length in Chapter 1, the environment here, even though might be supporting the guitar by emphasizing key metrical and harmonic points throughout the track, neither properly sets the harmonic (long bass notes that the guitar is already emphasizing) and rhythmic support (straight eight-notes on a hi-hat), nor does it set the stylistic and genre boundaries. Consequently, the environment here is blurred. Using the cinematographic analogy, there is something there, but the shot is so shallow that we cannot make out what is lying behind the guitar. Thus, the importance of the other protagonists is minimal, almost as if the two were after-images of the guitar persona.

This reading is supported by an analysis of the live version, which is played by Satriani alone. Among the deviations from the original studio recording, the most prominent is the removal of the percussion and keyboard layers. The result is that even more attention is paid to the guitar persona. Moreover, if we watch a video of Satriani performing (such as the G3: Live in Denver (2003) DVD that I consulted) or if we attend a show where he performs it, it will be hard not to think of the guitar as an extension of his persona. This seemingly unified persona mirrors Cone’s (1992) revised model not only at the sonic level but also at a compositional level, as a new theme (NT) also emerges during live performances. The disappearance of the two accompanying personae not only signals their unimportance, but, to some extent, also reveals a hegemonic persona that pulls the strings of the track, taking it in a new direction.

This is the kind of decision a composer usually makes, although in this instance Satriani acts as both composer and performer. As a performer, he also takes liberties with the sound of the guitar. The clean tone of the studio recording is replaced by a slightly distorted sound (closer to Satriani’s standard distorted tone), enriched by the addition of an even heavier reverb, and a chorus. Granted, this is probably done (at least in part) to compensate for the lack of other instruments, as a distorted tone covers a larger frequency range than a clean one, mainly due to the number of (perceivable) overtones. Obviously, for reasons ranging from technological improvements in guitar equipment and recording technology to differences in playing style, the track will sound different. Nonetheless, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, while the two guitar sounds are different, this does not impede on the notion of the persona. As with vocal music, where the
sound of a singer changes with age, the sound of a guitar player also assumes a historical dimension. We are aware that it is the same person producing the music originally recorded in 1987, and played live in 2004. In this instance, Satriani’s persona trumps the band persona, as he removes the other personae during live performances of the track, modifying both music and sound, and other elements such as environment and proxemics (see table below). Nonetheless, it is hard to argue that the music, the recording, and the live versions of this track are not the result of Satriani’s persona alone, without the aid of the concept of brand persona. In the case of ‘Midnight’, we are dealing with a Satriani sound, and not a band sound.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joe Satriani – Midnight (studio version)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (a, a’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B (b1, b2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A (a’’)</td>
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<td>Coda</td>
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<tr>
<th>Joe Satriani – Midnight (Live in Denver version)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Section</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A (a, a’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
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<tr>
<td>B (b1, b2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A (a’’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
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‘Borg Sex’: fictional duets

Guitar protagonists that do not change their position in the sound-box are not always the norm on a Satriani record. ‘Borg Sex’ (2000) offers an interesting example of a duel section where the guitar protagonists change their position in a call-and-response fashion (dubbed ‘Solo 2’). Here, while P1 is found slightly to the right of the sound-box, in the exact spot as in the intro, P2 has now moved away from its initial position in the centre of the sound-box, and is now close to 45 degrees off-centre. This has an effect of proximity change, but not between the listener and the protagonist(s), but between the different protagonists themselves. These protagonists have the potentiality for moving freely across the sound-box and imaginary stage, as in the section between 2:38 and 2:40, where the central line gets auto-panned and moves chaotically within the sound-box. Their duet section could represent a form of ‘instrumental intercourse’, which would be an interesting tie-in with the title of the track (‘… Sex’), particularly because the synthesizer-
like guitar tones and the desire on the production end to achieve mechanical precision on all parameters (‘Borg…’) (Satriani and Brown 2014, 351.3/537- 352.6/537).

A listener will probably assume that this second protagonist is another persona of Satriani himself, even though he/she would know Satriani could not have performed both melodies at the same time. In this case, it would be understandable to think about both guitars as being under the control of Satriani, of an omniscient guitarist-persona which divides into two separate entities on the studio version. However, two distinct melodic lines could be played by Satriani himself even in a live situation, as on ‘Why’ (1992), where Satriani has a DigiTech IPS 33B Super Harmony Machine set up to generate a third above the main melodic line (Satriani 2011). On the studio version, a listener would just suppose that the two melodic lines were the result of overdubbing rather than the product of a machine. However, during live performances of the track, the effect is both audible and visible, as two melodies are clearly distinguishable, with Satriani being the only musician onstage to play the specific line. This means that, in theory, there is no difference between ‘Why’ and a track such as ‘What Breaks a Heart’ (2002) (where overdubs were used), at least at a theoretical level, which in turn could mean that the duet of ‘Borg Sex’, while having the potentiality to being a conversation between different personae, is a conversation between different protagonists emanating from the same persona.

This is exactly what happens in the live version of the track. The drums are still there, with the synth line taken by the bass, relentlessly playing the opening riff. The two guitar protagonists merge into one, a guitar part that Satriani himself plays. Consequently, the number of protagonists drops, since the dual-lead approach cannot be maintained in a live scenario. This loosens Satriani’s grip on the overall sound of the track. The guitar was extremely prominent in the studio recording, being overdubbed to such an extent that it drowned out the other instruments in the process, putting itself centre stage. The live version subverts the centrality of the guitar, placing it on even footing with the bass and drums. The instrumental intercourse here is not between many protagonists of the same persona, but between (fewer) guitarist-protagonist and drum and bass protagonists. The band steps in from the shadows, so to speak, and reveals a completely different scenario no only in terms of sound, but also in terms of protagonist-environment relationships and issues of proxemics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joe Satriani – ‘Borg Sex’ (studio version)</th>
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<td>Section</td>
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102
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<tr>
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<th>G1 P1</th>
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<td>Static</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>G2 P1</td>
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<td>1:04-1:20</td>
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<td>G2</td>
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<td>Public/Private</td>
<td>G2 P1</td>
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<td>1:37-1:52</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Public/Private</td>
<td>G2</td>
</tr>
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<td>D</td>
<td>1:52-2:08</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>G2</td>
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<td>Interventionist</td>
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<td>4:24-4:40</td>
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<td>Social</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4:56-5:12</td>
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<td>Social</td>
<td>G2</td>
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Introduction’ (a) 5:12-5:27 Blurred Intimate G1 P4

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<td>P2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6:14-6:29</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Blurred</td>
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‘Searching’: trinity of personae

While ‘Midnight’ presents a more solitary, Romantic view of Satriani’s persona, such instances are infrequent in his music. Most of his tracks are comprised of at least three distinct instrumental-personae. The ‘power trio’ has been a mainstay in rock since the late 60s, and Satriani embraces this model in ‘Searching’ (2004), where there is a single guitar accompanied only by bass and drums. Throughout the piece, even though the guitar assumes central position, both bass and guitar are in the centre of the sound-box. The only reason we might choose to focus on the guitar is because of the higher register in which it plays and the fact that Satriani’s name is on the record. The other two instruments create distinct layers and are not felt as
supporting characters, but as fully-fledged, equal partners of the guitarist-persona. The bass and

drum sounds remain constant throughout the piece, whereas the guitar sound fluctuates between
two main protagonists: P1, a clean guitar (with delay and reverb), and P2, Satriani’s standard
distorted tone - heard for most of the ten minutes of the track. The latter then splits up into three
secondary protagonists: P3, a pitch-shifted version of P2, P4, the standard Satriani tone with a
wah pedal, and P5, where the standard tone gets modified by the addition of a Voodoo Labs
‘Progtavia’ fuzz pedal (Satriani 2011). The guitar protagonists interact throughout the duration of
the track, but only by passing the baton, so to speak, as each drops out, leaving the next to take
over. In this context, the Coda is particularly interesting, as it features a protagonist formed of a
fusion between P1 and P2 (the tone of the guitar is not clean, yet not distorted either: it is
overdriven). This also happens in the live version, although we get an even more unusual fusion,
between the clean P1 and the wah sound of P3. The fusion could be read as a unison between P1
and P2, as an instance in which both protagonists utter the same melodic line. This is easily
achievable by splitting the guitar signal and sending it through two different sets of effects pedals
and amplifiers. This results in two completely different protagonists, even though the melodic
material is the same.

Key elements of the live version deal with issues of sound-box placement and form, as
well as the role of the other two instrumentalists onstage. What is striking about the live version
is that while the same three personae are present, the guitar is not centre-stage anymore:
Satriani’s guitar is in the right channel. Moreover, the live track is almost two minutes shorter
than the studio version, which seems odd in the context of a solo performance by a virtuoso
guitarist, since it is customary for the soloist to take every possible opportunity to showcase his
skills. This version was, however, recorded as part of the G3 series of concerts, so the shorter
length might be due to time constraints, either because of the limited information that can fit onto
a CD or because all the guitarists’ sets, including the jams at the end, needed to fit an evening’s
performance. Nonetheless, a shorter runtime and off-centre placement of the guitar does indeed
take away from Satriani being the driving force of ‘Searching’.

Tied in with the issue of form is the role of the other instruments in modifying it and other
features of the track. First, the drum introduction is replaced by a bass introduction. Secondly,
the live version sees the addition of two new themes. The first is not a theme per se, but more of
a change in the harmonic pattern that underlines one of Satriani’s multiple solos. Nonetheless, it
is one of those elements which could not have been decided on the spot, as all the band members change the normal patterns to account for Satriani’s solo, something which does not happen in other such improvisational sections. ‘New theme 2’ is a proper new theme and is played by the whole band in unison, with the bass playing an octave lower and the drums following the rhythmic pattern of the other two instruments.

Thirdly, as opposed to ‘Midnight’, the environment in ‘Searching’ is mainly static throughout, with the bass and drums providing a stable metric and harmonic backdrop on top of which Satriani plays the main themes and improvises. However, even though the bass and drum personae could be supporting characters, particularly in the sections where Satriani improvises solos or where his guitar lines assume a central position for one reason or another, there are instances where the environment becomes *interventionist*. The most obvious is in the introduction of the studio version, where the drums play solo for two bars. (Even though it is the first thing that we hear, convention tells us that the drums are part of the background of a track, and we will tend to follow this line of reasoning to the end and assume that what we are listening to is a supporting character.) In addition, the guitar drops out on a few occasions, leaving the other instruments in charge. The bass assumes leadership in the section dubbed ‘Solo 4’ of the live version, where the higher register and the pronounced melodic character of the lines force the listener to pay attention to the bass, even though Satriani is playing what would naturally constitute a lead line. Whether Satriani was behind these changes or not is irrelevant, as the outcome is the same: Satriani’s composer persona is subverted in favour of a band persona.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joe Satriani – ‘Searching’ (studio version)</th>
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<td>Solo 1 (Progression)</td>
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<td>Progression</td>
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<td>Solo 2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- new theme 1 (solo) | 3:49-4:28 | Static | Public | P 4
Breakdown 1/Solo 3 | 4:28-5:19 | Interventionist | Private/Public | P 5
- new theme 2 | 5:19-5:40 | Active | Intimate=>Public | P 5
Solo 4 | 5:40-6:04 | Active | Public | P 5
Breakdown 2 | 6:04-6:21 | Interventionist | Intimate | P1
Progression | 6:21-6:47 | Active | Intimate | P 1
A | 6:47-7:10 | Static | Private | P 2
B | 7:10-7:34 | Interventionist | Public | P 3
Solo 4 (bass solo) | 7:34-7:46 | Interventionist | Public | P 3
Progression /Solo 5 | 7:46-8:06 | Static | Public | P 2
Breakdown 3/Coda | 8:06-8:33 | Static=>Interventionist | Public | P 2
III.3 The classical virtuoso: Yngwie Malmsteen

Malmsteen’s music uncovers a series of interesting facets of the instrumental persona. His monogamous Fender-Marshall relationship creates a more unified sound, with little to no changes from his first to his latest release. Furthermore, his music has changed very little throughout his career. Finally, the general sound of his bands is also constant, even though the musicians in the band change periodically. Overall, Malmsteen’s music seems trapped in a bubble of Malmsteen’s own design. He is currently the sole member of his studio ‘band’, as he wrote, recorded and produced everything on his latest record, World on Fire (2016), making him the ideal candidate for Cone’s (1974; 1992) composer persona. Malmsteen oversees every musical decision. Before exploring the implications of this any further, it is worth seeing how he achieves this apparent sonic and compositional unity.

Sound-wise, Malmsteen has been an avid user of the now classic Fender-Marshall combination. He plays his signature Fender Stratocaster exclusively, and while elements such as pickups have changed throughout the years, the general features of the guitar have stayed very much the same: a Fender Stratocaster with a scalloped fretboard and single coil pickups. He also uses Ovation acoustic guitars extensively, more prominently on ‘Golden Dawn’ (1992), ‘Memories’ (1988), or ‘Sorrow’ (1994), on various live improvisations, and in certain parts of tracks such as ‘Black Star’ (1984) (intro), or ‘Icarus’ Dream Suite Op. 4’ (1984) (5:16). Finally, although not as prominent as Steve Vai’s use of the instrument, the sitar appears on many studio tracks, most notably on ‘Time Will Tell’ (1995) (intro), ‘Pyramid of Cheops’ (1994) (intro), ‘Crucify’ (2000) (0:31), and ‘C’est la Vie’ (1992) (intro).

The default distorted setting that Malmsteen uses generates the standard Malmsteen tone (fig. f). It is the direct result of his Strats going straight into Marshall amplifiers. His

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64 Or “99.9% of the time”, if we are to trust him (Malmsteen 2014a). Most of the guitars he owns are Fender Strats (Malmsteen 2011).
65 He currently uses custom Seymour Duncan STK-S10 YJM ‘Fury’ pickups.
66 The most important, and the one that distinguishes his guitars from most guitar players’, is the scalloped fretboard. Malmsteen claims that the idea came from a sixteenth century lute (Malmsteen 2014a) that he got hold of while working as a luthier at a guitar repair shop (Yngwie Malmsteen n.d.3). He argues that the scalloped fretboard helps him get a better grip on the string (Yngwie Malmsteen n.d.3). However, Eichenberger (2014) and others (Yun 2007; Montfort n.d.) have suggested that scalloping also enhances the vibrato and gives much more control over string bending.
67 Currently uses his signature Viper Ovation YM63 nylon-string guitar (Ovation Guitars n.d.).
68 Standard acoustic sitar (Malmsteen 2015).
69 He currently uses his signature YJM100, and has an impressive number of them onstage, 42 in 2014, although not all of them are turned on (Malmsteen 2014c).
pedalboard is unassuming, featuring in 2011 only a wah-wah pedal.\(^{70}\) Since 2014, he also developed an overdrive pedal with Fender, which he uses in conjunction with his Marshall amps (Malmsteen 2014). However, as opposed to the other case studies, his standard tone is not twofold. He uses the electric in combination with the clean channel very rarely, and opts for the acoustic whenever there is a clean section in a track. Consequently, the number of protagonists throughout Malmsteen’s music is reduced to only two: a standard distorted and an acoustic (although the sitar could be considered a colourful third). In terms of secondary protagonists, given the fact that except for a wah pedal, he rarely uses any other effects, we get a solitary wah-distorted tone. Since Malmsteen always uses the same tone and is always accompanied by the same instruments (and in the same fashion), the audience experiences a realist protagonist in a real situation with his music. Moreover, since often there is a single guitar rather than the multi-layered texture of Vai’s work, for instance, and since he hardly ever changes tones from one section to another, it is hard to imagine that the protagonist is not involved in the music. What we are left with is a realist and (deeply) involved protagonist describing realist scenarios, thus strengthening Malmsteen’s authenticity, an issue I shall return to in the discourse analysis chapter.

Regarding his general approach to composing and guitar-playing, Malmsteen’s bag of tricks is somewhat limited. One of the key elements here is his tuning. He tunes down a half step, and while this is probably not something most listeners will actively notice, its influence will be perceived, at least subconsciously. The lower frequencies create a heavier sound, and while the Eb tuning is not as extreme as the drop C of other styles of heavy metal, it still helps create the dark and heavy sound that Malmsteen’s lyrics, song and album titles conjure up.

While other guitarists experiment with odd meters and complex rhythmic patterns, Malmsteen’s music is almost exclusively in 4/4 (with ‘Enemy’ (1997) being a notable exception,\(^{70}\) His pedalboard also sported a Dunlop Fuzz Face, although it was not used. Malmsteen claims that it is there only because he likes the way it looks, as it resembles a landmine (Malmsteen 2011).
with its 5/4 beat) and rarely uses any exceptional note subdivisions. Furthermore, in terms of harmonic/melodic features, except for brief minor pentatonic passages in tracks that are inspired by blues and classic rock (the intros to ‘I Don’t Know’ (1994), ‘Let Sleeping Dogs Lie’ (2012) (intro), ‘Iron Blues’ (2012), or ‘Hairtrigger’ (1994), an insignificant minority of his output), most of Malmsteen’s compositions (dare I say all of them) are grouped under the mantle of neo-classical metal. What this principally implies (in his music) is that the harmonic and melodic context is derived from the harmonic minor scale (and its fifth mode, the Phrygian Dominant).\footnote{1, b2, 3, 4, 5, b6, b7.} These scales are literally ubiquitous in his music. I am not aware of any track where the scale is not used. Moreover, the fact that the scale of choice is always minor (coupled with the fact that he tunes down a half step) creates a sense of uneasiness that permeates all his releases and helps create the dark and heavy atmosphere I was hinting at earlier. This is one of the reasons why sections that are in major, as in ‘Leviathan’ (1992) (at 2:26), sound so jarring and luminous. Nonetheless, such moments are extremely rare.

The term neo-classical implies that his music is derivative of classical music. Neoclassicism has been used to engulf a large selection of musics, but often these were modern (early twentieth century) takes on Classical and Baroque elements. In the case of Malmsteen’s music, the neoclassical influences are twofold. The first and, arguably, the less creative one is represented by tracks that are literal interpretations of pieces from the Classical/Baroque cannon, or by tracks that feature sections of well-known pieces. Examples include ‘Icarus’ Dream Suite Op. 4’ (1984) (Remo Giazotto’s ‘Adagio in G minor’), ‘Turbo Amadeus’ (2012) (Mozart’s Symphony No. 25), ‘Air’ (2002) (Bach’s Suite No. 3 in D major), ‘Evil Eye’ (1984) (Johann Krieger’s ‘Bourree’), or ‘Air on a Theme’ (1997) (Vivaldi’s Piccolo Concerto in C major).

The more interesting category, however, is represented by tracks where classical music elements are fused with metal, blues, and rock tropes. ‘Majestic Blue’ (2002), ‘Overture 1622’ (1995), ‘Magic and Mayhem’ (2005), ‘Fire and Ice’ (1992) feature contrapuntal writing, classical harmonic structures and melodic patterns, as well as the bravado element (fast scalar runs, six string arpeggios, octave leaps on the same string, alternate picking and so on) that was so endemic to musicians such as Paganini, whom Malmsteen cites as one of his main influences. Even so, these classical music elements are somewhat watered down. While Bach is, at least at the discourse level, his most important influence, most of Malmsteen’s compositions do not
follow the musical practice of Bach’s time. The most relevant form here is the fugue, which, at a basic level, is a contrapuntal piece in which a subject (a melodic phrase) is introduced in one of the voices and then taken in succession by other parts. As a standard practice, when the subject is repeated, it is usually a fifth above, at least the first time the repetition occurs. While numerous Malmsteen tracks employ subject-answer elements, these are often strict repetitions, occasionally at the octave, as in the intro to ‘Voodoo’ (1995), or complementary lines, as in the intro to ‘Overture 1622’. One of the main reasons for the diluted character of these classical music practices is that Malmsteen neither reads nor writes music in the traditional sense (Rosenthal 2013). Nonetheless, the classical (mainly Baroque) sound is there and is arguably the element that distinguishes Malmsteen from the rest of my case studies.

Most importantly, the past ten years have seen Malmsteen become completely self-sufficient. There has always been a tendency for independence throughout Malmsteen’s entire career, collaborating in writing songs only with lyricists (usually the singers). He even habitually plays bass on at least a few of the tracks on each release (Sarzo 2015), and has been known to take the mantle of a flute player on occasion, utilizing a guitar synth to simulate the flute on the intros to ‘Revelation (Drinking with the Devil)’ (2005) and ‘Save Our Love’ (1990) (Hard Rock Heaven 2009). This practice has reached the apogee with his last two albums, Spellbound (2012) (Malmsteen and Charupakorn 2013), and World on Fire (2016) (Discogs 2016), on which he recorded every instrument, sang all the vocals, and produced and engineered every track, with negligible interference from anybody else.\footnote{The engineering and mixing roles have been taken on by a series of people over the years, most notably by Tom Fletcher, who worked on Malmsteen records eighteen years (Fletcher 2015). Yet, Malmsteen has always been featured as the producer on all of his releases.}

This singular mindset extends to how he records guitars, opting to very rarely overdub, and even when he does superimpose guitar lines, these are harmonisations (in thirds or, on rarer occasions, in octaves - Malmsteen 2011a) of the main line, not individual melodies (two in ‘Overture 1383’ (1985) (0:24), ‘Brothers’ (1994) (0:32), or ‘Majestic Blue’ (2002) (intro), and three in ‘Lament’ (2008) (0:21), for instance). Finally, this main guitar line, main protagonist is normatively in the centre of the sound-box, with additional voices being usually separated left-right for two and left-centre-right for three voices. The zenith of this practice is found in pieces such as ‘Amberdawn’ (1995), where the guitar is positioned in the centre channel, in an
intimate/private proxemic level of a static environment – a practice that has become the standard in guitar-driven instrumental track.

Given how many different vocalists have appeared on Malmsteen’s albums over the years, the relationship of these to his own vocal effects is a key, unique element of Malmsteen’s persona. He uses vocality less to create the illusion of the voice but more to maintain a hegemonic hold on the overall sound. As in the previous case studies, the idea of vocality, of emulating a human voice, is prevalent in Malmsteen’s music, particularly in the way he articulates his melodic lines,73 as besides the Dunlop Cry Baby wah pedal, he does not use any other piece of gear to produce vocal like effects.74 However, in terms of native gear, Malmsteen changes the vowel quality of a note by using the pickup selector. In tracks such as ‘Tarot’, there is a clear timbral difference between sections in which the neck pickup is used and sections in which the bridge pickup is used. By rapidly switching from one to the other, Malmsteen generates a sound that resembles either a subtle manipulation of a wah pedal or the quick manipulation of the tone knob on the guitar. Both scenarios function on the same principle: the neck pickup/tone knob all the way down exposes a mellower sound, with fewer high overtones, while the bridge pickup/tone knob all the way down creates a more abrasive sound, full of high harmonics. Moving quickly between the two creates the frequency sweep that is interpreted as a modification of a vowel. Moreover, particularly when switching from the neck to the bridge pickup, the guitar ‘screams’, at least for the few moments after the pickup swap. This represents an instrumentalization of the vocals, in the sense that the pickup switch creates a sound similar to a vocalist switching from a full, heavy, round chest voice to a light and piercing head voice. This happens frequently in Malmsteen’s music, regardless of whom the main vocalist in the band is,75 as in ‘No Mercy’ (1992) (1:12), ‘The Seventh Sign’ (1994) (1:46), ‘Four Horsemen (of the

73 Malmsteen also creates the illusion of voice by utilizing (synthesized) voices. He uses synths to thicken up the textures in tracks such as ‘Knight of the Vasa Order’ (2010), ‘Into Valhalla’ (2010), ‘Spellbound’ (2012), ‘Time Will Tell’ (1995), ‘Bite the Bullet’ (1988), or ‘Nasca Lines’ (2012). (On ‘Into Valhalla’, the choir has designated solo moments.) However, what is particularly interesting in these examples is that the synthesizers use choir patches (although he also uses a proper choir in his 1998 Concerto Suite for Electric Guitar and Orchestra in E Flat Minor). The fact that proper lyrics have been replaced by meaningless ‘ah’’s and ‘oh’’s makes the choirs act more as an instrument than as human voices, bridging the gap between Malmsteen the ‘guitarist of songs’ and Malmsteen the ‘guitarist of tracks’.

74 He mainly uses it in blues/hard rock-inspired tracks such as ‘Blue’ (1999) or ‘Freedom Isn’t Free’ (2002), or the more restrained use of the pedal in ‘Into Valhalla’. In ‘Blue’ (at 0:40-0:42), for example, Malmsteen uses the pedal to create the vowel quality-changing spectral glide that occurs in speech, primarily in words with diphthongs.

75 This does not happen in songs on which Malmsteen himself sings, probably due to issues regarding vocal range, as I shall explore below.

In terms of technique, Malmsteen achieves vocality through bending and vibrato. At fifty-five seconds into ‘Like an Angel - For April’ (1997), Malmsteen ends a solo section by playing a three-note pattern (B#, C#, D#) while only fretting the first note. The other ones are played by bending the E string. Such bends subvert the notion of the guitar as a tempered instrument, because even though the three pitches themselves would have been the same if picked individually, the bends create a portamento effect that pulls the notes from one to the other in an un-tempered articulation that resembles singing. Finally, Malmsteen’s vibrato has been particularly praised by fans and critics and is one of the key elements that generates vocality in his music. He uses a moderately paced wide rock vibrato, but since the strings do not actually touch the fretboard, due to the curvature of the scallop, the vibrato assumes a different tone than the standard rock technique. The resulting vibrato is eerily similar to how all of Malmsteen’s vocalist vibrate their long notes, particularly in the upper range.

The hegemonic composer

What is unusual in Malmsteen’s music is that a great deal of his pieces are vocal songs, even though he is known and praised for his instrumental tracks.\(^{76}\) Out of the 222 tracks that he has recorded as of 2018,\(^{77}\) the number of instrumental tracks per album ranges from 1 out of 13 on Facing the Animal (1997) to 10 out of 13 on Spellbound (2012), and everything in between.\(^{78}\) Noteworthy here is the fact that the largest number of instrumentals appears on the album on which Malmsteen is the sole performer. I have already mentioned that Malmsteen plays bass on

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76 On Angels of Love (2009), an album that features re-recordings of previously released material, he actually substituted the vocal melodies with guitar melodies. However, these versions were played on the acoustic guitar alone (with few exceptions). The best example of such a practice is ‘Save Our Love’ (2009), a reinterpretation of his original 1990 version, off Eclipse. Except for the introduction, which is played using the same guitar-synth flute tone I previously discussed, everything else is played on the acoustic, even the vocal melodies. However, the guitar does not follow the original vocal melodies. For example, the chorus is replaced by the melody of the electric guitar solo.

77 I use the US releases as reference. Of course, Japanese and European releases might contain bonus tracks. Nonetheless, the main idea comes through regardless of specific numbers.

many of his recordings, but he is also a keen drummer,\textsuperscript{79} and this is reflected not only in the fact that he occasionally plays drums on his albums, but also in the fact that many of his songs/tracks begin with a drum fill.

His seventeen LPs (not including compilations, live albums, or alternate versions of pre-released material – including his \textit{Concerto}), were released under the band names Yngwie J. Malmsteen’s Rising Force, Yngwie Malmsteen’s Rising Force, or Yngwie Malmsteen, in a random pattern that does not always reflect changes in band members. Rising Force disbanded after the release of their \textit{Live in Leningrad/Trial by Fire} (1989) live album, when Malmsteen also left his record label (Shelton 1999). Regardless, he started using the name Rising Force again sporadically after \textit{Alchemy} (1999), even though the name did not always reflect the nature of the music. For instance, his \textit{Spellbound} (2012) was released under Rising Force, even though Malmsteen is the sole musician on the recording.

Regardless of who is in the band, however, the music ends up sounding roughly the same from one release to another. This is probably to be expected, since Malmsteen is usually the sole composer of the music. Nonetheless, the actual sound of the band is the same, particularly post-1990. The drum is always conforming to strict patterns commonly associated with heavy metal (fast tempos, double-pedal sixteenth notes, machine-like kick and snare patterns etc.), the bass always features the same tone, voicings, and register, and the vocals are always powerful, vibrato-heavy, and occupy the higher end of the male vocal spectrum. Again, regardless of who a band member is, he is almost required to copy what the previous instrumentalist/vocalist did. The musicians themselves seem to be devoid of any unique musical personality. They are there only because Malmsteen cannot play all instruments at the same time.

Given the potentiality for other musicians and engineers to ultimately affect the resulting recording and band sound, this elimination of musical variables creates an interesting layer of Malmsteen’s persona. Since the reigns to the compositional and production aspects of Malmsteen’s music are in his hands alone, his persona acquires properties commonly attributed to classical music composers. His band might be called Rising Force, but since it has seen so many musicians being replaced without the sound of the band changing in any relevant way, it is rather hard to discuss Malmsteen’s sound in terms of a band sound. Here, each musician brought

\textsuperscript{79} He even took lessons when he was young (Malmsteen 2013).
into the project is there only to follow Malmsteen’s instructions and reproduce what he did on the recording.

In this context, are we interacting with a band sound or with an Yngwie J. Malmsteen sound? In the case of Satriani, the most recent incarnation of his live band features Bryan Beller, while his 1997 band saw Stu Hamm as the bassist. Both players have their own individual sound, and this will most likely be reflected in the way live performances are constructed. Moreover, although we do not know if this in ultimately true, at least at the discourse level Satriani states that he leaves creative room for the other musicians. In the case of Malmsteen, since every record has the same sound, it is safe to assume that the driving force behind it is not a band per se, but Malmsteen alone. The roles of the other band members are, arguably, perfunctory.

Developing this line of thought, the drumming, bass playing, and vocals in a Malmsteen song are exactly what a listener would expect in heavy metal or neoclassical metal. The other instrumentalists are there only to provide a backbone for Malmsteen’s playing. Listeners know they are not only listening to a standard Malmsteen track, but also to a standard metal track. Consequently, perhaps the crux of the matter lays in who or what a band allows to be projected. The question then is whether the band exists solely within the boundaries of a parent style, thus allowing for the leader to be projected alone, or whether the band members start to deviate from that parent style, a case in which their contributions become more important in the resulting combination, which thus projects the idea of the band.\(^{80}\)

In addition, the tracks seem to be constructed in such a way that Malmsteen can perform them without the aid of a second guitarist. In ‘Instrumental Institution’ (2000), for instance, even though there are clearly multiple lines interacting throughout the track (these are even placed in different points in the sound-box), each line ends when the other begins, so that they can be played as a continuous melody in live performances. At the same time, a key feature of Malmsteen’s music is improvisation. Some of his live performances are improvised to such a degree that certain sections disrupt the formal structure of a piece. In Malmsteen’s music, everything can be changed, even key themes. This provides another layer of hegemony over the sound, as he is the only one who modifies any element of the original recording; the other members stick to the original themes and structures.

\(^{80}\) I thank Dr. Nick Braae for this observation.
‘Black Star’: a single entity

The first track on Malmsteen’s first solo LP *Rising Force* is ‘Black Star’, making it the very first recording most listeners heard of Yngwie Malmsteen, back in 1984. The first bars of the track present the listener with a short classical guitar section that recreates the musical rhetoric of Bach and composers of his time. As opposed to just performing an already established piece from the classical canon, Malmsteen composes new music in the same tradition, but utilizes his own musical sensibilities. Nonetheless, for the perspective of a casual first time Malmsteen listener, this section could have had its origins in a Baroque dance. Nonetheless, the classical sound world is shattered by a drum break that leads the track into the neoclassical rock sound of the remainder of the piece. The intervening environment acts as a sort of wakeup call, letting the audience know that what they are listening to is an Yngwie Malmsteen record, and not a classical music piece.

Throughout ‘Black Star’, the guitar sound does not change from the standard Malmsteen Fender-Marshall combination. The initial classical guitar (P1) is never heard again after the first 24 seconds of the track. P2 is then present in all subsequent sections of the track. Except for brief passages where the position in the sound-box changes (the protagonist pans from left to right and vice versa in Intro 2b, Solo, and Outro), most of the time P2 is split into two guitars positioned approximately 45 degrees off-centre to the left and 90 degrees to the right, respectively. However, the second line is always a note-for-note harmonisation of the first, making the entire section playable by a single guitar during live performances by utilizing a harmoniser. Malmsteen does not do this, however, but the fact that it can be achieved by such means is enough. Moreover, he does perform the two himself on screen in the *Full Shred* (2000), one of Malmsteen’s instructional videos (Yngwie Malmsteen n.d.4). The only instance where the protagonist plays individual melodic ideas is in the Solo, but that section featured a single guitar, placed in the centre of the sound-box. Consequently, the entire piece could have been performed by Malmsteen alone. In the instructional DVD, Malmsteen first records guitar 1 on the spot, and then played the other melody over said recording. Of course, these two melodies are a third apart, as if recorded through a harmonizer. However, the screen is split into two, each half showing Malmsteen playing one of the lines. Essentially, we get to see what it would look like if two Malmsteens were playing at the same time. I shall explore similar issues in the next analysis.
The environment is static for most of the duration of the track, becoming active only in moments where the bass plays counterpoint to the guitar lines of section B. Malmsteen is not only part of the environment, given that he also plays bass on the track, but he is also responsible for the only instance where the nature of the environment changes, making the unification process even greater. Furthermore, the fact that the drums and keyboards play the same figures repeatedly suggests that who the instrumentalists are is of no consequence to the track. While the keyboard does change chords and produces some idea of harmonic movement, the bass plays a single E note for most of the piece. Subsequently, the entire rhythm section is there only to provide harmonic support or, better yet, a drone for Malmsteen’s melodies and solos.

It is hard to argue that ‘Black Star’ has any element of it ‘fractured’, and could be the result of a single persona and protagonist, from the musicological features to the sonic, and performance of each instrument. Malmsteen holds the reigns to everything that is heard on the recording, and live versions of the track sound eerily similar, even after more than 30 years since the tracks’ release. The degree of subservience of the environment, the singularity of the guitar sounds, and the various musicological features such as harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic patterns solidify the notion of an omnipresent composer persona directing everything.

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<tr>
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<td>Active</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>P2 P2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>P2 P2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>P2 P2 P2</td>
</tr>
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<td>P2 P2 P2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>P2 P2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3:27-3:54</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>P2 P2</td>
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‘Molto Arpeggiosa’: one more Malmsteen

What is particularly interesting in this track is that the bass assumes central position in a few key sections. First – and this is a rather unique feature among Malmsteen’s tracks – ‘Molto Arpeggiosa’ (2000) opens with the bass persona playing the main melodic material of what eventually becomes the environment. However, for the first ten seconds of the track, our attention falls on it. Of course, in true Malmsteen fashion, the guitar comes in afterwards and assumes its role of thematic material provider. Except for very short bends at 0:18, 0:39, 0:48, which are played by a second guitar (P2), positioned in the centre of the sound-box, the main melodic material comes from the guitar that is placed in the left side of the sound-box, 30-40 degrees off-centre (P1). At no time during the track do the two guitars play simultaneously, except for brief passages in which the second guitar doubles the first exactly or when it harmonises the principal line. Since both harmonisations are possible in real-time using an effects processor such as a digital harmonizer, this second line functions as a sort of afterimage of the main protagonist, not as a fully-fledged second one.

Returning to the prominent bass, it functions as a main protagonist of sorts, as it constantly intervenes and takes the attention away from the main guitar line, even if just momentarily (0:17, 0:46 etc.). The most conspicuous examples are the ‘Breakdown’ and ‘Solo 2’ sections. Here, not only does the bass regain centre stage by being the only audible instrument (for two bars, until the guitar joins in again), but it also creates a sense of counterpoint with the main guitar line, particularly between 2:52 and 2:54. The bass is placed, as expected, in the centre of the sound-box. However, as I previously mentioned, the guitar does not occupy the same space; it is at an angle, to the left. The main reason for this placement is most likely technical. By not positioning everything in the centre channel, both instruments are audible (due to less chances of phase cancellation or other EQ issues), and their melodic lines form a more coherent strand, especially given the fact that often these interactions create counterpoint.

But what implications does this have for our perception of the persona? If we do not inquire further into who the bass player is, we will just assume that it is someone who was either hired to record the bass or the bassist in Malmsteen’s band at the time. Then, the interactions between the two melodic lines are understood as exchanges between two separate instrumental
personae. However, if we do inquire into who the bass player is, or if I habitually follow Malmsteen’s music, we will eventually find out it is Malmsteen himself who plays bass on this recording. We are, of course, aware that he could not have played and recorded both at the same time. Nonetheless, if we are not perturbed by the idea of being able to play multiple instruments at the same time, how should we to make sense of this, from the perspective of the persona?

The easiest solution might be to analyse the live version of the track, but it has never been performed live, at least not in a complete version. Excerpts, mainly the arpeggio section, were performed as part of a demonstration in *Full Shred*. The track in question was dubbed ‘Arpeggios from Hell’ and was released in 2000, the same year as *War to End All Wars*, from which ‘Molto Arpeggiosa’ is taken. While the duet section is missing from the performance, the bass is clearly audible on the recording. More importantly, it not only plays in unison with Malmsteen’s lines, but it also plays distinct, contrapuntal melodies in some sections. Again, if the listeners know Malmsteen plays both instruments, then these lines cannot be harmonisations, but extensions of his persona. We essentially have two Malmsteens playing at the same time.

The reason this interpretation seems valid is because Malmsteen is the sole performer on this live version, the rest of the instruments – bass included – being pre-recorded. In this instance, not only is Malmsteen playing different protagonists at the same time, he also adopts two different personae at the same time. However, the crux of the matter is whether we would know that it was Malmsteen playing the bass if not for the video. I would argue that we would not. The sound of a bass guitar is completely different from the sound of a distorted electric guitar, and as mentioned earlier, the tone of a guitar player comes from a combination of phrasing and gear. While the phrasing might be the same, since the instrument and the gear that it is plugged into are not the same, Malmsteen’s persona cannot be equated with the bass persona. Moreover, the bass lines are in no way different from tracks in which Malmsteen did not play bass. Yngwie Malmsteen the person might have creative control over the finished product, but the sound itself is not an extension of his musical, instrumental persona. We might not have multiple Malmsteens after all.

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81 The instructional video was mainly released for the Japanese market. Consequently, I could not find a specific date of its release. Websites cited 2000 as the year, but none offered a specific date. However, since *War to End All Wars* came out on 7 November 2000 and *Full Shred* contained no tracks post *Alchemy*, which came out in 1999, I think it is safe to assume that ‘Arpeggios from Hell’ preceded ‘Molto Arpeggiosa’.
Regardless, the two lines on the studio version were recorded by Malmsteen himself, and this points to an interesting aspect of his persona. I have previously argued that the notion of a fractured persona might be the better way to approach this type of music. However, in such an instance, not only is the music and the recording the product of Malmsteen alone, even the performance is entirely Malmsteen’s. Moreover, the guitar sound does not change throughout any of the track’s sections. The protagonist is unitary, the composition is unitary, and the backing instrument personae are unitary. Granted, the personae of the bass and drums are different instruments, each with its own sets of idiosyncrasies. Yet, the overall product is the result of a single, hegemonic persona. This track comes closest to Cone’s (1992) model of instrumental personae.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yngwie Malmsteen – ‘Molto Arpeggiosa’</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Intro (a)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Solo 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakdown (Intro)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solo 2</td>
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<td>A</td>
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</table>

‘Look at You Now’: guitarist vs. singer

‘Look at You Now’ (2010) is fascinating on multiple levels and has a somewhat unique place in Malmsteen’s discography. Out of the 5:46 runtime, 2 minutes and 52 seconds of the song are vocal, which represents a shade under half of the song’s length. Here, both guitar and voice are on an even footing, which is fitting, given that Malmsteen is the singer on the track. Harmonisations are minimal (mirroring the sparseness of the guitar overdubs), and most of the time the listener focuses on a single vocal track that carries the lyrics. The decision to keep the
guitar and vocal parts simple could have been made to facilitate live playing, but the track has never been performed live. Furthermore, while the instruments and compositional elements behave the same way as in any other similar track, the vocals do not, however. None of the elements that Malmsteen uses to achieve vocality in his guitar solos – all of which are translated into the vocal deliveries of singers he has worked with throughout the years – are found here. The vocals are mid range, sung in a raspy, Hendrix-like tone, unlike the operatic vocals of singers such as Joe Lynn Turner or Tim ‘Ripper’ Owens. While virtuosic guitar skills do not come hand in hand with virtuosic vocal skills, it is somewhat unusual that the ultimate expression of Malmsteen’s persona comes out completely different in this regard to his previous twenty years worth of material, both in the studio and onstage.

The track sees many tropes found in Malmsteen’s music, from the snare and toms fill that introduces the drum to the presence of the harmonic minor even over chord sequences that do not specifically require it. An interesting change from his usual output, however, is the mode of the chorus, which is major. While major chords are plenty in his music, having an entire section of a track in major is a bold move for him, particularly on a chorus. The intro and outro guitar themes are also played in major, although the main solos are in the comfort zone of the harmonic minor mode. Furthermore, even though there are various harmonisations that occur throughout the track, particularly in the descending scalar runs that precede the sung sections, there is little contrapuntal work in this track. The multiple protagonists are relegated to doubling rhythm parts or harmonising lead lines, with the bass and drums also following the simplicity of the guitar parts. This, again, is somewhat unusual for him, as the bass often plays counterpoint to the guitar, and the drums normatively intervene in the guitar discourse. During the solos, the main guitar line does cut through the mix and is in the centre of attention, which is to be expected. Nonetheless, this example shows that compositional decisions are always taken by a real person, regardless of how hidden he or she is from what we listen to. Some other guitarist trying to compose a song in the style of Malmsteen might have not decided to use the major mode in such an important section, so even though he/she might try to wear the mask of a certain guitarist, so to speak, their thought process will never be identical to the actual composer and performer.

This track is particularly fascinating given that Malmsteen is the sole musician on the recording. ‘Look at You Now’ features drums, bass, guitars, and vocals, all performed and recorded by Malmsteen himself. In many ways, it represents the apogee of the composer persona,
surpassing, perhaps, what even Cone (1992) thought possible, as not only is the composer responsible for every ‘written’ aspect of the work, but he also presents to the listener his exact musical idea, including the sound itself. Whereas with instrumental music it is easier to create the illusion of an all-seeing composer, vocal music brings that extra layer that makes the endeavour far more challenging. Particularly in the case of Malmsteen, who as opposed to Satriani and Vai has up until recently relied on singers to record in the studio, the addition of the extra person to the mix, regardless of how little he did in terms of writing, unbalanced Malmsteen’s titanic hold over the music. Ironically, however, he still uses singers for live performances (even though the keyboardist is also the singer of his current live band, sitting somewhere in the background, contrary to customary rock practice, leaving Malmsteen as the frontman), presumably because he is not competent enough as a singer to perform the challenging vocal lines. ‘Look at You Now’ and similar tracks on his latest release might be the start of a new trend where we could see Malmsteen singing more and more, thus strengthening his hold on the live environment as well.

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<th>Sound-box</th>
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<td>P1</td>
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<tr>
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III.4 The chameleon: Guthrie Govan

Interviews aside, Guthrie Govan’s presence on record in strictly instrumental, as he has never sung on any of his tracks (unlike the other three guitarists). Since Govan only expresses himself musically in an instrumental setting, there is a tendency for the listener to consider his music as somewhat sincerer, more complete than if he would have used additional means of expression on his records and performances. This apparent authenticity also stems from the fact that his signal chain is very unassuming, using the basic guitar to amp setup as his to go setting. While he does use many effects (TC Electronic Flashback delay, TC Electronic Hall of Fame reverb, Suhr Koko Boost, Providence Anadime Analog Chorus, etc. – Govan 2016),\(^82\) his main tone is realised by sending the guitar straight into the amp. He used a custom Shur Modern Pro guitar with a Shur Badger amplifier for many years, switching recently to a Charvel Custom guitar and stock Victory amplifiers.\(^83\) His standard tone is normatively distorted (fig. g), although he often uses a clean configuration, particularly for rhythm or other rhythm-led sections of his tracks. The main protagonists encountered throughout his music are the standard distorted tone and the standard clean tone, achieved by sending the guitar signal directly through the clean or distorted channels of the amp. As for secondary protagonists, these are created by adding a wah pedal to each of the main ones. Of course, many other episodic protagonists appear throughout both The Aristocrats releases (his main band, formed with Bryan Beller and Marco Minnemann) and Govan’s own compositions, such as the chorused clean sound created by using the Providence Anadime Analog Chorus.

\[
\text{GUTHRIE GOVAN TONE} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{DISTORTED} \\
\text{CLEAN}
\end{array} \quad \text{WAH} \\
\begin{array}{c}
\text{WAH}
\end{array}
\]

**fig. g**

While I will focus on tracks from his sole solo album - *Erotic Cakes* (2006) and the three albums released by The Aristocrats - *The Aristocrats* (2011), *Culture Clash* (2013), *Tres*

\(^82\) His pedalboard currently sports the Free The Tone Red Jasper overdrive, TC Electronic Polytune, Guyatone WR-3 Autowah, Xotic EP Booste, Providence Anadime Analog Chorus, Dunlop Jerry Cantrell Signature Wah, Dunlop Volume Pedal, Flashback x4 Digital Delay and HOF Reverb (Aristocrats 2016).

\(^83\) He also uses acoustic guitars in the studio and in live performances (but on very rare occasions), on pieces such as ‘Ner Ner’ (2006) or ‘Eric’ (2006), along with the Vigier fretless guitars, as seen on The Aristocrats’ *Boing, We’ll Do It Live!* (2012) release.
*Caballeros* (2015) -, I will also look closely at a track that Govan composed and recorded for the UK magazine *Guitar Techniques* (Govan 2011u). A poll was conducted among its readers, in which respondents had to select the best guitar player in each of twenty categories (legato, tapping, vibrato etc.). In this track, Govan not only exemplifies each individual technique, but he also emulates the compositional and, more importantly, the overall playing style and sound of each category winner. As I mentioned in the introduction, I find Jung’s ‘mask of the actor’ analogy convincing, and I think Govan does pick up the masks of the various players and constructs a piece that manages to bring together twenty different personae. Govan has spent most of his career as a transcriber, guitar teacher/internet instructor, and session musician, and this is reflected in his chameleonic style of playing and in his compositional style. Nonetheless, his own music and the music of The Aristocrats is original.

Govan is undoubtedly one of the most technically accomplished guitarists of his generation, as many listeners, peers and critics attest. He has been hailed by critics as the “virtuoso’s virtuoso” (Govan and Edwards 2006) for his skills on the instrument and his command of a multitude of music styles. As with the previous case studies, Govan’s guitar style is also intimately intertwined with the notion of vocality. He achieves this in two ways: gear and technique. In terms of gear, the main ones that he uses are the Dunlop JC95 Jerry Cantrell wah pedal, the Guyatone Wah Rocker WR-M5 autowah pedal (as heard on ‘Blues Fuckers’ (2011) at 1:03, or ‘Rhode Island Shred’ (2006) at 0:18), and the Boss FV-30H Foot volume pedal, used to “hide the attack of the note” (Govan 2013b). This makes the sound seem less instrument-like and more vocal, simulating the human production of vowels, as on ‘I Want a Parrot’ (2011) at 4:30, or on ‘Through the Flower’ (2015) at 5:46. In terms of native gear, Govan is an expert in manipulating the volume knob, lowering the signal that reaches the amp, thus creating a

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84 I do not own a copy of the magazine, nor could I find an archived version online. Consequently, I will refer to the track as ‘Guthrie Govan plays: Who’s Best?’, the title of the YouTube video containing the recording (Govan 2008). The magazine issue came out in 2005, but the track was uploaded on YouTube in 2008.

85 This pedal automatically vocalizes the sound at set intervals, but the guitar player can control the degree of ‘wahification’ by modifying the dynamics of a note, series of notes, or chords (the harder the attack, the more prominent the effect). Both effects feature heavily in Govan’s music, as can be heard on many tracks on The Aristocrats’ *Culture Clash LIVE!* (2015) CD.

86 As a tangent to this, an interesting example is found in ‘Desert Tornado’ (2013), where the feedback functions as the air supply of the guitar (2:42). Govan manipulates the amp feedback to sustain a specific note, the result of which is an interesting type of feedback ‘scream’. Not only is the note airy due to the lack of pick-attack usually needed for such an extended note, but the sound also stops and starts again from a pitch that is slightly flat before reaching the initial pitch, which happens in vocal production in instances where a note is stopped (because of lack of air) and then re-sung.
mellow tone, as heard on ‘Ohhhh Noooo’ (2013) starting at 4:50. This simulates the effect of vocal dynamics, of going from a strained head voice to a relaxed chest voice. Finally, he uses the whammy bar to produce a “gargle” (Govan 2013c), as in ‘Jack’s Back’ (2015) at 1:14, or to slightly lower the notes and raise them up again, as in ‘Furtive Jack’ (2011) at 0:57. On the latter piece, the type of whammy manipulation gives a sort of lingering quality to the notes, one which is commonly heard in jazz singing (Diana Krall’s ‘I’ve Got You Under My Skin’ (1999), for instance).

Technique-wise, Govan also uses slides to simulate the untampered quality of the human voice. However, besides gliding from one note to another, he also uses metal slides, more prominently on ‘Eric’ (2006) (at 0:27) and ‘Wonderful Slippery Thing’ (2006) (at 0:53). Using the slide also permits vibratos with more control over the width and speed. Moreover, he also plays the Vigier Excalibur Surfreter Supra, a fretless guitar that by its very nature eliminates the fixed distances between the notes and creates a similar sound to using a slide on a fretted guitar.87 Picks or Allen wrenches are also used on the strings to simulate screaming on ‘Erotic Cakes’ (2006) (2:45) and ‘Living the Dream’ (2013) (on the intro).88 Another characteristic slide technique is used on ‘Jack’s Back’, for instance, where he plays a note then slides up on the same string before muting it, creating a sound that resembles a hiccup (5:04). Finally, on ‘Sweaty Knockers’ (2011), in the section that starts at 0:56, he slides from one note to another, but he makes every note in between audible, resembling fast scalar runs often heard in classical operas (Mozart, Rossini etc.).

Spectral slides occur often in Govan’s music, even though not always in an overt way. In ‘I Want a Parrot’ (2011), he quickly alternates between two notes on the same string (a trill) while lightly touching the string with the right hand in specific places so that the harmonics become audible (4:05). This creates the effect of a spectral glide, but as opposed to perceiving the general effect of the harmonics (in the sense that they colour a sound and expose an extra set of frequencies), the overtones become audible. This changes the spectral configuration of the trill and consequently modifies the vowel quality of the sounds in the same way as a wah pedal would. Similar effects are achieved on ‘Fives’ (2006), where he plays a tapped arpeggio on

87 I am not aware of any studio recording on which this is used, although he has played it when performing with Dizzee Rascal (Govan and Rascal 2011).
88 A similar technique was used when he performed with Dizzee Rascal, although the result here was more robotic and synth-like (Govan and Rascal 2011).
multiple strings, which creates the opening-the-mouth effect as he quickly and fluidly moves from low to high notes, thus simulating a spectral glide (1:34).

Tracks such as ‘Hangover’ (2006) at 0:50, ‘Sweaty Knockers’ (2011) at 3:31, ‘Furtive Jack’ (2011) at 6:16, ‘Sevens’ (2006) at 0:41, or ‘Culture Clash’ (2013) (1:13) feature pinched harmonics bursts that resemble whistles and choked screams. In ‘I Want a Parrot’ (2011), he uses pinched harmonics in conjunction with the whammy bar to create falling screams (9:09). Similar vocal effects are achieved by bending the strings. Bends permeate Govan’s music, and he often uses them to create the illusion of a five-stage bend, for instance, on Steven Wilson’s ‘Ancestral’ (2015), a bend that is made up of multiple two-stage bends seamlessly stringed together (4:02). Multiple bends occur on ‘Cocktail Umbrellas’ (2013) as well, but in a more static way, as it involves bending the same initial pitch twice or more times (1:14). This has as a result the illusion of vowels, as only the first note of the pattern is struck with the pick.

One characteristic that defines Govan’s bending technique is his approach to pitch. He departs from the usual whole-tone/half-tone pattern that is common in instrumental rock, and utilizes the entire gamut of possible bends. In ‘Dance of the Aristocrats’ (2013), for instance, he uses quarter-note bends, playing notes that are somewhere in between the fretted note and the next note in the tempered scale, a practice adopted from blues (1:20). In addition, Govan rarely returns to the initial note, and resolving the bends to the next tempered note is equally infrequent, choosing instead to leave it hanging somewhere in between. These suspended bends create the sensation of a vowel, as the notes do not have a sharp attack at the end of the note. Similarly, on ‘Waves’ (2006) (and many of his tracks and improvisations) he uses gradual bends, slowly moving from the fretted note to the upper pitch he is aiming for, which is a standard vocal technique, commonly associated with blues and jazz (2:04). Similarly, another distinguishing approach is found on tracks such as ‘Ohhhh Nooooo’ (2013), where he phrases the main melody (0:38) using short bends, simulating the way someone might articulate words, in the sense that the small melodic sections could be syllables that form words. This is one of the most recognizable traits of Govan’s persona, and he uses short (and often bent) melodies in his compositions and especially in his improvisations.

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89 Even though Satriani’s blues influence is prominent, these types of bends are rare in his music and are virtually unheard in Malmsteen’s playing.
Vibrato is another common feature amongst all four case studies. As with his bends, Govan uses a multitude of ways of vibrating a note, from discrete to violent. Usually, his vibratos are wide and resemble BB King’s vibrato, in the sense that they are fast and created by rapidly bending the string up and down (as opposed to Vai’s circular vibrato, for instance), as heard on ‘Sevens’ (2006) at 0:26. On ‘Jack’s Back’ (2015), at 1:13, he violently vibrates the final note of the main melody to achieve a somewhat strange type of vibrato, one which is often heard in older opera singers – a certain wobble that comes with old age and overused vocal chords.

**Heterogeneity**

Govan started playing at a very early age and has spent most of his early career transcribing (most of the 90s, starting in 1994 at Guitar Techniques – BIMM n.d.), and this offered him an intimate knowledge of the music and styles of most guitar players that were part of the late 80s and 90s ‘canon’. He also regularly records for Replay Heaven, a sample recreation company (Sonny J, Sugababes, Gotye, Cee Lo Green, Tinie Tempah, Dizzee Rascal) and has recorded with Asia (progressive rock), The Fellowship (jazz fusion) and The Young Punx (electronica) – BIMM n.d. He cites Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Eric Johnson, Steve Vai, Yngwie Malmsteen amongst his most important influences (Govan 2013a). His own solo album, *Erotic Cakes* (2006), is an eclectic mix of tracks that reflects his diverse musical influences.

The focus of this chapter will be on the heterogeneity of Govan’s output, as an eclectic mix of influences come together to produce his peculiar musical persona. More than in the case of Vai, Satriani, or Malmsteen, Govan’s persona is less bound by compositional practices. His musical persona comes out at least as much, if not more, in his guitar playing and improvisations. His mastery of a multitude of styles gave his playing a chameleonic quality, without him losing his identity in the process. His main influences are blues, country, jazz/fusion, and the shred scene of the 80s and early 90s. These influences are reflected in both his approach to melodic/harmonic construction and his approach to technique, phrasing, and improvisation. Again, the notion of vocality is key to his persona. He uses a variety of techniques to create the illusion of the guitar as a voice, from bends and manipulations of the whammy bar to his use of wah pedals and fretless guitars.
These factors have had a significant effect on his compositional language. His music is less individual, to some extent, than the previous three case studies. While his guitar sound is distinctive, the tracks themselves are less so, and this is particularly evident on The Aristocrats releases. All three members compose for the group, but the individual style is less distinct than in a band such as Queen, for instance, where songs by Freddie Mercury are easily distinguishable from Roger Taylor compositions, especially for listeners accustomed to Queen’s output. One cannot make the distinction so easily for The Aristocrats. Consequently, as opposed to the previous case studies, I shall focus less on the music per se but more on how it is articulated by Govan himself. This carries interesting implications for how he treats other musician personae, particularly on his solo album. On ‘Eric’ (2006), for instance, the final secondary theme (4:06) sees the bass intervene in the guitar discourse(s). The guitar protagonist maintains its melodic material, but the bass jumps to the foreground with a walking bass line that resembles a Bach bass line. This takes the listener’s attention away from the guitar and places it on the bass persona. Similarly, on ‘Erotic Cakes’ (2006), there are actually solo moments for both bass and drums (2:09 onwards).

As a guitar player, he has a distinct sound that not only combines the virtuosity of Vai and Malmsteen, but also the blues inflections of Satriani. However, what separates him from most rock guitarists is his use of chromatic notes, filling in the gaps left in the pentatonic or the standard seven-note scales of Anglo-American rock. The jazz elements are distinct to his sound, but chromatics are not the only jazz and blues features that permeate his playing. These elements form the basis for both his solo playing and his chordal and harmonic pallet. While rock music’s harmonic language is based on triads (and this is true for most of the music of the other three case studies), Govan uses extended, four and five note chords as standard (7th chords, 9th chords). Tracks such as ‘Wonderful Slippery Thing’ (2006) (the intro, for instance) or The Aristocrats’ ‘Get It Like That’ (2011) (3:29 onward) are full of chromatic runs, octave lead lines, extended chords and instrument timbres that unambiguously point toward jazz-fusion as key influences.

Govan’s progressive rock influences are exposed in tracks such as ‘Erotic Cakes’ (2006), with its highly chromatic intro that resembles much of King Crimson or Dream Theater’s output. The ‘robot’ solo (1:40) of the piece (achieved by playing through a ring modulator), for instance, also fits the character of progressive rock, as not only is the instrumentation in progressive rock
extremely important (Palmer 2001), but most of the natural sounds of the instruments are manipulated to create unfamiliar timbres (Macan 1996). The country influences are also noteworthy, from the characteristic harmonic and melodic patterns of pieces such as ‘Rhode Island Shred’ or ‘The Kentucky Meat Shower’ (2015), to the specific chicken-picking technique that he uses extensively on his and The Aristocrats’ pieces. Overall, the best term to describe Govan’s music is eclectic. Tracks such as ‘Louisville Stomp’ (2013), ‘Culture Clash’ (2013), ‘Blues Fuckers’ (2011), ‘Eric’ (2006), ‘Wonderful Slippery Thing’ (2006), or ‘Rhode Island Shred’ (2006) all occupy distinct spaces in the ‘genre field’.

Finally, Govan is also a keen improviser, to the point that most of his reputation, at least on YouTube, has been based either on short clips of him improvising as part of a series of online lessons and masterclasses, or on improvisations on different backing tracks for companies that produce such pieces (JamTracks, for instance). Although both Malmsteen and Govan tend to modify and improvise during live performances (and even when recoding studio albums), Malmsteen usually limits himself to the harmonic minor scale and a range of characteristic scalar runs, patterns, and arpeggios (thus keeping at least the overall ‘atmosphere’ intact). Govan, on the other hand, constantly changes the style in which he approaches his improvisations. It is interesting to note that rock music inherited blues’ propensity for improvisation. As Moore (2002, xvii) argues, “[w]ith the exception of some moments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, improvisation has never really been a defining feature of the music of the classical tradition, which now in any case depends on reproducing, with various degrees of fidelity, the instructions of a usually absent (because dead) composer”.

‘Boing!... I’m in the Back’: A link to the past

The most interesting feature of ‘Boing!... I’m in the Back’ (2011) is its treatment of EQ and other frequency filters. Essentially, for a large part of the piece, a low-cut filter creates a lo-fi sound that simulates early playback equipment. This suggests that the lo-fi sections are some sort of memories of the persona, conversations that took place before the main dialogue of the modern mix sections. From a proxemic point of view, the filter and the heavy reverb create an imaginary distance between the protagonists and the listener, as if the music was coming from a neighbour’s house, played on the street, or at some large-scale event at which the listener is somewhere in the last rows – in the public/social zone. The title of the track seems to support this
latter interpretation. Nevertheless, regardless of which of the two understandings one takes as veridic, the sensation of being transported to either a different spatial or a different temporal plane is evident. However, while it is rather hard to imagine that someone could instantly move through spacetime, given that the track often shifts between the two, the ‘memory’ (‘Past’) versus ‘now’ (‘Present’) interpretation seems more valid, as we all experience similar states in our day-to-day lives.

The guitar changes channels throughout the track. Its first appearance is in the centre channel, a position that is maintained throughout the ‘Past’ section. Interestingly, it retains this position throughout all subsequent ‘Past’ sections except for the B section at 4:06. Here, it moves from centre to hard left, even though the other instruments do not change their positions in relation to the original ‘Past’ setting. This could represent a change in perspective for the guitar protagonist, in the sense that past events and memories recalled are coloured and updated by present ideas and discourses. However, the concluding section brings the guitar back to the centre channel, suggesting that these present events have not changed the way the persona makes sense of such memories after all. This might also be a tie-in to the title, as a way for the persona to go back to the beginning, before any present situations could have affected the memories. Furthermore, while the ‘Past’ sections feature a single guitar, the ‘Present’ sees the addition of at least two others, suggesting that the present persona is more mature, in the sense that it is capable of synthesizing and expressing many points of views, and can process many more ideas than in the ‘Past’.

Of course, this interpretation rests upon the past experiences/memories assumption. While it is by no means the only solution, the music itself provides elements that seem to support it. Something is happening in the track that gives the sensation that two musics are being played at the same time in various places or in different timelines. These interpretations boil down to elements of proxemics and the protagonist/environment duality, suggesting that these features are important in uncovering the/a meaning of the track, even in the absence of lyrics. It is true that the track has a title and this makes things easier than analysing something titled ‘Symphony in B Major, Opus 7’, but since the title is given – and is part of the discourse behind the music (press, internet) – it would make little sense not to consider it.

Finally, the title of the track also works as a metaphor for both the band and Govan’s persona in general, as I have previously mentioned. Govan’s chameleonism is dependent on the
influences of past rock generations, with these influences being laid bare more than in the other case studies. Govan constantly balances both the old and the new in his musical persona. Moreover, this is also the first track on the first Aristocrats album, which again signals that the old influences of each of the band members coalesce to produce the new music of their first album. Out of the 5 minutes of the track, 1:29 are placed in the past, roughly a third of the track, signalling that these past influences are essential to this new music. Furthermore, the sound of the instruments themselves remains the same, regardless of the timeline, which suggests that while the musical influences might have produced new music, the way of making this modern music has remained constant. This link to the past extends to all aspects of musicmaking, and gives the guitar persona a historical dimension that transcends Govan himself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
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<th>Environment</th>
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<th>Sound-box</th>
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<td>0:52-1:07</td>
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<tr>
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<td>P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Past</td>
<td>1:34-1:47</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>P1 P2 P2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>P2 P2 P2</td>
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<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>2:44-2:58</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>P2 P2</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>P2 P2</td>
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<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3:13-3:42</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>P2 P2</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td>3:42-4:06</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>4:06-4:25</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (c1 + c2 + c3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4:25-4:51</td>
<td>Static/Active</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>4:51-5:00</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>P1</td>
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‘Ner Ner’: fusion

The heterogeneity of styles encountered in ‘Ner Ner’ (2006), coupled with the presence of acoustic, clean, and electric guitar sounds make for an interesting listening experience that brings
Govan’s chameleonic persona to the forefront. The track starts with a percussive acoustic guitar part, doubletracked and panned hard left and right to leave room for the distorted guitar that comes in halfway through the intro. While the opening lines are assertive and feature elements commonly associated with virtuoso guitarists, the main theme (A) subverts sound-box expectations by placing the melodies on the edges of the sound-box, leaving the rhythm guitar in the centre. This shifts the listener’s attention away from the centre channel that the vocal usually inhabits, bringing the track closer to conventions associated with instrumental music (vocals in the centre and instruments on the sides). This happens throughout the track and is only subverted during main solo sections, where the centre channel is left open for new protagonists and virtuosic passages, and the rhythm gets doubletracked and sent to the sides. Moreover, proxemic zones also change during this process, as sending the lines towards the background brings the solo protagonist closer to the listener, which in turn creates the illusion of sincerity, of a protagonist coming closer to confide in you. This idea is strengthened by P5 of Solo 3, which features a slightly overdriven sound, close to a completely clean tone that subverts the common in-your-face nature of virtuoso guitar sounds. Not only does this bring to the limelight the fact that Govan’s clean tone component is on an even footing with his distorted one, but it also signals to the listener that Govan is extremely precise in execution and technically accomplished (given the very stripped-back setup) on one hand, and that he is sincere, on the other, as he does not have to hide behind obscene levels of distortion and compression when playing these extremely virtuosic and nuanced lines.

Linked to this, at no point during the track do guitars leave the left and right channels, not even on solo sections (or on the intro and outro). Moreover, the B section features two extra protagonists placed approximately 45 degrees off-centre, as if to compensate for the lack of a virtuosic protagonist on the main channel. There are always at least two guitars playing throughout the entirety of the track, which is an unusual practice for Govan, whose music is usually bare. He goes a step beyond in the classical flavoured C section, where there are five protagonists, but even though there is one in the centre channel here as well, neither can be viewed as central. All play similar contrapuntal parts that intertwine to create a very interesting mixture of guitar sounds and modes of articulation. What is particularly fascinating about this section is that while P3 seems to be moving through the sound-box, the swirling effect is in fact generated by a phaser added to the clean sound. This, nonetheless, makes the listener pay
attention to P3 during those oscillations, even though the melodic material is in no way exceptional compared to the other guitar lines.

These various sections often feature distinct protagonists that distinguish themselves not only by where they are placed in the sound-box, but also by their timbral qualities, as the tones are selected in such a way as to leave sonic space for one another (clean/distorted in the intro, or the phaser in section C). This command of tone and texture is even more fascinating when watching a live performance of the track, as all live guitar sounds in ‘Ner Ner’ are not the result of multiple amp or effects changes, but of the manipulation of the volume knob on the guitar. This sonic chameleonism is mirrored in the heterogeneous mixture of styles encountered in the track. The intro features an almost folk-like melody, section C is a clear example of contrapuntal writing not dissimilar to Baroque dances, section D is inspired by progressive rock, and the subsequent Solo 3 is heavily influenced by jazz and fusion. This diverse mixture of styles and tones are kept under control by Govan, who presents a persona that is confident in many musical scenarios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Intimate=&gt; Public</td>
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<td>0:30-1:01</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>P2 P2 P2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1:01-1:31</td>
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<td>Public/ Private</td>
<td>P2 P2 P2</td>
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<td>P2 P2 P2</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2:32-3:02</td>
<td>Blurred</td>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>P1 P3 P1 P3 P1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>3:02-3:32</td>
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<td>Social</td>
<td>P2 P2 P2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solo 3</td>
<td>3:32-5:03</td>
<td>Blurred/Static</td>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>P4 P5 P4</td>
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‘Guthrie Govan plays: Who’s Best?: the persona’s persona’

This track is probably the richest in terms of resources on Govan’s musical persona. Govan himself offers the best context for it, in the speech with which the track opens: “Hi, it’s Guthrie here, reporting to you live from the GT Reader’s Poll Awards Ceremonies. Everything’s gone very smoothly this evening. There’s been no fighting, nobody cried during their acceptance speech, and Jimi’s been good enough to sign autographs for everyone else here. And now, to round off the evening’s proceedings, all the winners have kindly agreed to join onstage and treat us to an epic jam” (Govan 2008). As is evident from this fictional coverage, the piece represents an imaginary jam session between all the winners of the categories suggested by the Guitar Techniques magazine. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, one of the fields which informs my understanding of persona is psychoanalysis, and more specifically, as mentioned throughout, the writings of C.G. Jung (et al 2014), who describes the persona as a mask that we wear when interacting with the other members of society, with no one except for ourselves being

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90 Best chord voicings - Eric Johnson; Best use of capo - James Taylor; Best strumming - Pete Townsend; Best use of E-Bow or sustaining device - The Edge; Best vibrato - BB King; Best string bending - David Gilmour; Best finger picking - Mark Knopfler; Best hybrid picking - Albert Lee; Best tapping - Eddie Van Halen; Best palm muting - Al Di Meola; Best sweep picking – Yngwie Malmsteen; Best speed, Best alternate picking, Best string skipping - Paul Gilbert; Best pinched harmonics - Zakk Wylde; Best use of an effect - Tom Morello; Best legato – Joe Satriani; Best fretting hand reach, Best use of harmonics - Steve Vai; Best use of slide - Sonny Landreth; Best feel - Jeff Beck; Best timing - John Scofield; Most creative/experimental player, Best use of whammy bar, Overall winner – Jimi Hendrix.
able to see the person behind the mask. I find this analogy extremely compelling, probably even more so when it comes to music. Is it possible to wear someone else’s musical mask? This track proves that it is at least conceivable. We know Govan plays all of the guitars on the recording, but none of the examples sound specifically like Guthrie Govan. This is due to two factors. Not only is Govan playing guitar parts that exemplify the personal variation (of each category winner) of the techniques of the poll, but he also does so within the framework of certain compositional practices. The backing sections of each category (loosely) fit the compositional idiosyncrasies of each of the guitar players’ music. For instance, the best string bending section was won by David Gilmour, and in addition to some double bends as seen on ‘Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)’ (1979), the backing track also resembles the solo section from Pink Floyd’s ‘Comfortably Numb’ (1979) in terms of tempo, instrumentation, and general atmosphere (1:40). This suggests that tone and phrasing are important to the construction of the persona, but so are the other musical features. Harmonic context, instrumentation, tempo, timbres and so on fuse with the sound and the phrasing of the guitar to create short sections of a track that pushes forward certain musical personae.

As luck would have it, three of the guitar players whose masks Govan borrows are Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, and Yngwie Malmsteen. For the Steve Vai example, Govan chose to perform a lick (3:20) that resembles the final solo in ‘Tender Surrender’ and the middle section of the solo from ‘Juice’ (1995) (although Vai uses similar approaches in many of his compositions). Both tracks feature elements that fit into the categories Vai won, best fretting hand reach, and best use of harmonics. These categories are probably not the best to describe Vai’s music, which might be a reason why Govan also incorporates the gradual and aggressive bends as well as the ‘from above’ grace notes Steve Vai is known for (which, in this recording and in many of Vai’s tracks, start with a subtle pinched harmonic). The case for Malmsteen (2:36) and Satriani (3:09) are more clear-cut, as the categories they won, best sweep picking and best legato respectively, describe some of their most individual traits as players. Fans and critics alike discuss and praise Satriani’s legato technique at length, as well as Malmsteen’s sweep picking (MD 2008, Brown 2010, Lindsay 2013, Gress 2014). However, as opposed to the Gilmour example, the actual music that provides the harmonic support for these solos – essentially the environments of the tracks – do not resemble perfectly what one would normally encounter in a Vai, Satriani, or Malmsteen recording.
This takes me to a very important point. Even though other guitar players might be able to take on one or more of these masks, they cannot take on the person, so to speak. It is conceivable that a guitar player (or computer, for that matter) might somehow synthesize a certain artists’ idiosyncrasies to such an extent that it would be extremely difficult to judge whether a certain passage was recorded by the original instrumentalist or by a copycat. However, it would be impossible too anticipate exactly what the original artist might have improvised or composed in the same context. After all, the person makes the artistic decisions, not the persona with which we interact. In Govan’s track, Vai, Satriani, and Malmsteen would have probably played completely different melodies if they were the ones to record the piece. Moreover, attention to the environment would have also been key. Govan might have dubbed the recording a ‘jam’, but it is actually a proper composition, as the backing music for each section is thought of in advance.

Theme-and-variations pieces are quite common in the classical canon. These compositions can be seen to exhibit the personae of both original and new composer. However, these pieces do not use literal quotation, as often it is only the abstract melharmonic context that is then modified or reproduced in the new composition. In a genre such as hip hop, for instance, heterogeneous samples are combined into a new piece that can feature multiple personae (as in early recordings of Public Enemy, for example). In Govan’s piece, however, the two strands are fused and explored further, as each section contains musical ideas that could be found in the original composers’ music (although not originating from the same mind) as well as sounds and production aspects that would be present in any of the guitarists’ records (but without the actual effects that the original artists might have used).

This relationship between Govan’s composer-performer persona and the virtual persona of the other guitarists is fascinating. Guthrie is obviously the composer of every section of the track. Nonetheless, the various sections take our attention away from him; we are tempted to hear the referenced guitarist. This is on one hand a testament to Govan’s capacity to reproduce the technical and sonic idiosyncrasies of each guitarist, and a weakening of his persona on the other. The chameleonism in this track subverts the integrity of his persona. It is interesting to note that this was not the first time Guthrie was asked to “impersonate” famous guitarists (Govan 2016d). During his early career, he was invited to record the guitar parts on the Asia album Aura, where guitarists such as Brian May, Steve Lukather, or Mark Knopfler were slated to perform solos, but were unable to do so due to scheduling. This capacity to take on the masks of all these other
guitarists, even though paradoxical, is precisely what separates him from the other three guitarists in this case study.
CHAPTER IV: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

IV.1 Steve Vai

Vai often refers to the elusive element that binds guitarist and guitar. He often discusses how “as you go through playing, you kinda infuse (...) [and] charge the instrument with a personality” (Vai 2012m). He describes this process as a “trance” in which “you’re kinda like one with the instrument” (Vai 2012). In this context, he argues that a certain “energy (...) comes through the person [and] goes into the note” (Vai 2014). He contends that this type of energy and oneness with the instrument “cannot really be pantomime[d]” (Vai 2014). Vai gives multiple examples to support his case on this issue, often referring to Jimi Hendrix (“you can’t really ever get that Hendrix sound, because it was in his fingers” - Vai 2012), or another subject of my research, Yngwie Malmsteen (“You don’t emulate Yngwie” - Vai 2012c). Finally, when reminiscing about the moment he played on one of his idols’ guitar (Brian May), he admitted that “it sounded like me playing, not Brian!” (Vai 2012n). So, in Vai’s view, regardless of the equipment used, the essence of a player – his/her instrumental persona – is somehow detached from it and lays somewhere inside the player. The track ‘K’m-Pee-Du-Wee’ (2005) is an extremely interesting case study. Vai claims: “[t]his track, I believe more than any other, is definitive of my playing style and sound. (...) Technically, if you were to take a stock Jem and a stock Legacy amp and play on the neck position pick up, you should have this tone” (Vai 2005b). However, he does nuance his claim, claiming that “tone is in your head and your fingers and not necessarily an amp and guitar” (Vai 2005b). As I discussed in the first part of this project, a guitar player’s tone does not come only through a combination of pitches and equipment. Of course, these are integral to the sound, but phrasing is at least as important in establishing the musical persona of a guitar player.

The principal factor here is whether or not Vai sees his music as involving a constructed persona. This is somewhat difficult to assess because Vai does not use the term ‘persona’ frequently. However, he argues that the lack of cohesiveness of his albums is “much to the detriment of any identifiable persona that most people need to grasp onto when it comes to qualifying an artist” (Vai 2012f). This seems like a reasonable point, but it does create an identifiable persona. Granted, its main characteristic might not be one of unity, but this lack of
cohesiveness is precisely what defines Vai’s musical persona.\textsuperscript{91} In 1993, he professed that “in the future, the name ‘Vai’ will represent to people, hopefully, something that they’re not gonna expect” (Vai 2013d). Moreover, while Vai often cites passion and the spontaneous as key to his music, he himself admits “I’m not a one take guy - I sit and agonize a lot over parts” (Vai n.d.2). By agonizing over every detail, he is effectively removing the immediacy out of the musical ideas, which seems to be in contradiction with his music-as-a-means-of-transmitting-inner-feelings trope that I will discuss below.

Before moving to Vai’s views on his own music, a few notes on his recording process is warranted. He notes on multiple occasions that he always felt “very protective” of his intellectual property, a trait he claims to have gotten from Frank Zappa, who was allegedly the same (Vai 2012i). This aspect, coupled with the fact that he “always tried to kinda create a relatively undefinable style of music” (Vai 2012i), led him to a one-man army approach to musicmaking, a musical vision not “diluted by contributions” (Vai 2012i). Although he is not opposed to working with other artists, “for me to sonically go to bed with somebody, so to speak -- I want them to really know what I am, know what I do and have a handle on it, and I don’t want them to have to change what they do” (Vai n.d.4). This frame of mind came out of “a desire to expand and evolve my own unique creative vision” (Vai 2012b).

Consequently, he writes, records, and produces everything himself. He does not record the bass and drums, but hires musicians to play the parts that he writes instead (Vai 2013d). He argues, “I do virtually every aspect of the record, because I like (...) engineering, I’m fascinated with gear [admitting in one interview that he is “an equipment whore” - Vai 2012k], what it does, and I like the decoration of the stereo landscape with the use of things like instrument placement, EQ, different timbres and stuff like that” (Vai 2012i). These artistic decisions are not only aesthetic, but also practical. He notes that “the biggest education was learning how to place things within the stereo spectrum and the frequency spectrum”, as “[y]ou can’t put certain sounds in the same place as a cymbal, because “it’s gonna cause phase cancellation” (Vai 2009e). For instance, in ‘Building the Church’ (2005), he observes that modifying the equalization of frequencies of the guitars not only helps paint a better picture of the theme (1:09) of the track

\textsuperscript{91} On the idea of the persona being projected through the music, the notion also extends to live performances. Discussing his time in David Lee Roth’s band, he reminisces that the experience “taught me how to get to on a big stage, move comfortably, with my guitar and the audience and emanate my ego out into the crowd” (Vai 2013d). Moreover, he admits that probably the most important lesson that he learned from those years with Roth was “how to be a rockstar” (Vai 2012j).
(the building of a literal church, as the linear notes of the album show), but it “also separates the audio field of the rhythm guitars and the melodies” (Vai 2005a). He discusses the diverse processes that he goes through in a recording situation (Vai 2014a), and although he notes that he tends to “overproduce stuff” (Vai 2012a), he admits that he has no experience in mastering (nor does he have the necessary gear to master tracks). While he “love[s] the idea of recording, and overdubbing, and building” (Vai 2012k), “in terms of mastering, I never touch that process and never have” (Vai 2012i). Consequently, even though he talks about himself as the mastermind behind every musical decision, ironically, the final stage in preparing a track for dissemination is left to some other person and persona.

As a final general note, the weight Vai places on the strictly musical aspects of his work is interesting. He acknowledges the influences of folk music and related concepts such as modal melodic chromaticism in ‘Bad Horsie’ (1995) or ‘Freak Show Excess’ (2005), claiming that he “stay[s] pretty diatonic and then (...) I sort of get slap-happy and my fingers just start going kind of bizarro” (Vai n.d.2). Moreover, in terms of scales and modes, he notes that he responds to the Lydian more than any other mode (Vai 2005b), arguing that modes are “flavors (sic) and colors (sic) and tapestries” that one can use to “completely color (sic) your music” (Vai n.d.3). Consequently, the compositional elements are at least as important to his music as the actual sound.

**Self-expression and uniqueness**

While Vai admits that guitarists such as Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix and many others were big influences in his formative years, their music and styles were not particularly influential to him. For instance, he notes that the blues is “not very prominent in [his] playing”, regardless of his “great roots in the blues” (Vai 2010d). He confesses that when he was young he did not really “get” the blues (Vai 2015a), as it felt “very alien”, noting that even when incorporating it, the music that comes out is still “me all over the place” (Vai n.d.1). Vai argues that instead of any standard musical influence, events of his life represented the “[t]he biggest influences (...) and the inspiration to play” (Vai 2013c). He goes on to point out that these life experiences represent

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92 His music ranges from extreme cases of overproduction to the “very guitar-language [Alien Love Secrets] record”, where “there was one guitar, no overdubs, not multi-layered” (Vai n.d.4). *Alien Love Secrets* (2005) is a unique album in Vai’s output, every other release being full of overdubs, strange guitar effects, and massive orchestrations.

93 He even concludes that modes “have everything to do with the way you write your music” (Vai n.d.3).
the place “where originality comes from”, and permit an artist to express him/herself on the instrument (Vai 2013c).

Two main ideas arise here: music is self-expressive; and originality and uniqueness are essential. I shall start by focusing on the idea of “create[ing] something from experiences from my life, from my imagination” (Vai 2009b). He often highlights the fact that any artist is creating “a reflection of [his/her] personality” (Vai 2008a), and that every creative output is an expression of what the artist is (Vai 2014b), concluding that whenever one “pick[s] up and instrument and (…) do[es] anything, [they]’re expressing [themselves] to a degree” (Vai 2010b). Vai often reminisces on his years as part of Whitesnake and the David Lee Roth band, noting that, although an enjoyable experience, “it was crushing me musically” (Vai and Abasi 2012), arguing that leaving the stadium rock scene and becoming a solo instrumental guitarist permitted him to “look into [him]self and find what it is [he] really want[ed] to express” (Vai and Abasi 2012), because the guitar is an “infinite instrument of expression” (Vai 2014), allowing you to express “your personal feelings” (Vai 2013a). Vai was never at peace with all his musical projects, particularly the session work that he did in his early years “for money (…) because you have to make a living” (Vai 2013d). Even during his time with Whitesnake, he still thought that his “personal musical voice was very different than all that” (Vai 2012f). In such scenarios, Vai contends that he wanted to contribute to the band as seamlessly as possible, “but also expresses my personal identity”, as “I had my own voice”, and “[y]ou don’t really have a choice in not expressing your personal identity because it’s just something that happens” (Vai 2012c).

The expression of his inner most feelings is not the only aspect of guitar playing that Vai is focused on. How he expresses these feelings is equally important to him. He argues: “you’re usually creating a style [in which] your own true self is flowing into” (Vai 2015b). While Vai does admit to “practicing ‘until I was blue in the face’, ten, fifteen hours a day” in his early years (Vai 2008a), he also stresses the fact that this virtuosity was never the endgame. Instead, “once the technique becomes natural, once the technique is honed, then you have to go deeper than the technique” (Vai 2015b), because it represents only “preparing the vessel (…) [in order to] have that freedom of expression” (Vai 2015c). This seems to suggest that person (or self) and persona come together in the bodily nature of technique, in the way hands and fingers are used and experienced as simultaneously thought and action.
Vai confesses: “I really have no choice (…) if somebody says to me (…) here’s eight bars, play a solo. I just have to do what’s natural to me, I’ve got this weird tweak in my personality that’s got a little bit of a comical edge to it, or an absurdity to it, and I always put that into my playing. That’s sort of a trademark” (Vai 2008a). His quirky, humorous nature comes out even in his interviews, where the line between reality and joke is thin: “Playing [the guitar] and being sentimental, and expressive, and emotional is very good sometimes. But it’s really important to be able to grab the guitar by the monkey grip and swing it around your head! I mean, what are we here for, folks?” (Vai 2012h), which is in line with how he presents himself as both an ‘auteur’ and a ‘poser’ from the 80s. He often uses the same type of discourse to describe his playing and compositional style: “I have to consider myself eccentric, because it’s eccentric behaviour to make a record like [Flex-Able]” (Vai 2013d).

The main theme, however, is that you must “try to be yourself”, noting that he does not “wake up in the morning and look at [him]self in the mirror and go ‘Oh, ok, you’re going to be that rock star today’” (Vai 2009d). Even though he is aware that “people criticize [his] facial expressions”, he maintains that he “can’t help it, though! And why should I, right? I’m that guy, that weird guy that has the funny faces” (Vai 2012). Even when discussing the deep depression he went trough in his early 20s, the undertone is still of a true self that somehow comes out of any experience and emotional feeling: “From the ages of 18 [to] 21 (…) I had the ability to be very dark. I could project a very dark persona. The music I wrote and the music I played on my own was very dark and negative. (…) But what happens is you become what you think, and you become what you create” (Vai 2011a).

Vai discusses the idea of uniqueness in relation to him and other guitar players at length in most interviews (Vai 2009c, Vai 2009a, Vai 2014, Vai 2013e, Vai 2015b, Vai 2015a),94 but does so mainly as a distinction to them rather than as a way of highlighting the self. While his tone and music are celebrated as distinctive and unique by fans and critics alike, Vai himself stresses that “no one else sounds like… anybody” (Vai 2011b). Nonetheless, he does frequently address his propensity for “throw[ing] a wrench in it” and giving music “that unique Vai twist” (Vai 2013d). He set out to do “innovative things” (Vai 2011b), and this led to the realization that his style developed through “a conscious turning away from the norm”, by which he mainly means

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94 His desire to be unique extends to his Favored Nations label, as he himself admits, in the sense that each artist that he signs must be unique and bring a contribution to the instrument (as the label is specifically aimed at guitarists) (Vai 2012e).
“genre specific type of playing” (Vai 2015b). He contends that he never felt good enough at any of the pre-existing styles and genres, and that he could not “even approach playing [blues, jazz etc.] effectively” (Vai 2016). He reasoned that instead of doing badly what other people were already extremely good at, he looked “for something that was within [his] capability and that was different and interesting” (Vai 2016).

Even from an early age, he set out to “be different and unique”, “an innovator” (Vai 2010c): “when I was a little boy and I discovered music, I knew that I had my own musical voice” (Vai 2009c). He claims to have wanted “to identify and cultivate a unique musical voice” (Vai n.d.5) from the first moments when he picked up the guitar: “I told myself, ‘You’re going to play the guitar, but you’re not going to play what anybody else plays. You’re going to find out what’s interesting and cool to you and work on it’” (Vai n.d.1). By looking “outside of the box”, these “little different (…) not so normal” elements can be incorporated and will “eventually (…) feel very normal, but it will be unique to what you do” (Vai 2008). Vai concludes, “my goal, with my solo music, has been to just try to find something a little new, a little different, a little interesting, you know, a little innovative”, but “not compared to anybody else, compared to myself” (Vai 2011).

There are, however, instances where he openly discusses what he thinks are the traits which separate him from other guitarists and musicians: “I would say maybe I’m know for my quirkiness” (Vai 2012l); “I’ve got this peculiar personality, this absurdity to me that, I guess, I like to hear in music. So it kinda comes out that way” (Vai 2012l). While fans and critics might cite “the melodies, (…) the complexities (…), the innovative technique”, he claims that “the thing that I’m doing that I think people respond to” is “the quirkiness, the bold quirkiness” (Vai 2015d). He admits that “to some degree I found that [uniqueness]” in “a melodic, harmonic adventurous quirkiness” (Vai 2015d), in a “very quirky, esoteric guitar nature” (Vai 2012f). The way he claims to have achieved this is through “never work[ing] on my weaknesses. I only worked on my strengths. And I exaggerate them. And that’s how I get the particular voice that I have on the instrument” (Vai 2010b). This physical sense of making music - very clear in the Vai interviews – might also account for his self-image of quirkiness, as it feels very personal.
**Tone and vocality**

Ideas of uniqueness and self-expression are also reflected in Vai’s choice of gear and in specific techniques or specific variations on standard techniques, as mentioned before. In a context of a conversation on his probable incapacity to play the guitar as proficiently at an older age, he mused over the fact that “the thing I like about the guitar is just the sound it makes” (Vai 2013b), not the technical aspects of composition or guitar playing. Since the sound itself is the essential element for him, the guitar tone is the centre of focus. As my musical analysis chapter advocated, Vai’s standard tone is distorted, a fact that he himself notes (Vai 2015b). He argues that the way to achieve a great tone (there is an undertone in interviews that his tone is great) is by “finding the tone that is in your head” and then using phrasings, attacks with the pick etc., as well as gear (effects pedals, amps etc.) to make it a reality (Vai 2015b).

The issue of phrasing is essential here. Vai argues that “the touch on the instrument, (…) your relationship with the note (…) can never be deep enough. It’s an endless, endless pool” (Vai 2010a). This suggests that one can never become one with the note; you never get to the point when you can say ‘I am become’, but you can say ‘I am becoming’, acknowledging the fact that the process of becoming one with the note, one with the music is an infinite one. Touring in general is a time and frame of mind that Vai uses to “dig as deep as I [can] into every note” (Vai 2015f). What this usually implies, besides the spiritual aspect, is the phrasing, as he repeatedly points out in his demonstration of sections of ‘Freak Show Excess’ (2005) (Vai 2008). This does not mean that it ultimately boils down to phrasing, however. On the reason why he continues to use Ibanez guitars, he argues that the company “created an instrument that’s a reflection of my idiosyncrasies when I play” (Vai 2010c). Furthermore, in the context of the diverse amps and guitars that he owns, Vai notes that even though he might use other equipment occasionally, he “usually go[es] right back to [JEMs and Legacy amps] because these guitars and this equipment [are] custom built specifically to my ear and my fingers” (Vai 2012).

In terms of vocality, Vai rarely - if at all - discusses the resemblance between his guitar sound and the human voice, even though this is often pointed out as a defining trait by his interviewers. In an interview on his *Sex & Religion* (1992) album, for instance, he noted the semblance between his playing style and Devin Townsend’s voice: “It’s like my guitar the way

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95 As in the famous Gita passage quoted by Robert Oppenheimer: “I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds” (PlenilunePictures 2011).
he sings; he’s able to be really subtle, and then at a drop of the hat be very aggressive” (Vai 2013d). Nonetheless, he does often refer to notes and passages as having a vocal quality. When discussing ‘Weeping China Doll’ (2012), for example, he contends that getting the guitar “to speak right” requires “big, fat, seven-string voicings with tons of distortion” (Vai and Abasi 2012), going on to point out the difficulty of getting “the notes in the chords to speak” in the similar scenario of ‘Under It All’ (2005) (Vai 2005).

He does point out in one interview, however, that “I always have the talking guitar thing in my arsenal” (Vai 2012a). Some of the weapons in this arsenal were exemplified in a 1993 MTV show, when a fan asked Vai how he achieved the numerous cat-like sounds on the intro to the Whitesnake song ‘Kittens Got Claws’ (1989) (Vai 2015e). Vai obliged and took the viewers through the ways he arrived at the various sounds. In yet another interview, he distinguishes between a phaser and a flanger by vocally simulating the sound of both (Vai 2014a). Finally, Vai commonly describes his various guitar sounds using phrases such as: “it really screams” (Vai 2010c); “smooth, singing, melody bits”, “get the notes to scream”, “high, screamy notes” (Vai 2012h); “it sings a little more”, “choked a little bit”, “it sings nicely” (Vai 2014a); “singing guitar tones” (Vai n.d.3). Even though he might not specifically point out the fact that his guitar tone is very vocal-like, the undertone throughout his interviews is that he is at least aware of the fact that fans and critics cite vocality as a key factor of his musical persona. He does mention, nonetheless, the Sprechgesang melodies in ‘The Jazz Discharge Party Hats’ (1983) and ‘The Dangerous Kitchen’ (1983), as well as the conversation between his guitar and Lee Roth on the intro to ‘Yankee Rose’ (1986), where he maintains that the song featured words for both protagonists, and while he does not remember the specific sentences, “there were some words I was thinking in my mind (...) Something silly, you know: ‘David?’” (Vai n.d.1).

The culmination of these various threads can be found in the following statement: “What I like to hear, basically, is somebody telling a story. Good melodies are like good books. All the phrases are written in sentences, with commas, and they all make up a paragraph, that is part of a chapter” (Vai n.d.4). He applies this in ‘Midway Creatures’ (2005), for instance, where the goal “was to create a lyrical melody that emulates a creature speaking, but keeping it within the confines of the melodic sensibilities of the [track]” (Vai 2005d). This ties in quite neatly with my breakdown of the many ways to achieve vocality. It is not only a matter of creating sounds that
resemble the human voice, but also about creating melodies and phrasings that mirror the patterns of language.

The whammy bar vocal-like antics Vai is known for came as a response to the “nothing (…) [that everybody] was doing” (Vai 2009e) in the time of Van Halen and Hendrix. Vai used the bar to play “melodies with harmonics and certain dips inside the melodies” (Vai 2009e).\(^6\) For ‘Mullach a’ tSi’ (2012), for instance, Vai studied the “real authentic Celtic nuances” in the singing of Padraigín Ní Uallacháin and decided to reproduce them on the guitar, because of “the intimate and exquisite little slides and bends” (Vai 2012o). The track is particularly complex from this point of view, as “in one phrase I might be using the volume knob, the whammy bar, the wah-wah and the Sustainer on and off and bending a note to get it to sound like a particular thing” (Vai 2012o). He discusses the intricacies of articulating each individual note in tracks such as ‘Creamsickle Sunset’, where he “wanted every note to speak” and “wanted the sound and the performance to have its own identity” (Vai 2012o). This was achieved by vibrating each note until it had “its own zip code” (Vai 2012o), and “a little church bell that it owns” (Vai 2012d).

Although not specifically referring to the vocality of his playing, the fact that he intends to substitute melodies with lyrics and vice versa on the box-set containing all three records of his Real Illusions trilogy (Vai 2012j), suggests that the guitar melodies do indeed work as substitutes for actual vocal melodies. When discussing ‘K’m-Pee-Du-Wee’ (2005), for instance, he contends: “I hear the lyrics when I listen to this even though it’s an instrumental” (Vai 2005b). The main melody of the track does resemble someone enunciating the syllables of the title, and Vai provides other lyrics that were allegedly the base of some of the melodic lines, but it is quite difficult to place them on any of the melodies. Until Vai releases the Real Illusions box-set, the listener is left wondering what the lyrics could be. It might be, however, the case that the lyrics will only be understood by Vai alone, as on a different track on Real Illusions: Reflections (2005), ‘Yai Yai’, he argues that even though “the piece only annunciates the word Yai, it always seemed to speak volumes to me” (Vai 2005e). Whatever the case may be, the idea that a guitar melody can substitute a vocal melody is present in Steve Vai discourse, even though not as overtly as one might expect, given the musical cues.

\(^6\) Besides phrasings, Vai also uses a fretless guitar to achieve this vocality, as seen live on the improvisational intro of ‘I Know You’re Here’ (2003), or the “cat-like sound” (0:30) on ‘Glorious’ (2005) (Vai 2005f). On a similar note, as my analyses showed, the acoustic guitar is nowhere near as prominent as the distorted electric guitar, in neither studio nor live performances. Vai himself admits that he never considered himself a good acoustic player, but more of “an acoustic player for texture” (Vai 2012o).
IV.2 Joe Satriani

Joe Satriani sees himself as part of a lost generation of guitarists who were too young to be part of the classic rock/blues moment and too old to be part of newer musics such as grunge. He cites Jimi Hendrix, the blues, and R&B as “the basis of [his] playing” (Satriani 2010f), noting how we channelled “that inspiration and that feeling into something that came from within”, using it “as sort of a catalyst” (Satriani 2008b). He admits to “resonat[ing] with (...) the blue[s] sound, and (...) rhythmic approach” (Satriani 2009c) as well as with its improvisational nature, remarking that “improvisation is a way of life for me. I put it in every piece of music (...) that I write. When we record in the studios, all the solos are improvised” (Satriani 2010c).

While these strictly musical elements are important, individual tone and the personality of each guitarist seem to be essential to the way Satriani articulates notions related to the musical persona. For instance, in discussing Yngwie Malmsteen, he notes that while “there are plenty of super fast guitar players out there”, “nobody quite does it with that personality and that tone” (Satriani 2013c). This personality is the key element of his understanding of persona, particularly in a live setting, admitting that “performers sometimes need another, more extroverted personality when they hit the stage; somebody that they wouldn’t wanna be when they’re walking around in their everyday life, but who seems to be a necessary component to being a performer” (Satriani 2015f). Satriani states that “artists like Mos Def have this cool feel that just sounds so musical, even outside of the lyrical message”, noting that “if you removed that special personality from the track - it wouldn’t really hold up” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 401.6 / 537). As a “guitar instrumentalist”, his aim is to “replace that special personality” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 401.6 / 537). Again, the issue seems to be a combination of compositional practices combined with an elusive personality that comes through in the music.

On discussing the likes of Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, or Jimmy Page, he observes that they are “all equally amazing”, “completely different”, noting that “[t]heir fingertips make a different sound” (Satriani 2015j). He goes on to expand on the differences between Jeff Beck and Hendrix, arguing that they are totally different “people”, and that this is “what we hear when we hear these guys: we hear them” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 42.5 / 537). He goes a step beyond and points out that “[m]usic gets filtered through their fingers and the technique they’ve picked up along the way, but their talent is really getting their unique

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97 Guitar players such as Steve Vai, Eddie Van Halen, Zakk Wylde, Eric Johnson, or Randy Rhoads.
personalities to come through their music” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 42.5 / 537). While guitars, gear, and technique are important, Satriani hints to some other elusive trait that comes directly from the guitarists’ personality. Romantic as this view might be, it shows that Satriani does indeed think of instrumental music in terms of personae.

In discussing his own music, he comments that in doing solo records he made sure that he “wasn’t trying to sell one kind of guitar sound”, setting out to create records that sounded as if he was only one of multiple guitar players in a band: “I imagined what they would sound like and how they would be different from Joe Satriani. They’d be somebody else and what would they sound like?” (Satriani 2008g). There are many instances where he refers to playing as if there were more than one guitarist persona present (Satriani 2008i). For instance, he notes that on ‘In My Pocket’ “there were two personalities” operating at the same time (Satriani 2015h). The first one is represented by a melody “in which I imagined myself being part of a three-piece horn section”, whereas the solo is “the kind of solo that you would imagine somebody in front of an audience playing” (Satriani 2015h).98 The most interesting example is the entire *Shockwave Supernova* (2015) album, which is apparently “written around an alter ego that really came from the experience of touring for so long” (Satriani 2015f). This album and the character (named Shockwave Supernova) were based on “the story about how the real person, Joe, wrestles with this guy and says, ‘You know what? It’s time for you to move on’” (Satriani 2015g). For Satriani, the title track is about a “character, [an] alter ego [that] says ‘I’m real, I’m here, I wanna take over, listen to how big I am, how real I am’” (Satriani 2015a). Being a concept album, the story continues, and as it unfolds, Joe tells the character that “you’ve gotta go, but I want you to evolve into something better” (Satriani 2015a). This is not the end of the conversation, however. The character continues to describe “what we’ve done over the last thirty years”, concluding that it was it that brought Satriani where he is now: “I played the blues, I played all these notes, I played feedback, I fell in love, I played these beautiful songs about things that we imagined and you can’t get rid of me” (Satriani 2015a). Finally, at the end of the album “I convinced him that it is time to evolve and those last two songs, ‘Stars Race Across the Sky’ and ‘[Goodbye]”

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98 It is worth noting that Satriani sees the concept of unity as being relevant only to classical music (long pieces), with it having no place in pop, mainly because, historically, the latter was based on short pieces, due to the limitations of technology (cylinders, vinyl etc.) (Satriani 2014b).
Supernova’ really represent him coming to [the] realization that (...) he’s ready to evolve into something better” (Satriani 2015a).99

Regardless of how much of that narrative comes through the speakers, Satriani uses his guitar melodies and tones to portray multiple perspectives, multiple protagonists. Reminiscing over his early years as a performer, he noted that when touring both as a solo artist and as part of Mick Jagger’s band he was “touring with two entities”, because on one hand he was just one of the musicians in the Jagger band, but also “Joe Satriani the solo artist, which was brand new”, on the other (Satriani 2014a). This led him to “understand that there’s a place where you can be yourself” (Satriani 2014a). Nonetheless, he admits to not being able to handle the “duplicity” of being Joe Satriani the solo artists and the person who replaced Blackmore in Deep Purple, a few years later (Satriani 2008e). Overall, he has always been more comfortable when performing as Joe Satriani, regardless of the uncertainties of the early years.

In a way, Satriani does have a stage persona like Marshall Mathers (aka Eminem), given the fact that he is commonly referred to as ‘Satch’, a nickname that “stuck” with him since his childhood (Satriani 2012). This nickname expands to other elements of his music, such as the distortion pedal that he created in collaboration with Vox, the ‘Satchurator’. While this bombastic name is somewhat appropriate for this pedal and the music Satriani uses it on, Satriani does not see himself in the same light. When asked about the reasons for shaving his head, he noted that he is “not a weave, fake hair kind of guy, so it’s more honest and in line with my kind of music and my image of straight ahead” (Satriani 2007a). Nonetheless, he does confess on occasion that there is “an alter ego inside of me, fighting for dominance” (Satriani 2015e). This comes into play in compositions such as ‘Crazy Joey’ (2015), which is a “song about a version of me” (Satriani 2015e). Of course, people are never at one extreme or the other (or, if they are, they do not maintain the position for too long), either completely straight ahead or completely over the top. Whoever wins in this fight between alter egos, Satriani’s musical persona lies somewhere in between the two extremes, and while Satriani (and other musicians like him) might refer to there being different versions of themselves, there never is the sense that there isn’t one underlying authoritative self overseeing this fighting for dominance.

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99 It is interesting to note that this is not the first time Satriani envisioned this sort of entity. ‘Super Colossal’ (2006), for instance, apparently describes a fifty-foot-tall fictional character (Satriani 2015d).
Self-expression and uniqueness

While Steve Vai admits that his favourite artist to listen to is himself (Vai 2015), Satriani confesses that he does so rarely, if at all (Satriani 2010a). This might seem surprising at first, but the fact that for Satriani each record is the result of “a very intense period of (...) introspection” makes it understandable (Satriani 2011d). Not everyone is keen on going back repeatedly to the experiences that led to the creation of a piece, particularly if those events were unpleasant. Satriani states that the music that he writes is influenced by “people (...) experiences (...) dreams (...) wishes, desperation” (Satriani 2012a), and these “past experiences” (Satriani 2008f; Satriani 2014a; Satriani 2013d) are somehow tied in with the tracks themselves, creating an “emotional connection” between them and himself (Satriani 2008f). He reminisces in his memoir that all his albums “have been cathartic to a large degree”, because he made an “unconscious decision” to focus on “feelings, experiences, and memories” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 499.3 / 537). Satriani sees instrumental music as cathartic (Satriani 2015e; Satriani 2010a; Satriani 2008f; Satriani and Brown 2014), going as far as declaring that only “an eight” of what he writes is heard by the public, the rest being mainly for “personal development” (Satriani 2014). Nonetheless, he does share quite a lot of music with the public, having released sixteen studio albums and four live albums as of 2018. This need to “shar[e] inner most thoughts” (Satriani 2008d) extends to live performances, where Satriani argues that “finding new ways to be expressive every night onstage (...) keeps things interesting” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 498.0 / 537).

Even though on records such as Flying in a Blue Dream (1989) Satriani also sings, plays banjo and harmonica (Satriani 2015c), his “instrument of expression” (Satriani 2009a) remains the electric guitar.100 While he constantly bemoans his limited resources as a singer, he is against the idea of hiring vocalists, arguing that these types of pieces are “autobiographical songs; some deep, some funny” (Satriani 2015c). He contends that he has “a romantic view of life” and “that comes out it my music” (Satriani 2012a). This “agony and ecstasy (...) [is] distilled into music” (Satriani 2013), resulting in “a uniquely private moment”, and what comes out is “mine - it’s free. It’s pure art” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 485.2 / 537). Satriani constantly refers to his output as “art” (Satriani 2013), and defines what he does as a “never-finishing artistic quest” (Satriani 2013a).

100 He uses acoustics on very rare occasions, the most prominent being on ‘Andalusia’ (2008) in recent years.
While it is quite clear that he sees his music as self-expressive, what is expressed is often left unexplained by Satriani himself. He argues that interpreting the meaning of a track is the job of the listener. Whether the track had a specific meaning, it is irrelevant for the listener, as they should create their own meanings (Satriani 2014b). Even though Satriani uses every possible means to “get the music to sound truthful to me”, he contends that it is not his “job to force people to think of the song the way I thought of it” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 491.1 / 537). He concludes that, eventually, the artist has to give it away and move on and create more art” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 491.1 / 537), and that “with instrumental music, after you (…) produce the composition, it really is your job to hand it over to the public and let them decide what they want to make of it” (Satriani and Tarquin 2007).

This ties in with his views on producers in the creative process. The people “behind the glass” (Satriani 2013a), must not be actively involved in the composition of a piece, only in its realisation as a recording. He acknowledges the fact that the artist is not the only “part of the creative process”, and that the “engineer/coproducer is (…) keeping track of things” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 455.8 / 537). Yet, the presence of the producer constitutes a downside to the cathartic approach to musicmaking, as even though he/she might come up with new, different ideas, these are ultimately not the artist’s. Nonetheless, Satriani does observe that on a solo artist’s record there is a “danger (…) that there’s too much of one persons’ ideas” (Satriani n.d.1.). The solution that he sees here is to work “with people who aren’t afraid to tell you that the idea you have really sucks” (Satriani n.d.1.). This attitude “may not put me in the spotlight for four minutes, but it makes the music more interesting in the end” (Satriani n.d.1.). He recalls recording the solo section (2:27) for ‘Andalusia’ (2008), where he played ten different improvised solos that were comped into the final track by the other members of the band along with the producer. Satriani admits that when they played back the solo to him, even though he thought it was an impressive performance, “it almost sounded like someone else had played it, some other ‘Joe’” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 413.4 / 537).

His approach to working with musicians is also worth noting. While Satriani states that “I prefer to have someone with a real bass personality play on my records,” as “my bass playing seems to follow the guitar, sometimes a little too closely” (Satriani n.d.1.), he does not always opt for this approach. On ‘Butterfly and Zebra’ (2015), for instance, Satriani decided to remove the drum track set by Marco Minneman, as he “felt it distracted from the personal nature of [the
track] and we didn’t want people to think about a band” (Satriani 2015i). It is interesting to note here that Satriani himself admits to the possibility of listeners identifying a track with a band rather than with the solo artist. Considering the fact Marco Minneman has a recognizable musical persona, it is understandable that the resulting music would somehow maintain some of that instrumental persona, even though Satriani might have been the composer.

On recording The Extremist (1992), for instance, he notes that he hired Simon Phillips, Phil Ashley, and Doug Wimbish to “introduce more musicianship into the mix, and that sort of creativity you get from having different kinds of players in the band” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 249.1 / 537). However, at the same time he “wanted to make sure I could control it” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 249.1 / 537). This is at odds with his approach on later albums, where he let Mike Kineally compose the intro for the track ‘Lies and Truths’ (2013) (Satriani 2013). Particularly on his Shockwave Supernova (2015), recorded with Marco Minneman, Bryan Beller, and Mike Kineally, he observed that “each of the guys are great players, they’re great writers, they have (...) unique performance personalities, (...) [so] you have to give them space to interpret, to reinterpret your music” (Satriani 2015f). Contradictions aside, regardless of which of the two approaches is dominant, both prove that Satriani is aware of multiple personae in his music, as each instrumentalist brings his own personality into the mix, either for the best (developing the musical idea) or the worst (taking away from the personal nature of some of the tracks).

An interesting application of his thoughts on the matter are found in the Chickenfoot super group, formed of himself, Sammy Hagar (ex-Van Halen), Michael Anthony (ex-Van Halen), and Chad Smith (Red Hot Chili Peppers). While the band’s albums carry influences of Satriani’s own music (as he composed most of the songs for the band’s two albums), Satriani argues that “Chad didn’t just bring his Chili Peppers stuff to the band, I didn’t bring all my solo guitar stuff, and Mike and Sam weren’t trying to be Van Halen” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 424.5 / 537). Instead, they “created a fifth element that we all loved and were surprised by, and that really is the sound of the band” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 424.5 / 537). They “decided to call ‘Chickenfoot’ - that extra thing”, that new element/sound of the band (Satriani and Brown 2014, 424.5 / 537). Here, he acknowledges that even though each individual musician has a strong musical persona, when all four get together they create an entirely new one. While this seems to be true for Chickenfoot, it is interesting to observe that he does not feel the same when discussing an album such as Shockwave Supernova (2005). Even though the musicians on the album are at least on an even
footing with the Chickenfoot musicians, said album was still released under Joe Satriani. The issue here might be the degree to which each individual musician is ‘permitted’ to express himself in these somewhat different scenarios.

Satriani constantly stresses the importance of uniqueness and originality (Satriani 2013c; Satriani and Brown 2014), even though he does acknowledge the fact that in the very beginning, the success of a guitar player is often judged on how well one copies other musicians (Satriani 2012b). However, even if a guitar player wants to evoke an “R&B or bluesy mood”, he/she will have to “quote from the lexicon of those styles” (Satriani n.d.1.). Nonetheless, the guitar player will “hopefully (...) do it in an original way” (Satriani n.d.1.). The fact that the musician is forced to work within certain stylistic limitations reflects in Satriani’s dislike for studio work, because he “had to play like other people” (Satriani 2008a). What is and always was important to him was having “your own identity” (Satriani 2008a).

A main tenet of his approach is making sure that what he plays is “a unique melody and it’s not just me playing” (Satriani n.d.2). For Satriani, “a truly great guitar player (...) [has] to figure out how to be expressive with [his/her] special message, whatever that might be” (Satriani 2008g). He argues that “originality and versatility and the difference between players” are the traits that need to be celebrated above all else (Satriani 2015b). While “there are a lot of guitar players who can play fast, who can stretch their fingers, who know all the chords, and who memorize the notes in the scales”, “the one guitar player who has an original sound” is the truly great player (Satriani 2008g). The most common advice he gives to aspiring guitarists is “to try to be as original as possible, which really means to be true to yourself”, and to “be interested in expressing your true feelings about music”, concluding that one should not “try to copy anybody else” (Satriani 2012). While there will obviously be influences, one needs to “take things that you like and try to make them your own” (Satriani 2012). Everything from the phrasing to the tone need to be self-expressive; the guitar must not “sound like some other guitar” (Satriani 2009a). To that end, he also mentions his “personalization of the legato technique” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 243.3 / 537), which he used to construct this unique sound and musical persona.

Satriani argues that each piece must have a “unique sonic stamp” (Satriani 2013), which he achieves in two ways. He contends that songwriting and having a unique voice are intimately interlinked (Satriani 2011c). Composition is key to Satriani’s identity, as he himself acknowledges (Satriani 2011d; Satriani 2013c), arguing, “the best place to start is always with a
As an example of a compositional idiosyncrasy, Satriani observes that the modes are essential to his style (Satriani 2012c; Satriani 2010d), and they function as “emotional themes” (Satriani 2010d); their true meaning goes beyond the theory. For instance, changing the mode from major to minor or vice versa modifies the perspective of the ‘story’ that he is trying to tell, similar to how a vocalist might present a series of events from two different perspectives (Satriani 2010e).

**Tone and vocality**

For Satriani, the gear that he uses on a specific recording or performance is dictated by the composition (Satriani 2011b). Moreover, the idea of uniqueness expands to Satriani’s approach to creating gear, noting that in order to “push yourself to that edge (…) you have to have the gear that lets you do it” (Satriani 2009d). The guiding question in developing gear has always been: “how can we be different and get a better sound?” (Satriani 2014). Even when using the now standard wah pedal, he notes that “you have to find your own voice with it” (Satriani 2016). Particularly when onstage, “in front of thousands of people, (…) trying to play some beautiful, emotive melody, if the pickups aren’t doing their job, it just stops you in your tracks” (Satriani 2009d). He concludes that guitar players “depend so much” on gear, particularly on the pickups (Satriani 2009d). However, not only effects pedals, pickups, and amps are important, but also the tone knob, particularly for melodies (Satriani 2010g).

His memoir, *Strange Beautiful Music* (Satriani and Brown 2014), focuses heavily on the recording side of his music, providing countless interviews with producers, engineers, and musicians, with Satriani himself discussing gear at length, with a lot of focus on recordings and recording techniques. Satriani openly confesses that he is “obsesse[d] about pedals” (Satriani 2008b). He also notes that effects pedals and other such gear “empower” riffs (Satriani 2016), which for him is an advantage, given that in rock music “what you need to do is have an attitude, and you have to get together with the instrument, and the equipment” (Satriani 2012a). He uses

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101 On this note, it would be interesting to point out the fact that Satriani occasionally uses fragments of compositions by other musicians. He has used, for instance, Gabriel Fauré’s ‘Pavane’, most notably on ‘Crowd Chant’ (2006).

102 For *Engines of Creation* (2000), for instance, Satriani comments: “I used my JS Chrome Boy and Black Dog guitars. We also used a ‘58 Fender Strat quite a bit. As far as pedals, we were using the Electro-Harmonix Micro Synth, Dunlop Cry Baby wah-wah pedals, Fulltone pedals, and the DigiTech Whammy pedal quite often” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 348.7 / 537).
these tools to express certain musical or conceptual ideas. For instance, on ‘A Phase I’m Going Through’ (2015), he “embrace[d] the phaser” (it is used on most of the track), which is reflected in the title of the track as well; he “leaned on the sound and used it as a way of explaining a changing of sorts” (Satriani 2015h).

Satriani stresses the fact that he not only produces records, but he also produces gear, such as his custom Vox pedals, DiMarzio pickups, Ibanez guitars, Marshall amplifiers, and so on (Satriani 2010a). This comes out of a belief that guitar players cannot do without effects such as distortion, delay, and wah (Satriani 2009e). Everything form “picks, and strings, and guitars, and amps, everything” permits him to “speak in that sort of [expressive] language” that his music is known for (Satriani 2009c). He admits to not being “a one amp kind of guy” (Satriani 2007b), which is the reason for developing multiple amplifiers throughout his career, particularly with Peavey and Marshall. Nonetheless, Satriani notes that working with Ibanez and maintaining his custom guitar over the years has kept him grounded through all the other gear changes (Satriani 2013). He admits that he is extremely comfortable playing his custom Ibanez guitars, and that he would not be able to play the same way on other guitars.

Referring to Fender Stratocasters and Telecasters, he argues that the guitars themselves “won’t let you play certain things”; the guitars tell you that “you’re not good enough to play that!” (Satriani 2012a). He also personifies gear, referring to the Voodoo Lab Proctavia, sent through his Vox Satchurator, as a “wild and crazy beast” (Satriani 2008c). However, as opposed to other guitarists who talk about their instruments as if these were extensions of their own body, Satriani contends that the guitar is “just a guitar” (Satriani 2009). He argues that if “you’re not inspired and you’re playing like dirt (…) the guitar sounds worse. But it isn’t the guitar’s fault. (…) So if it was such a great thing it would always make you sound great (…) it would truly be the instrument of freedom. But it is also the instrument of pain” (Satriani 2009). He does refer to “becom[ing] one with the instrument” (Satriani 2012a) on more than one occasion, admitting that when he is “up on stage, or when I’m writing in a private moment and I’m by myself and just the instrument [it] feels like there’s no separation between the instrument, the music, the inspiration. But once it’s finished, it’s just a guitar, you know?” (Satriani 2012a). Overall, Satriani uses all this equipment to create a unique musical statement.

Besides composition, this is achieved through his tone. What it all boils down to is creating “a unique voice to play the melody” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 337.8 / 537). An engineer would
make the singer sound slightly different from one song to the other, particularly if the lyrics and mood of the song require it, by using various kinds of microphones, “or surround the vocal performance with a unique set of equalization, limiting, compression, reverb, delays”, and so forth. Satriani approaches instrumental music in the same manner. He argues that, even in vocal songs, it is “[t]he sound” itself that “carries with it a message” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 337.8 / 537). However, since most of his music does not feature lyrics, Satriani puts “more emphasis on that sound to create a kind of ‘voice’”, observing that each track’s “melody winds up with its own voice that is not duplicated on any other song on the album” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 337.8 / 537). A good example of this type of approach to recording is found in ‘Borg Sex’ (2000). Satriani argues that the track “is about a female and a male borg having sex”, functioning as a “conversation, [as] foreplay” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 343.6 / 537). To achieve this effect, Satriani and his producer “put together the strangest combination of effects pedals just to see if we could get the guitar to be the ‘male borg’”, and then “set up another configuration to be the ‘female borg’” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 346.1 / 537).

Creating an “expressive (…) melody guitar” (Satriani 2009d) helps him convey his musical ideas through that melody, using effect pedals (Satriani 2014) to achieve that final, “perfect tone that allows me to tell the song’s unique story” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 337.8 / 537 - 338.9 / 537). He constantly refers to the fact that “the melodies need to speak”, they need to “tell a story” (Satriani 2014; Satriani 2014a; Satriani 2013c) in instrumental music (Satriani 2010h), noting that the wah pedal “helped me a lot” in “telling a story”, in “replacing the lyrics” (Satriani 2016). Pondering on the reasons why listeners are so accustomed to vocal music that they would require a substitute even in instrumental music, Satriani argues that it is probably “because [rock music] started with vocals”; it “came about always with singers and instrumental is derivative” (Satriani 2009b). That is why Satriani contends that he is “the singer in the band” (Satriani 2013), expanding the technique to engulf the concept of the backing singer as well, using the lead guitar as a substitute for the lead singer and additional guitars as substitutes for backing singers (Satriani 2013). However, he does stress the fact that he “can’t just replace the vocal line. That doesn’t work. Ever” (Satriani 2008c). For the listener to not “miss the vocals” in this context, the guitar player needs to “really deliver some very strong phrasing” (Satriani 2013c).

Phrasing is key to Satriani’s tone. He argues that the way to achieve a great guitar tone is by hitting the strings with “feeling”, which to him means “hitting the strings soft, hard, here, and
there” (Satriani 2015c). Furthermore, particularly for lead playing, “you gotta get a good handle on vibrate” (Satriani 2016a). However, while technique is key, it is not the quintessential element of a great guitar player’s tone and music. He contends that after one learns the technique, then “you have to throw out the method from which you learned it and then you have to just connect your feelings and what you’re trying to express, you have to project that on to the instrument with your fingers” (Satriani 2016a). Moreover, as part of phrasing, since the guitar features multiple instances of the same note, but on different strings, finding the right string to play a certain note or melodic idea will make a difference in the final melody, and give it the character it needs in order to speak. He cites Frank Sinatra as an inspiration for constructing his melodies, arguing that Sinatra “starts off mellow at a lower register before ramping it up. The lyrics would reveal more of the ‘story’ while his vocal line rose in pitch, and the chorus was the last few lines of his story. I’d always thought that was a beautiful way of playing a melody (…). It was a very elegant, simple way of telling a story and putting it to a beautiful melody, then having it peak” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 237.2 / 537).

Finally, Satriani constantly uses terms such as “sing out” (Satriani 2010b); “big, woman tone” (bridge pickup) (Satriani 2010h); “screaming guitar” (Satriani 2015c), “throaty sound” (second setting on his custom ‘Big Bad Wah’ pedal), “really scream” (custom Marshals amps) (Satriani 2010g), “screams all the time” (custom Peavey amps) (Satriani 2007). He goes as far as noting that he sometimes uses “the guitar to represent sounds in the natural world” (Satriani 2013b), such as a “songbird or something like that”, by “writing a super high melody” (Satriani 2013b). It might also be telling that he always refers to his pieces as songs rather than tracks, something all four case studies are guilty of, to some extent. While this can arguably be more a case of semantics than anything else, it does hint at a certain laxity between instrumental and vocal music in Satriani’s thinking.

The combination of self-expression, composition, gear, phrasing and vocality come together to create Joe Satriani’s unique musical persona. Satriani concludes that “you go to the edge of your technical ability”, and that will be “the best final result”, as “it’s gonna be evocative, and that’s how you get a personal sound” (Satriani 2009d). Nonetheless, the guitarists “can’t really take credit for it (…) for moulding it (…), that’s just out of your control” (Satriani 2009d). Regardless of who is moulding and controlling the final persona, one is still there, and these
various traits that come together to produce it separate one guitarist from another, and represent the difference between an average guitar player and a truly great one.
IV.3 Yngwie Malmsteen

His relationship with the press makes Yngwie Malmsteen one of the most controversial figures in the guitar world. The arrogance he displays in most interviews is indeed jarring, particularly in contrast with the more modest demeanour of guitarists such as Guthrie Govan. Examples include: “I did something that was never done in [Sweden]”, “it took one week in the United States for me to become the talk of the town” (Malmsteen 2009), or “if I’m running around onstage like a lunatic, I still won’t play a wrong note in the scale that I’m in. It won’t happen.” (Malmsteen 2013c). Malmsteen is known for his technique as much as for his often-parodied ego. In a 1993 interview, he was asked to express his opinion on songs and guitar players, in a blind listening test. He had very few good things to say about most of the music he was played, often describing what he heard using words such as “very bad”, “bent out of shape”, “out of tune”, “terrible”, or “worst technique ever” (Malmsteen 2015i). Moreover, he expressed disdain in his early years for people who did not cite him as the definitive influence for the neo-classical style (Malmsteen 2015h).

He claims to have a “tell you what I’m thinking without sugarcoating” attitude, which did not go well with the press in his early years (Malmsteen 2013h). However, since then, he learned “that when being interviewed for a magazine that’s sold nationally, and maybe internationally, you shouldn’t always tell the whole truth” (Malmsteen 2013h), even though he claims in multiple interviews (a point that is the central tenet of his 2013 memoire) that he does not “fake anything, it’s all real” (Malmsteen 2015f), and that he tells it “just how it is” (Malmsteen 2013e). He ends his introduction to his memoire with the following: “This is the story that only I can tell—my life, my journey, my failures, my triumphs. This is a window to my soul” (Malmsteen 2013h). Of course, one cannot judge whether the artist is truthful or not (particularly if the artists themselves express the sort of ambivalence Malmsteen seems to put forth), but it is important to keep these somewhat contradictory statements in mind throughout the rest of this discussion.

103 Michael McKean’s Spinal Tap character satirizes the way Malmsteen puts ‘J.’ in his name “so you don’t confuse him with all the other Yngwie Malmsteens in the business” (McKean 2014). Malmsteen frequently invokes his family heritage, which apparently dates to 1622 and forms part of the ‘House of Knights’, making Malmsteen a knight by birth (he even has a personalized knight’s armour to prove it!) (Malmsteen 2008a).

104 People who have worked with Malmsteen throughout his career have expressed similar thoughts. Producer Tom Fletcher claims that Malmsteen’s demeanour is not “something he’s putting on. No. He is that guy” (Fletcher 2015).
Self-expressivity and uniqueness

For Malmsteen, music must express something that “come[s] from within” (Malmsteen 2014g), “from the heart” (Malmsteen 2013e). He claims that he “bleed[s]” on his albums, and that this process “take[s] a lot out of” him (Malmsteen 2013f), as “blood, sweat, and tears, and soul” go into everything that gets recorded (Malmsteen 2015c). Musicians use their instruments “to express what it’s like in [their] soul”, and this goes “deeper than just the technique, and it cannot be duplicated” (Malmsteen 2013b). Technique is important, nonetheless, as musicians must have the “tools” (Malmsteen 2008b) and “vocabulary” to “express” themselves (Malmsteen 2014b). While Malmsteen has been often criticized for his extremely fast, technical, and repetitive playing, he defends his style by arguing that there is “a lot of emotion, a lot of thought behind what I’m doing” (Malmsteen 2015b). He admits to putting “everything into [his music]”, into “every lyric, every piece of production” (Malmsteen 2008k), to the point that “all the songs I’ve written are almost like my children” (Malmsteen 2008e).

He is also quick to point out that all this music comes naturally to him and claims to have never practiced (Malmsteen 2010b). Of course, this is an exaggeration, but Malmsteen argues that he has always been more concerned with musical ideas and with using technique to express these ideas rather than being able to play a certain scale or passage for their own sake. The real issue was doing whatever it took to bring a musical idea to life, and worked on it until it became second nature and found a place in his style. Some degree of authenticity is implied here, and this is used to strengthen the impression that his music and guitar playing is the result of natural talent rather than hard work. This is a contradiction in Malmsteen’s discourse, as even though he claims to “hate” practicing and that “music [is what] really matters, [and] not the flesh moving over the strings” (Malmsteen 2008), he always points out that especially during his teens he would play (at home, on busses, on trains, etc.) for hours on end (Malmsteen 2013h). Furthermore, the difference between playing and practicing is never thoroughly explained, so the fan/critic is left to construct his/her own impressions of Malmsteen’s early playing habits.

Malmsteen insists that he has “always been honest” with his music (Malmsteen 2008i), and has always had an “honest musical direction” (Malmsteen 2015c), which involved not following any trends (Malmsteen 2008i). While he contends that “music is definitely (…) from within”, he also insists that he does not “know where [it] comes from” (Malmsteen 2008h), as it “naturally” just “comes out (…) by itself” (Malmsteen 2015c). He notes that developing his own style was a
“natural” process (Malmsteen 2015c), and that his aim was to “just create what [he] felt was good” rather than “playing other people’s stuff” (Malmsteen n.d.2), as he is a strong “believer[r] in individuality” (Malmsteen 2013c). He argues that from “very early on” he “decided not to copy other guitar players” (Malmsteen 2013e), choosing to create “something entirely new” instead (Malmsteen 2015c). Even though he acknowledges the benefits of being “influenced (…) for learning purpose”, he concludes, “you have to find yourself after that” (Malmsteen 2013e). For Malmsteen, this learning period ended when he came to the realization that the blues (the style of music that was the basis for his favourite artists growing up) was “boxed in”, and he “wanted to break out of that” (Malmsteen 2012a). His main objection to the blues was the use of the minor pentatonic mode (Malmsteen 2015f) and found the harmonic minor scale as a “natural” alternative to this (Malmsteen 2012a). Malmsteen admits that this scale represents “the bread and butter of what” he does (Malmsteen 2012a), and, as I pointed out in the musical analysis, he ends up using it in every one of his tracks.

Improvisation, a key feature of the blues, is essential to Malmsteen’s approach to musickmaking, nonetheless, as he argues that what he does is “all improvised” (Malmsteen 2011g). He constantly notes that no two shows are the same – “every solo, every intro, every nuance is different” – and that even his studio performances are mostly improvised (Malmsteen 2015a). This also represents another way of signalling to the audience that everything that he does is ‘authentic’, ‘true’, and ‘from the heart’. The off-the-bat quality of his solos reflect his overall approach to recording. While he notes that he is “not the kind of person that likes to sit and do re-takes” (Malmsteen 2013c), he does admit to spending a lot of time on producing and arranging his tracks (Malmsteen 2015c). This means that even though the overall intention might be one of spontaneity, the persona that is ultimately projected is constructed. Nonetheless, Malmsteen notes that writing music is “automatic and natural” (Malmsteen 2008k): “I could pick up a guitar and write a song right now. (…) I don’t know exactly where that inspiration comes from (…) the musical inspiration is just there. (…) I’m blessed that way” (Malmsteen 2006). Again, somewhat contradictory statements, as at one time his music is the result of some sort of divine inspiration that is constantly there to provide Malmsteen with new material, and the product of intense editing in the studio at another.

Regardless of how or where the music comes from, he admits that he possesses a “burning passion to create something that is uniquely me” (Malmsteen n.d.1), and that this passion extends
to all aspects of musicmaking (Malmsteen 2008b). From the guitar playing to the note selection and compositions, the most important feature of his approach is the desire to be different (Malmsteen 2011b; Malmsteen 2011c). This is reflected not only in his playing, but also in his overall approach to life (Malmsteen n.d.1), particularly in him rebelling against the conformity of late 70s Sweden (Malmsteen 2009a; Malmsteen 2009b). Malmsteen argues that it is essential to do “what’s important for you, something you want to do” and to follow “your own path” (Malmsteen 2008j), rather than trying to walk on someone else’s footsteps. He acknowledges the fact that the most important aim of a guitar player is finding “a sound for yourself” and contends that he is one of the musicians who was “actually created a style that is mine” (Malmsteen 2015f), not only in compositional terms, but also in terms of guitar playing.

When asked to describe what exactly makes his style unique, he is less specific, however, arguing that he “do[es]n’t know, [he] just play[s]!” (Malmsteen 2013a). Nonetheless, he often notes that he wanted to “break away” from the “blues-based” playing of most rock music (Malmsteen 2014d), remarking that he wanted to play the type of elements that were “never played on the guitar” (Malmsteen 2014b), which for him involved mainly sweep-picked arpeggios and classical music inspired runs. He observes that he does not “need to listen to any music to get any sort of influence in any way, shape, or form” (Malmsteen 2008k), not even when preparing to record a new album (Malmsteen 2015e). He argues that he does not have “any influence from any rock bands” because he thinks that rock music is “too limiting” (Malmsteen 2015b). He does cite Jimi Hendrix as an influence, but only concerning showmanship (Malmsteen 2015b; Malmsteen 2014c). Musically, Malmsteen names Ritchie Blackmore as an important influence in his early life (Malmsteen 2014e), and constantly refers to the fact that he could play all of Blackmore’s solos perfectly at some point in his life. At the same time, he also pushes forward the idea that he does not “owe anything” to Blackmore (Malmsteen 2014f). In a telling passage from his memoir, he cites Deep Purple’s Fireball (1971) as one of his essential musical influences. He reminisces on how the album starts, noting that the very first thing that listeners hear is “the drums—a pounding double-kick beat before anyone or anything else chimes in”, after which “the rest of the band kicks in with a really massive onslaught of sound” (Malmsteen 2013h). This lack of acknowledgement for the influence of Blackmore and blues-based rock (in this case Deep Purple) is particularly striking, because this is exactly how many of Malmsteen’s tracks begin. Moreover, he also released a covers album called Inspiration (1996),
where he performs, as the title suggests, songs from other artists that influenced his music. He does cite, however, Bach and Paganini as key muses (Malmsteen 2013a), and argues that classical music (Baroque) is more important to his sound and guitar playing than any other style of music, including rock (Malmsteen 2011d; Malmsteen 2015b). While classical music is arguably as important to his music as rock, all his albums are clearly rock albums, and not classical music albums (with the possible exception of his 1998 Concerto).

Malmsteen does not want to “get influenced by other people”, because he prefers doing “what comes naturally to [him], to make it pure” (Malmsteen 2010b). This latter term is key to understanding Malmsteen’s musical output, as will be discussed below, in the context of working with other musicians. He argues that he just “let[s] it go” and then “all of a sudden there’s a spark”, which is the genesis of the melodies and compositions (Malmsteen 2008c). This has apparently “been hard-wired and deeply implanted” in him, so that “when I start to improvise or when I start composing it’s automatic” (Malmsteen 2008k). This automatism represents one of the main criticisms against Malmsteen’s latest albums, with most detractors criticizing him for essentially releasing the same record repeatedly, and attempting to sell the same sound that he had in the 80s. None of this phases Malmsteen, however, as he argues that all this criticism is part of the job description of a great musician. A guitar player has “to sacrifice, (...) to suffer, (...) to be ridiculed” (Malmsteen 2009c), but “as long as you believe in what you’re doing” (Malmsteen 2005) and you are “true to yourself” (Malmsteen 2013f), it will ultimately pay off. One must “listen to your heart, and you listen to your mind, and you do what you feel is the right thing to do” (Malmsteen 2009c), which for him means, “impress[ing] myself” and “challenging myself” (Malmsteen 2006; Malmsteen 2012a; Malmsteen 2013g).

The desire to be unique, to express his own emotions and musical ideas, coupled with the refusal to acknowledge the influence of other artists has resulted in a difficulty in working with other musicians. Malmsteen describes himself as a “leader kind of person”, noting that he would be unable to “work in a group situation where everybody has a say”, as he needs to “have the final decision” (Malmsteen n.d.2.). Malmsteen either formed bands around himself from the initial stages of his career, or hijacked bands in which he was initially assigned the role of guitarist, as in the case of Alcatrazz (Malmsteen 2011b). Working in an environment where he was not the lead authority has always been problematic for Malmsteen. He argues that anytime he worked with other people, he was unsatisfied with the results (Malmsteen 2010a). Malmsteen
notes that he is “full of creativity” and he does not “need any other input” (Malmsteen n.d.1), or “people telling [him] what to do” (Malmsteen 2015b). This extends to producing his records, as he is involved in everything, from mixing drums to arranging: “I’m producing it myself, and I [write] all the material”, as he wants to “stay in control, more or less, of everything” and “complete everything on my own” (Malmsteen 2011d), to put forth a single, unified, pure vision. While he has worked with engineers and other musicians throughout his career (Malmsteen 2008k) (even arguing at one point that having a “different set of ears” for the mixing stage is beneficial - Malmsteen 2013d), he has slowly but surely removed everyone from the equation, to the point where the last three albums were recorded and engineered by him alone. He also owns a recording studio used exclusively for recording drums, which he did himself for the last few albums, besides recording the bass parts on almost all his records (Malmsteen 2008a). He avoids listening to other people’s suggestions, and claims “there’s no need (...) to have a producer, there’s no need (...) to have a cowriter, (...) because it would (...) crowd my vision” (Malmsteen 2008c).

Malmsteen constantly compares himself to a classical composer, observing that he writes all the parts and that he needs the musicians to do exactly what he tells them to do (Malmsteen 2008c). He concludes that he feels more “like (...) a composer (...) than a songwriter” (Malmsteen 2011d), and wishes to be “appreciated” for his compositions and not only for his guitar playing (Malmsteen 2008g). He notes that writing for a musician is “like writing a part for an actor”, in the sense that “you write the part, and you direct it as a film [director would]” (Malmsteen 2010b). Even the singer must deliver “what I want to deliver with my lyrics” (Malmsteen 2010b). He contends that the singer should not be a “prima donna”, as he is not the centre of attention – Malmsteen is (Malmsteen 2012).

Despite all of this, Malmsteen has worked with multiple other musicians on lyrics. He admits in an interview that Joe Lynn Turner wrote 10% of the music and 90% of the lyrics while he was in the band (Malmsteen 2011e). Even though Malmsteen is mostly known for his instrumental work, lyrics are still important to him, as he wants to have diversity on each album, with no album featuring only instrumentals or only vocal songs (Malmsteen 2008d). Nonetheless, he also argues that the melodies and the music are more important than the lyrics (Malmsteen 2006). Furthermore, “the melodies, the rhythms, the lyrics, the solo parts” must “function together” (Malmsteen 2008d), creating a form of unity. This perspective ties in with his desire to
present a single, unified musical idea. He does not expand on the notion of unity, but it is quite clear that he at least acknowledges the importance of it and of maintaining a sort of hegemonic rule on the music, mirroring Cone’s (1974) composer’s persona.

Overall, the fact that Malmsteen sees himself as a composer is key to understanding his musical persona. Not only does it emphasize the fact that his idea of a musician is intimately intertwined with that of a creator of music, but it also highlights the despotic way in which Malmsteen treats the musicians that he works with. His desire to be unique extends to both his approach to the instrument and to his compositional practice. Breaking out of the mould of the blues resulted in a new sound, but as opposed to Satriani, whose work can easily be linked to the music of previous rock generations, Malmsteen’s seems detached from the rock cannon, reaching back to the Baroque (particularly because of the harmonic minor that Malmsteen obsessively utilizes). Regardless of the outcome of this desire and resulting fusion of styles, Malmsteen’s musical persona is a constructed one in which the composition is at least as important as the guitar playing.

A critical issue to raise here is Malmsteen’s relationship with the singers. In looking for a singer, Malmsteen argues that the most important is the vibrato (Malmsteen 2011c). Incidentally, this is also a key factor in his decision to scallop his neck, noting that the vibrato is “a method of expression” (Malmsteen 2013h). He also cites power as essential, which is a common trope in his music and particularly in his live shows, from his stage antics to the fact that he runs more than twenty 100-Watt amps on stage (Malmsteen 2010b). What this seems to suggest is that there is no difference between how he approaches writing for the guitar and writing for the voice (although the case seems to be different in writing for his own voice, as I discussed in the analysis chapter). Essentially, there seems to be no difference between the vocals and any of the other instruments Malmsteen uses to concretize his musical ideas. While Malmsteen constantly changes band members, the individuality of each musician is irrelevant to the project. The question of what a musician can bring to the table becomes extraneous. Rather, whether a musician can play what Malmsteen wants him to play seems to be the more pertinent one. Furthermore, particularly on the last few releases, Malmsteen opted for recording and producing everything himself, including drums and vocals, which where usually recorded by other musicians in the past. (He does use live musicians when performing, for obvious reasons.) This
suggest that even though most of his recordings feature multiple instrumentalists, their output in constructing Malmsteen’s musical persona is at most negligible.

Out of the 222 tracks that he has recorded as of 2018, 140 are vocal songs. This results in a somewhat paradoxical identity for Malmsteen. While most of his tracks feature vocals, he is mostly known for his extreme technical ability and his classically infused instrumental compositions. Nonetheless, I think that the way he treated the vocalists and the vocal melodies throughout his career suggests that the difference between the voice and the guitar is minimal, at least in his view. All the melodies and parts are instrumental, in the sense that they are used to convey Malmsteen’s musical persona. This conclusion seems to be strengthened by the fact that Malmsteen is the singer on his latest two albums. While it is true that many of his tracks are vocal songs, thus giving Malmsteen’s persona a vocal dimension, it is also true that all his songs feature intense guitar work, which is the defining characteristic of his overall output.

**Tone and vocality**

Malmsteen seems to suggest that tone comes from a combination of guitars, amplifiers, and other gear. He gives the actual recipe for his sound in his memoir: “AKG 414 in front of the Marshalls; the mike (sic) signal goes through a focusrite (sic) EQ, a Summit audio tube compressor, then into the digidesign (sic) interface, into ProTools, and then out of ProTools into the 64-fader mixing console with API equalizers. Voila! There’s my sound” (Malmsteen 2013h). As I mentioned in the introduction, the guitar sound that we hear in a recording - the second layer of the instrumental persona - is a combination of what the guitarist is doing and how the sound is captured and then reproduced, and this seems to be the way Malmsteen perceives the realisation of his tone. He does not employ many effects pedals, opting instead to use the pickup selector (switching “back and forth like a million times in one solo” - Malmsteen 2013c) to differentiate between sections and create a specific atmosphere for each. Malmsteen is “very particular about having the right sound” (Malmsteen 2015g), and is especially concerned with what goes into the guitars themselves to get “the sound [he is] looking for” (Malmsteen 2013c). He discusses his pickups at length, designing along with DiMarzio his own custom model ‘Fury’ pickups. Throughout a multitude of interviews (Malmsteen 2011h; Malmsteen 2011f; Malmsteen 2010c), he describes how important tone is to him and how he focuses on the minute details whenever he designs a pickup or amplifier. In terms of recording practices, Malmsteen is an avid
supporter of analogue equipment (Malmsteen 2008c), even though he uses ProTools for editing.¹⁰⁵

Malmsteen remarks that he does not listen to anything else other than classical (mainly Baroque), and that he “do[es]n’t listen to other guitar players” (Malmsteen 2013a). Particularly in relation to uniqueness, Malmsteen argues that to become a great musician one needs to do “something that is little different and also to listen to other instruments rather than just the guitar” (Malmsteen 2008g). Consequently, and surprisingly, the instrument of choice for Malmsteen is the violin (Malmsteen 2010; Malmsteen 2011f; Malmsteen 2010c; Malmsteen 2012a). Nonetheless, he still notes that through “a combination and Marshalls and Strats” he “could make the guitar almost sing” (Malmsteen 2005). He also describes how his pickups “really scream” (Malmsteen 2011), but he is less vocal about the topic. He does discuss the issue of vibrato at length in his memoir, arguing, “[y]ou need to hear the guitar’s voice”, which for him means “hear[ing] its vibrato”, concluding that he prefers “a singer’s kind of tone, a more ‘vocal’ kind of vibrato” (Malmsteen 2013h). Nonetheless, he often refers to the different techniques and licks adopted from the violin, such as the scalar runs and arpeggios (for which he uses sweep picking to simulate the bow technique).

The importance of “articulation” (what I dubbed phrasing in earlier chapters) is constantly brought up, Malmsteen arguing that one must listen critically to his/her own playing to improve every note so that nothing ends up being “sloppy” (Malmsteen 2011b). Moreover, while he often discusses his use of scales and modes, he argues that “expression” is more important than the notes and scales themselves (Malmsteen 2014d), and as I mentioned earlier, vibrato is one of the main ways to achieve this expression. Technique and note selection (i.e. composition) are not the endgame; they are mere tools used to express a musical (or extra-musical) idea. How one phrases a line is possibly even more important than the line itself.

Malmsteen notes, nonetheless, that “the electric guitar is definitely my main instrument”, with the acoustic guitar being used “as a flavour” (Malmsteen 2008f). His guitar of choice, the

¹⁰⁵ On a similar note, it is interesting to note how on his Concerto (1998), Malmsteen opted to record the orchestra and guitar separately (Malmsteen 1998). The orchestra itself was recorded on multiple tracks, which is at odds with the standard method of recording orchestras onto two tracks (left and right, to reproduce the space of the concert hall). This suggests that even though Malmsteen is to some extent interacting with classical music on its own terms, by avoiding pop/rock musical elements or instruments, he is still not one hundred percent immersed in the classical world. The recording techniques used are still borrowed from popular music. The result is of a constructed persona that might not have the spontaneity of the live classical recording, but does have the polished finish of a popular music record.
Fender Stratocaster, is almost “like a part of my body” (Malmsteen 2008d), like “an organ” (Malmsteen 2010b). He scallops his necks because he “like[s] the vibrato and how you control the string perfectly” (Malmsteen 2008a). He also rarely uses effects pedals, noting that he approaches the electric guitar more as an acoustic instrument (Malmsteen 2011g). This also feeds into the authenticity that he is trying to project, as the lack of expensive, complicated outboard gear helps create the illusion of a humble, down to earth virtuoso, with all the contradiction this involves.
IV.4 Guthrie Govan

Guthrie Govan is an extremely articulate individual, and his interviews, lessons, and masterclasses are filled with illuminating information on how he approaches musicmaking in all its facets, from performing to composing and recording. While he is known for being ‘the guitar player’s guitar player’ because of his chameleonic abilities as a guitarist (being proficient in multiple styles), as well as for his virtuosic control of the instrument, he claims that he is “not a big one for exercises”, and that he prefers “playing” to “practicing” (Govan 2010b; 2010c). Moreover, he admits that he “never used a metronome”, opting instead to play along to records (Govan 2011c). This echoes Malmsteen’s discourse, as both he and Govan distance themselves from practice-based guitar players (some of whom Govan describes as “unmusical shredders” - Govan 2011f).

Govan confesses that he enjoys genres that centre around other instruments, such as electronic music or even traditional Indian music rather than guitar-oriented music (Govan 2010b). His proficiency in multiple styles was an essential skill for his session work at Replay Heaven (Govan 2010b). Having started studying guitar with 50s rock ‘n’ roll and continuing chronologically until the 80s shred era, Govan was exposed to and absorbed a varied and immense quantity of music. This fact, cumulated with the easiness with which he improvises in-style regardless of the music being performed (besides making him an ideal employee of Replay Heaven), led way to a personal style that is a fusion of everything that went on in the guitar world up until Govan’s break into the music industry. He can reproduce the tone and idiosyncrasies of multiple guitar players, which ultimately means ‘wearing the mask’ of each of them, adopting another’s persona (as seen in the ‘Guthrie Plays’ segment of the musical analysis chapter). This does not mean, however, that he cannot hold his own. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, his encyclopaedic knowledge of the guitar creates an all-star persona rather than a copy of any one guitar player.

In terms of performing and composing (spheres that are unusually interconnected in his philosophy, as I shall discuss throughout), his perspectives on the studio vs. stage environments differ considerably. In the studio, he considers that “the album approach is a lot more ‘composed’ in places”, and that the pieces “are a lot closer to what I meant the stuff to sound like” when he wrote them, whereas “[t]he live thing, for me, is more about using each tune as a loose framework for some improvising and band interaction” (Govan 2006). Improvisation is an
essential element of his musical persona, and he constantly lets interviewers and students know that most of what he does (including the solos on the recordings) are all improvised (Govan 2015b). In terms of composing per se, Govan finds the process natural (Govan 2012d), as he argues that after an initial “little musical nugget” appears and starts to “fascinate” him, “the rest of the song write[s] itself” (Govan n.d.1). A composition always starts “with a general idea of the sound I want to hear”, after which he explores “the instrument in search of some way to convey that sound” (Govan n.d.1). However, as opposed to players such as Vai or Satriani, Govan argues that he prefers not using “digital” technology, favouring instead to “keep it all organic-sounding” (Govan 2006) by using analog gear. While he is viewed as one of the best modern guitarists, he confesses that he is “essentially an old school ‘valve amp’ kind of a purist at heart” (Govan n.d.1), and tends to stay away from the more modern tools used in contemporary recording and performing environments. The fact that he is less interested in the intricacies of digital technology, from gear to recording techniques, represents an interesting contrast to the other three guitarists. As I will highlight below, he is more interested in interactions between different musicians rather than between iterations of the same musician through overdubs and extensive use of modern studio technology. Essentially, while there are some instances of overdubbing, most notably on Erotic Cakes (2006), Govan prefers situations where his persona is just one of many interacting with one another at any given time throughout a piece.

Govan personifies the guitar, arguing that it is “important to establish a real connection with your instrument: your guitar should feel like part of you, rather than like some machine that you use to generate scale patterns” (Govan 2015l). Govan contends that musical ideas are first constructed inside the mind and then they pass through the guitar to “come out of the amplifier” (Govan 2010b), which also involves playing through an amp that “should listen to you” (Govan 2012c). This implies that the persona is found at the intersection of both mind and technology, at the very end of the chain. He argues that through this process, the guitar has the potential to become “transparent”, and the result is “pure music” (Govan 2011n). When confronted with the question of virtuosity and note density, he argued that he plays “a lot of notes because I’m a skinny, twitchy, blinky, coffee-drinking person, and the music I hear in my head really does contain that many notes” (Govan 2015j). Govan insists that “[t]he music has always come first, and then I inject some of my own personality into it”, concluding that he plays “more notes per second than some other people do because that’s who I am” (Govan 2015j).
Melodic lines are not the only element of his persona, however. When discussing the fact that he does not enjoy playing the tracks off *Erotic Cakes* (2006) in a trio format, as the album features heavy use of overdubbing, he concludes that “without the harmony there it doesn’t mean anything” (Govan 2011e). The fact that harmony is as integral to those tracks as the melody (Govan 2014b) is extremely interesting, as it suggests that every guitar layer occupies the same degree of centrality in his music, which in turn creates the illusion of a single, possibly fractured persona that can be a fusion of two or more representations of the same entity. While the melody itself is the replacement of the singer, Govan’s persona is found at the intersection of all the guitar parts. Furthermore, regarding overdubs on The Aristocrats’ albums, he argues that every instance of layering “is just a decoration”, and “[i]n theory, if you take all the overdubs away, it’s still recognizably that song” (Govan 2015i). Again, this means that, essentially, listeners interact with a single entity that can be formed of multiple personalities.

While he does acknowledge that the note choice defines a guitar player, “the sound and phrasing” are at least as important if not more important than the musical material (Govan 2011i). Govan believes that the secret lays not only in the notes themselves, but also in “the way you play and the tone that compliments what you’re trying to say” (Govan 2010f). He believes that one should aim to maintain “the personality of each note” (Govan 2012e). Moreover, he observes that particularly in his early years he began experimenting with “trying to make a note sound lots of different ways, and looking at how your pick hits the string” (Govan 2010c). He continues that “articulation, and attack, the individuality of each note” are what players should focus on (Govan 2011l), and that guitarists must get their “personality to get through just by playing properly”, not using gear (Govan 2012). Nonetheless, Govan does state that one needs to find equipment and use techniques to bring to life the tone heard “in [his] head” (Govan 2011c; 2015e). He sums up his approach by noting that it all starts from imagining “your ideal guitar tone and then striv[ing] to create the sound you hear in your head” through “a mixture of fingers, ears, [and] equipment” (Govan 2007).

Govan looks for variety in his guitars,\(^\text{106}\) arguing that he would rather have a guitar capable of creating multiple sounds than one guitar for each specific effect he is aiming for (Govan 2015c). He wants to have “one guitar that (…) can do a credible impersonation of any guitar

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\(^{106}\) Regarding the acoustic guitar, he briefly mentions that he “like[s] it”, but does not “pretend to be a proper acoustic guitar player”, and essentially treats it as “a different instrument” (Govan 2014h).
sound you might need”, regardless of the type of music being played (Govan 2010e). This also extends to his use of amplifiers, as he wants to be able to “get as many different sounds as you can out of just a guitar and amp” (Govan 2014h). Even though for the most part his amps have been single-channel amps, these were versatile enough (mainly through the volume knob on the guitar - Govan 2010g) to permit their utilization in a wide range of musical contexts (Govan 2011h). His preferred term to describe these guitars and amps is “honesty”, by which he means “a rig that will listen to all those little details and bring them out”, and that will allow one to “make”, to be the creator of each note (Govan 2011e). Effects should also follow the same rationale. Govan performs using as few pedals as possible, although he does mention that this is mainly for travel purposes and depends on the project (Govan 2010b). He argues that the most important thing in a pedal is the ability to “play the effect”, meaning controlling the sound by playing harder, or softer on the guitar (Govan 2012b). In the studio, when recording with The Aristocrats, “[a]ll any given time, two of [the] three amps [that were set up for recording] were running in parallel”, with “the exact combination and blend [varying] from track to track” (Govan 2015j). This is somewhat revealing, as the overall tone is a construction of not a single amp, but multiple amplifiers, each with its own signal chain. While the listener is never aware of this, the guitar persona can be thought of as being made of multiple (covert) protagonists (resulting from each signal chain). Finally, depending on the context (if he is playing with The Aristocrats, with Steven Wilson, or with Asia), he puts “on a different hat” for each scenario (Govan 2014f).

Govan argues that on Erotic Cakes (2006), even though the leading role is given to the guitar, he did not want “the drums just laying down a simple beat and the bass playing root notes” (Govan 2011o). While there is “a lot of guitar playing” on his solo album, he insists that he did not intend “to make another shred album”, as “the world is full of those already”, opting instead to highlight the performances of the other players “so it would sound more like a band and less like an ego trip” (Govan 2007). For him, creativity is not the result of internal struggles, but a “musical conversation with your fellow musicians” (Govan 2015l). Moreover, he argues that “what makes the [Aristocrats] lineup distinctive is simply the way we interact with each other” (Govan 2013k). He concludes that he is “pretty sure that my playing is a lot more interesting and musically valid when I’m able to interact with other musicians, in real time” (Govan n.d.1). This means that not only is his guitar persona made up of multiple protagonists
(particularly on *Erotic Cakes*), but it is also just one of the personae found on any given recording. He is not trying to impose a single, unified persona in the same way as Malmsteen and to some extent Vai and Satriani do. Essentially, he is lending his persona to the overall sound of a band or project. Even though his name might be on a release and his persona might be more prevalent than others (particularly on his solo album, as he is also the composer), he sees himself as a cog in producing the music, as the brand persona, rather than the sole visionary behind every little musical or extra-musical detail.

As a final general note, I mention that in terms of meaning of his tracks and music, he echoes Satriani’s perspective, contending that he learned to accept throughout the years “that the way I was hearing the material had no relevance to the way anyone else would react on hearing it” (Govan 2006). This philosophy is reflected in his attitude toward track and album titles, to some extent. *Erotic Cakes*, for instance, is a reference to an episode of the animated sitcom *The Simpsons* (Govan 2007), while ‘Gaping Head Wound’ (2013) was named after an incident in which Govan hurt his head during the process of writing the track (Govan 2016b).

**Self-expression and uniqueness**

It is unarguable that Govan sees music as self-expressive, and this is one of the reasons why there seems to be no difference between how Govan sees himself and how he presents himself as a music maker. While he has a single solo album under his belt, Govan considers that making *Erotic Cakes* (2006) was “such a personal thing” (Govan 2013f). He argues that musicians should treat music “as a way to express who you are in life” (Govan 2016a) and “be true to yourself and play what you believe in” (Govan 2013k). Essentially, “[m]usic should be all about expressing yourself” (Govan 2013k). Furthermore, one of his main principles of guitar playing is to “play everything like you mean it” (Govan 2011e; 2011m), as people respond to “sincerity” (Govan 2013a). “Be[ing] true to yourself” (Govan 2015m) is the essential element of his philosophy, and guitarists should communicate their musical ideas naturally (Govan 2011c). The ideas and their execution start in the mind, and for him this means “enjoy[ing] things on a sub conscious level”, in a “‘[n]ice and organic’ manner” (Govan 2010e). Govan argues that creating your own sound should come “naturally” (Govan 2013f). He constantly mentions that music is not a sport and that the aim is not to “become a good guitar player like [Govan], [but]
become a good guitar player like you” (Govan 2012). The result of this is “figure[ing] out what it is I have to say” and then finding a way to express that musically (Govan 2013a).

While he seems to have an aversion for complicated rigs, he does confess that the gear used should aid in “communicating everything you’re trying to convey [to] people” (Govan 2014), and this could take many shapes, some more complex, depending on the context. A unique sound goes hand in hand with a good ear, as one must be able to “copy the music you hear in your head” (Govan 2010a; 2010d) and then make that music “come out through the amp” (Govan 2014b). However, Govan argues that he tries “not to think about it at a conscious level” (Govan 2014b), which could be a result of the fact that has done music for as long as he remembers (he mentions that his parents told him that he started playing guitar at the age of 3) (Govan 2012c). His strand of self-expression bypasses the rigidity of the mind. Particularly in terms of improvising, even though music theory rules are idling in the background, they function in a comparable way to Chomsky’s generative grammar (Chomsky 2015): one does not need to constantly think of the rules that govern music to improvise or even compose. While the process does not seem to be as automatic as Malmsteen’s, it is also not as thoroughly thought through as Vai’s, laying somewhere between the two extremes. Nonetheless, the result, in Govan’s view, is that what comes out of the amplifier is a direct expression of himself as a person.

Govan argues that “there is a side of me that likes to do things my own way and figure things out for myself” (Govan 2015a). The result of this journey should be finding “your own voice” and a way to “express” that voice (Govan 2012). The aim is to become a “musician”, not someone who “operates a guitar” (Govan 2014g). In his early years producing demos, he tried to find “a distinct direction for the music [he] was making”, which involved coming “up with some guitar music that wasn’t the same as what everyone else seemed to be doing” (Govan 2006). Regarding Erotic Cakes (2006), he admits that he “like[s] to think there’s something unique about it compared with other albums in similar genres” (Govan 2006). The reason for this, beside the fact that he is also part of The Aristocrats (writing for and touring constantly with them), seems to be that he wants his second album to be as different to his first release as possible, noting that he must “have something new to say” to release new music (Govan 2012e).

Besides composition, technology is another element involved in creating a unique sound. Choosing a transparent amp lets “every note [be] unique” and creates a sound that is different from any other guitarist’s tone (Govan 2011l). He expands on the idea, noting that he looks for
amplifiers which let “whatever goes into that amp (…) come out louder” (Govan 2010f). He compares such amps with the MESA/Boogie “Triple Rectifier, (…) an amp with a lot of personality”, and he argues that “a number of players with a number of different guitars (…) [plugged] into that amp (…) will all sound similar (…) to some extent (…), because the amp is doing quite a lot of the work” (Govan 2010f). He concludes that his amps of choice at the time (Cornford amps) “kind of do none of the work” (Govan 2010f). Nonetheless, an amp that “can add a little bit of character to each note”, is a desirable asset, as it helps him “be so much more expressive” (Govan 2006).

Regardless of the gear, the sound of a guitarist is “in the fingers to a great extent” (Govan 2011c), with “a lot of the players’ tone [being] self-contained” (Govan 2012). Even though guitarists such as BB King, Freddie King, or Albert King played similar licks, the difference between how they played them was key (Govan 2014g). One must look for “something deeper” than the gear and other similar factors, as “it must be the way they play (…), it must be the tone, it must be some unique way of hitting the string that makes everyone sound recognizable” (Govan 2014g). He maintains that one “could play middle C a hundred times and it could sound different without buying any pedals or turning any knobs” (Govan 2014a). Great guitar players possess a quality that lets “the strength of their personality [come] through” (Govan 2006). The most relevant guitar players throughout the years have always been those “whom you recognize after just one note” (Govan 2011o). Govan concludes:107 “I think the goal is to find your unique thing and then spend the rest of your life competing with yourself, getting better at crystallizing whatever it is that makes your musical voice special” (Govan 2013i). Essentially, he is “just trying to be the best me I can be” (Govan 2013k).

This might also be the reason why Govan’s relationship with platforms such as YouTube has been mixed. While he agrees that “YouTube has undeniably been a huge help in terms of spreading the word about what I do”, from “a more selfish perspective, it troubles me that so many people feel they have an inalienable right to post footage from any performance they attend” (Govan n.d.1). He comments that even though “policing it is quite impossible”, “[i]n an ideal world, I think the artist would have the sole right to determine which clips end up online: I reckon it’s entirely reasonable to strive for some degree of quality control over the way your

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107 In an interesting echo to Vai, when, asked what five albums he would take if stranded on a deserted island, he put his Erotic Cakes (2006) on the list, observing that it is an unusual choice given that he does not “listen to it very often” (Govan n.d.1).
playing is represented in the public domain” (Govan n.d.1). It is interesting to note that this desire to maintain some sort of legacy in the musical world is similar to the way classical music composers treat the issue, and Govan is the most explicit of the four case studies on how his performances are (and should be) viewed by fans, critics, and the media. It is almost as if the personal nature of the endeavour leaves him vulnerable, and he wants to be in control of how the expression of his inner most feelings is represented to the world.

**Tone and vocality**

Vocality is a main element of his discourse, and it extends to various aspects of guitar playing. On improvisation, he argues that the key element is remembering that “music is essentially just a language” in which guitarists use “scales (...) in much the same way that you would use the alphabet when writing a poem” (Govan 2015l). One of the best ways of incorporating “the ‘speech’ analogy” when playing guitar “is to think in phrases when you play” (Govan 2015l). Essentially, he argues that “every one of us becomes a fluent improviser” in a familiar language, and in such instances one “can effortlessly and spontaneously express a wide range of feelings and thoughts, frequently applying complex rules of grammar and syntax in the process, without even being consciously aware of what we’re doing” (Govan 2015l). When he was growing up, “playing music was like speaking English, it was just a natural thing” (Govan 2011r), so learning music was simultaneous with learning the English language for him (Govan 2011c). He argues that grouping notes and phrasing “should be [done] exactly the same as the way you talk”, and one should apply “everything that works for speech” to “your relationship with the guitar” (Govan 2014d). During a masterclass, he explicitly demonstrated the similarity between musical and linguistic phrasing: “If I end on [the seventh], you know I haven’t finished, you know I’m going to say something else. It’s a punctuation. [Plays the seventh] that’s a comma [plays a lick that ends on the root]. Full stop. So that’s the end of the sentence” (Govan 2014e). He believes “music is a language and all of these styles are just regional dialects” (Govan 2015).

Govan is the biggest supporter of the guitar-as-voice analogy, even though his music does not feature overt references to vocality the same way Vai’s does. He argues that it is “more interesting, more challenging” to make the guitar sound like Stevie Wonder or Paul Rodgers because “the most basic music you can make is either singing something or hitting something” (Govan 2010e). Govan notes that he first realised this when he heard Cream-era Eric Clapton:
“the guitar could be the singer” (Govan 2015m) and it “can play the melody, it could be the voice” (Govan 2011m), it could be “the vocalist (…) that can carry the melody” (Govan 2011e), the “singer in the band” (Govan 2011n). The fact that the guitar “can be playing melodies where you might expect the vocals to be” (Govan 2010b) is of utmost importance, as it suggests that the persona of the vocalist is replaced by the persona of the guitar in his view. Thus, all the attributes that the vocalist had in music with words are now passed to the guitar. He goes as far as to argue that utilizing bends, for instance, is a “gateway to sounding more vocal”, as he has a “theory that when someone who doesn’t play an instrument listens to you playing a melody on the guitar, the way to win that person over is to conjure up some kind of vocal quality in the melody” (Govan 2016c).

The language used to describe his various set-ups, equipment, and guitars is full of terms usually used to describe voices. He mentions the ‘meow EQ’ that pulling off creates, mentioning the fact that it resembles a wah-wah, the utility of the Jerry Cantrell custom wah pedal for “screaming rock” (Govan 2012b), with its simulation of a gradually opening “virtual mouth” (Govan 2011d), as well as the fact that the Floyd Rose tremolo system has the capacity to “coax a gargle” (Govan 2013g). Furthermore, he mentions that he prefers a flat radius on the neck of the instrument, as this permits him to “choke” the notes (Govan 2011k). His discourse is filled with statements such as: the Shur Riot pedal is ideal for “screaming pinched harmonics”, the Robotalk pedal “goes ‘quack’”, power-chords can be “screaming” (Govan 2010b); notes can be “screaming”, the tone can be “biting” (Govan 2012); melodies can be “impossibly vocal” (Govan 2011n); the Koko boost has a “honking” quality, the Exotic Pedals overdrive has a “nasal” sound (Govan 2013h); “the mouth opens” when changing the attack of the note when playing through a Guyatone Wah-rocker 5 (Govan 2011s); the bridge pickup has a “midrange honk” (Govan 2011j) (an effect that he argues “just goes ‘quack’ (…) it sounds like a duck” - Govan 2013h); mahogany gives a “nasal frequency” (Govan 2010g) and a “honkiness” (Govan 2011g); single coil pickups have a “snarl” (Govan 2010); low string action means that “the note won’t sing” (Govan 2014c); the Victory amp “allows the overtones to sing out” (Govan 2015h); amplifiers can be set to “scream mode” (Govan 2015k); notes can “scream obnoxiously” (Govan 2015j); and the list can go on and on. Terms such as “nasal”, “bark” (Govan 2013l), “scream” (Govan 2015d; 2011s), “screaming” (Govan 2013l; 2012a), “gargle” (Govan 2013c), “throaty” (Govan 2011), or “snarl” (Govan 2011b) are central to his understanding of guitar playing.
In terms of gear and specific techniques used to give the guitar melodies a vocal-like quality, he mentions that “the barking rock thing” is the result of combinations of woods (Govan 2013d) and that “there’s an element that resembles singing” when using the fretless guitar (Govan 2011p). He remarks that besides fretless guitars, sliding in general also helps guitarists “phrase in a more vocal way” (Govan 2013j), making the guitar itself “sound more vocal” (Govan 2010b). Similar effects are achieved by pre-bending the note, which creates a “more vocal vibrato” (Govan 2013). Bending on a single string might also “encourage” (Govan 2015f) or even “force” (Govan 2015l) guitarists “to think more vocally” (Govan 2015f), as will playing anything on a single string rather than staying in a single scale box. Particularly in the case of microtonal bends, he argues that the technique helps guitar players “[tell] a story every time” (Govan 2015g). Moreover, he utilizes the volume pedal to remove “the attack at the start of a note”, and this creates the effect of playing “some kind of bowed of blowed (sic) instrument” (Govan 2010b). Besides hiding the attack of the note, volume pedal manipulation also permits going from “super clean to screaming” (Govan 2013h). Finally, he observes that using the fretless guitar in conjunction with the wah pedal “give[s] everything a more vocal quality” (Govan 2011p), allowing guitarists to articulate “slides differently” and to create a type of “phrasing [that] (...) tends to sound somewhat more vocal” (Govan 2011a). These elements (wood, techniques, gear etc.) fuse so that guitarists can get “different voices (...) out of the guitar” (Govan 2011n).

He takes the argument to extremes when comparing the tone of UK and US amps, musing that “the UK and US tend to voice amps in a way which reflects the way the people speak in each of those countries”, with “the American style of amp voicing [having] a slightly more strident type of midrange which reminds me of an American accent” (Govan 2013e). He jokingly concludes that this is probably “why I feel more comfortable with a British kind of amp voicing: in some strange way, it sounds more like me” (Govan 2013e). Accurate representation of tones or not, statements such as these prove that vocality – in more ways than one – is key to understanding Govan’s philosophy.
**IV.5 General observations**

What is most striking here is how similar these musicians’ accounts of their musicmaking are. It seems that, in their view, persona is what emerges from their highly Romantic ideological understanding of the problems of creativity, individuality, and self-expression. Their different personae emerge from their different musical/technical solutions to the contradictions that will become apparent in the following pages: (1) originality vs. form/genre rules; (2) individuality vs. collaboration; (3) instinct vs. control; (4) personality vs. musical personality; (5) metaphor of the voice. (1) It is interesting to observe how these musicians have to stress, in many ways, their eccentricity, quirkiness, and their rebellion against ‘rules’. Malmsteen argues that his uniqueness comes from rebelling against hard rock and its blues influence. Vai contends that he is a quirky person himself and this ends up colouring his music. All four guitarists see music as self-expressive, with originality and uniqueness being key tropes in their discourse. However, it is clear that they define originality in terms of one’s own identity, but it is less clear whether this refers to a kind of intuitive or instinctive expression (your sound is who you are and you cannot help it) or as a kind of calculation, the way you make a sound that is quite clearly different from other people’s sounds, which is to suggest that originality refers in first instance not to identity, the uniqueness of the self, but to distinction, one’s displayed difference to other selves. Contradictions here seem to be resolved by creating “a unique voice” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 337.8 / 537). On the one hand, these musicians describe how musicmaking enables the inchoate self to be recognised (the sound in your head is given shape and form), and, on the other hand, they suggest that their self already exists and it is that which is expressed in their music. The complications of what is meant by being true to yourself while making something that to be music must follow certain conventions, technical requirements, etc. are left unresolved. The notion of ‘emotion’ is one way of thinking about/solving the problems here. Guthrie Govan does not seem to make this distinction, however, arguing that “what matters” is “invest[ing] some of your identity and some of what you’re feeling into the notes you’re playing” (Govan 2016d). However, he is not clear as to whether the player’s personality is expressed through the notes played or through realizing the personality of each note, with personality here hinting at the usual distinction between technical and musical expression.

(2) Another factor that often leads to contradictions is the way each guitarist navigates the fine line between individuality and collaboration with other musicians, engineers, etc. For
instance, composition seems to be the key element of Malmsteen’s musical persona, as he wants to be remembered as a composer as much or even more than a guitar player. Consequently, he uses the musicians in his live bands more as ‘machines’ or as hired guns rather than creative entities. Moreover, as I explored above, he has discarded them altogether on recent releases. The other three fall somewhere on the continuum of full control of the recording process to being more or less a musician at the mercy of engineers, so to speak. Malmsteen and Vai are the most involved in the recording process of the four, with Govan leaving the production aspects in their entirety to engineers and producers. (3) Linked to this idea of control is also their distinction between instinct and control of the recording process, performance, and especially of improvisation. For instance, Govan claims that musical ideas are the result of bypassing the thought. As opposed to spending a lot of time tinkering with his compositions and guitar playing in general (like Vai), Govan embraces the unexpected in both his compositions and live performances, in a similar fashion to Malmsteen, which should come as no surprise considering that Govan cites him as one of the most important influences (Govan 2011o). On the accompanying PDFs to the jamtrackcentral.com Erotic Cakes (2006) backing tracks, he writes that the booklet offers “only the main themes and general harmonic structure for each track - rather than documenting every last string squeak and pick scrape in slavish detail” (Govan n.d.2). He then adds that the solos heard on the album “aren’t meant to be set in stone: they’re just recordings of whatever I happened to feel like playing when the engineer hit the red button on one particular occasion, in a studio in North Hollywood, several years ago” (Govan n.d.2). For instance, only 13 bars from ‘Waves’ (2006) are written out in the booklet, which constitutes roughly 33% of the actual track (100 out of 308 seconds). Most of the solos that appear on his recordings are comped from multiple takes, usually by the producer (something that happens in Satriani’s case as well on occasion), so the degree of control that he has over the finished product somehow contradicts his claim to instinct.

(4) The difference between the true self and the suggestion that you “become what you create” (Vai 2011a), as in Steve Vai’s case, is interesting but it is not clear how the two are related: is the true self generating the creation, or is the creation generating the true self? What the analyses suggests is that Vai has a clear sense of ‘persona’ but this is not the same thing as his sense of self. He openly acknowledges that he tinkers with his original ideas in the studio, working on phrasings, sounds, recording techniques, regardless of how personal the initial idea
was. Moreover, he also admits to putting on the performer façade for live shows, even though the often-flamboyant costumes and quirks might come from his personality. In focusing on composition as the key to self expression, Joe Satriani often sounds like someone writing within classical music conventions of authorial intention, even though his suggestion that a piece of music is open to interpretation by listeners is not a common view among classical composers. On the other hand, as a performer he obviously brings to this another notion of expression simultaneously: performance, noting that once the technical difficulties are out of the way (mastering the various physical and technological techniques), the musical idea moves from brain to sound without having to think of fingers/guitar mechanics. Nonetheless, the relationship between the two forms of expression is not clear, as “finding new ways to be expressive every night onstage” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 498.0 / 537) and creating “material that [is] an expression of my feelings, experiences, and memories” (Satriani and Brown 2014, 499.3 / 537) appear to be quite different matters.

(5) It seems that these various threads coalesce in the metaphor of the voice, but not as carrier of semantic meaning (lyrics) but as immediately self-expressive (an on this note it is interesting to note how often the term ‘scream’ is used by all these musicians). More than any of the three other case studies, Govan’s understanding of the guitar is dependent on the concept of vocality, on multiple levels. However, whereas Malmsteen, Vai, and Satriani all have a vocal (in the proper sense) presence on their recordings, Govan’s only vocal output is in his interviews and masterclasses. Other than that, his presence is strictly instrumental, which makes notions such as vocality even more interesting in his musical output and general discourse. Although unmentioned in his discourse, it is interesting to consider, linking it to a previous point, whether the decision not to sing is the result of him believing that he cannot control his voice the way he wants to. What runs through all these accounts is the problem of what its means to find your own - or your true - voice. This is precisely why the solutions they find - in the music - can be (and must be?) heard as a person.
CONCLUSIONS

My fascination with instrumental expression was first sparked back in 2012, during a Steve Vai performance at the Hammersmith Apollo. Starting work on the conclusion of this project found me attending another Steve Vai concert, at the London Palladium. Same artist, same city, same band members, almost identical setlist. Nonetheless, the experience was different. What changed in the past four years? Essentially nothing on Vai’s part, but a great many things concerning how I viewed the performance itself and how the findings of my research informed my understanding of his music and performance. As opposed to the realness I experienced back in 2012, the 2016 concert exposed the constructed nature of Vai’s persona. At the same time, paradoxically, it made it ‘more real’.

I started the project with a firm belief, which I still hold, that valuable lessons can be learned by assuming that popular music and the notion of persona are intimately intertwined. The literature on the persona in both popular and classical music pointed at the fact that listeners’ perception of music is dependant on some sort of personification of the pieces they listen to (Cone 1974 and 1992; Tagg 1979 and 1999, Newcomb 1984, Clarke 2005, Robinson 2005, Cochrane 2010, Moore 2012). Often, listeners identify with the character of a song, either the protagonist (‘I’) or the antagonist (‘you’), but this seemed to be possible only in vocal music. Moore (2012) argues that expression is essential to vocal music, which is a sensible observation, but very little research tackled the issue of instrumental (rock) expression. Helping fill in this research gap seemed crucial, not only because the notion of the persona as an analytical tool had not been utilized on this repertoire (and only seldom used in vocal popular music and classical music analyses), but also because it can function as a way of subverting common-sense notions such as the unitary nature of the persona in both instrumental and vocal music.

The way these personae were presented to the listener in a recorded medium was also a main concern. I found Zak’s (2001) comment that musicians must create an electronic persona extremely compelling, as it also tied in with Frith’s (1996, 2010) observation that listeners tend to experience sound as a person. However, the crux of the matter remained: could a persona be conceived in a strictly instrumental setting? My hypothesis was that it could, and the subsequent research focused on the diverse ways this instrumental persona can be theorized and deconstructed. More specifically, the thesis dealt with the various models that can be used to
describe a persona in an instrumental setting and why the guitar is the most viable option for envisioning such a construct. I focused on the music of four of the most renowned and accomplished (both technically and compositionally) rock guitar players: Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Guthrie Govan. Overall, the thesis and its focus on the persona were means to explore instrumental expression, particularly individual instrumental expression, as each of the four guitar players expressed their musical ideas in unique and personal ways.

It made sense to focus on the instrumental music most relevant at the time of writing, so instrumental rock was the obvious choice. Moreover, the genre also came into existence due to the advent of the electric guitar, which, given its nature as a composite instrument that can have its sound changed by various electronic and digital means, makes it the perfect subject for persona analysis, not only because it can imitate human voices but also because it can create unique and individual timbres. As a direct consequence, the electric guitar can bridge the gap between instrument and voice, mainly due to its capacity to play monodies with extremely precise and diverse articulation. As I mentioned in the theoretical framework, Cone’s (1974) observation that the persona is realized in the voice of the instrument is a sensible one, especially given how important vocality is in the discourse of someone like Guthrie Govan. There is an expectation that the guitar functions as a secondary voice of the song, with electric guitarist aiming to imitate human vocals and “anthropomorphize their instruments” (Collins 2010, 7) from the very beginning (Backer 2002; Evans 2002; Headlam 2002).

The key element of the dissertation was how these guitarists construct their personae on a sonic level (and less on a compositional level), moving away from the classical models of persona construction. Why does a Steve Vai recording sound like a Vai recording and not like a Guthrie Govan recording? What does he do in the studio to construct this identity? What gear does he use? How does he use that gear to articulate his melodies? These questions seemed essential to discovering the way these guitarists carve their own instrumental personalities. However, the thesis also required an alternative source of information about expressivity to which the persona approach could be compared. While I am aware of the dangers of the intentional fallacy, this process did not suppose intentionality. Rather, it functioned as a way of seeing how far apart analysts and artists can be. Do these guitar players see their music as

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108 While contemporary instrumental rock is helmed by artists such as God is an Astronaut or Animals as Leaders, the principles explored in the music of Vai, Satriani, Malmsteen, and Govan function as stepping stones and can potentially be applied to any form of instrumental rock.
involving constructed personae? Do they see their music as self-expressive? Comparing my findings to their views on the same issues yielded interesting results, as I showed in the discourse analysis chapter.

The study of personae in instrumental music is complex. Through analysing various models of personae, the particularities of sound, and discrepancies between the analyses and the discourses, I have come up with three main conclusions. First, an instrumental persona can indeed be conceived and used as a means of analysing instrumental rock music expression. Few models for persona analysis in instrumental music have been proposed, although many can be imagined, and I have argued that one based on parallels with film is a strong framework for articulating a theory of persona in instrumental rock. The second conclusion deals with the essential role of vocality in the creation of this illusion of persona. The reason why listeners allow for a guitar to stand in for a vocalist is precisely because the ways of articulating melodies and sound-box treatments are analogous. Guitarists use multiple techniques and pieces of gear to express their musical ideas in more vocal ways. Vocal expression is key to popular music, and the parallel to it that the guitar permits transposes that expression into the realm of instrumental music. Finally, the ideas I put forth throughout this research did not always coincide with how the artists viewed themselves and their music, which although shocking at first, made sense given the way these musicians frame themselves and their music within a larger rock tradition. Nonetheless, there were points of convergence between my analyses and their discourse, but the inconsistencies are more remarkable. While the notion of the persona seems not to be particularly relevant for the artists, Vai, Satriani, Malmsteen, and Govan ultimately see their music as self-expressive.

Key findings

Allan Moore (2012) argued that a persona cannot be conceived in the absence of lyrics. He is the first and only scholar, to my knowledge, to have tackled the impossibility of an instrumental persona. While others have attempted to analyse instrumental music through the prism of the persona (Cone 1974, Clarke 2005 etc.), Moore focused exclusively on vocal music and specifically claimed that an instrumental persona cannot be conceived. The argument of the entire thesis was that the concept of an instrumental persona is not only plausible but necessary in the analysis of instrumental music, as a tool for making sense of the expressivity of the music.
Moore pinpointed a set of problems such as proxemics, the individual-environment model, and the realistic/fictional characteristics of the protagonist and its involvement in the track (distant or involved). The analyses showed that proxemic zones are easily transferable in an instrumental framework, as none of the characteristics Moore (2012, 187) presents are particularly dependent on lyrics. Proxemic distances (intimate, private, public, or social) are also free from the confides of vocal music. This spectrum of congruence between the protagonist and its environment also ties in with his second objection about the individual-environment relationship in instrumental music.

Moore proposed a set of five levels of protagonist-environment relations. While his model was comprised of inert, quiescent, active, interventionist, and oppositional, I argued that for it to properly describe the persona-environment interactions in instrumental rock, a somewhat different approach was needed. Instead of utilizing Tagg’s (1979) painting analogy which Moore based his ideas on, I suggested a parallel with film as a more lucrative framework, mainly to compensate for the lack of the temporal strand in painting. Cinematographic techniques affect the way a shot is perceived by the viewer, and this analogy seems to provide a better picture of the relationship between foreground and background in an instrumental music setting. The main cinematographic technique utilized was the modification of the depth of field (deep focus, shallow focus, rack focus). Based on this, five modified stages of protagonist-environment are created: static, blurred, active, interventionist, and oppositional.

Moore’s final problem dealt with the nature of the protagonist. It can be represented by a dichotomy between realistic and fictional protagonists, between realistic and fictional situations, and by the involvement of the protagonist in the music, so to speak. Even though the most difficult to resolve, equivalents can be found in instrumental rock if texture is taken as central. Realistic and fictional characters can be represented by clean and distorted guitar tones respectively, realistic and fictional scenarios can be represented by standard or acoustic instrumentation, and heavily synthesized or sample-based backing tracks, and persona involvement of the protagonist can be judged by tracks where there is only a monody or where there is no lead guitar per se, or where there are multiple equally important instrumental lines.

I found most instrumental persona models either too ambiguous (Clarke 2005) or so complex that they created more problems than solutions, rendering the resulting models unwieldy and impractical (Cone 1974). A more grounded model was lacking. Moreover, a model
that focused on popular instrumental music and on the guitar specifically was also absent from the literature. While Frith’s (1996), Auslander’s (2009), or Moore’s (2012) models were adequate for vocal music, none were fully equipped to address instrumental rock music. Nonetheless, many features of their frameworks could be modified and fused into a more appropriate model for tackling instrumental rock music. The real person (persona-proper), and character of the first two scholars was developed by Moore to also incorporate the sonic level, which resulted in a model that dealt only with recorded presences, except, of course, the real human musician. Thus, the real person becomes irrelevant to my model, the persona proper becomes the recorded presence, and the protagonist is the ‘I’ of every song or the lead guitar sound of any rock instrumental, one which does not have an identity outside of a track or section of a track. The latter is created specifically for each recording, paralleling film characters who are unique to a film (sequels and prequels notwithstanding), even though the actors can portray multiple characters throughout their career.

The distinction between figure and background needed to be broken down, given the complexity of the timbres and the temporal strand required to perceive music. A listener constantly moves from one instrument to another in hopes of perceiving all of them at the same time. Visually, as well as sonically, this is of course impossible. One cannot focus on every little aspect of a recording or of a movie at the same time. We cannot be aware of every nuance of each instrumental persona at any given moment, nor can we track every change, and the fact that we do observe one or another element will change our perception of what is being observed. Consequently, each individual instrument creates its own unique instrumental persona. Modifications of proxemics or similar mixing techniques can bring certain elements to the fore, as in film. How a guitar is ‘in or out of focus’ (reverberation, delay, volume etc.) or how it is placed in the sound-box (if it moves, for instance), help certain protagonists achieve centre stage for a section or multiple sections of a track.

Another key finding is represented by a critique of the tendency to consider the persona and the protagonist as unified. Even though scholars suggest that the presence of the voice attests to some sort of unified perspective, examples such as Michael Jackson’s ‘Earth Song’ (1995) cast a shadow of doubt on the issue. In instrumental music, even more so, the unitary nature of the protagonist cannot be maintained. Thus, I proposed the notion of a fractured persona as a more lucrative way of approaching the analysis of personae, particularly in instrumental music.
As I demonstrated in the musical analyses chapters, each guitar player operates with a certain ‘cast’ of characters. Some are main protagonists (distorted guitar going into an amp, for instance), some are secondary (the same setting but with a wah pedal added to the chain), and some are episodic (an effects-pedal and EQ for a specific section on a specific track). These coalesce to form the overall instrumental persona and are key to how each guitar player ultimately expresses himself.

Vai, Satriani, Malmsteen, and Govan create distinct personae through their playing, compositions, and recordings. Compositionally, each of them has a distinctive set of scalar, harmonic, and rhythmic preferences that blend with the sound of the guitar to create their unique musical persona. For Steve Vai, it is a mixture of odd time signatures, bizarre rhythmic subdivisions, modal melharmonic language filled with modal chromaticisms, unusual track structures, and frequent and sudden texture and dynamic changes. For Joe Satriani it is a blend of mostly common time, common rhythmic subdivisions, modal (as well pitch axis based) melharmonic language, melodic (and occasionally harmonic) blues inflexions, and simple track structures. Yngwie Malmsteen’s music is a combination of almost exclusively common time, relentless equal note values (sixteen and above, predominantly in solos), harmonic minor melharmonic language, frequent polyphonic textures, and simple track structures, whereas Guthrie Govan’s music is a mix of common time, odd time signatures (or manipulations of common feel to create the sensation of non-4/4 feels), common rhythmic subdivisions, blues and jazz melharmonic language, jazz and blues melodic inflections, and jazz head-improvisation-head track structures. (It is also worth mentioning that except for Guthrie Govan, all the others also sing.) Of course, the specifics of these compositional tendencies cannot be properly judged in the absence of sound. On paper, these characteristics could be used to describe a whole slew of players. Nonetheless, they are useful in differentiating between the four and signals to the listener what he/she should be on the lookout for.

**Analyst-artist contradictions**

The discourse analysis – my alternative source of information about expressivity – seems to point to some very interesting contradictions between artist and analyst. Granted, divergences between the results of the musical analyses and the information provided in the interviews are bound to appear, mainly due to me not interviewing the guitar players myself. Nonetheless, my
asking specific questions would turn the discussion too much towards what I expect or want the artist to say about the issues that I raise. The questions would most likely be loaded, regardless of how hard I try to make them neutral. Additionally, the contradictions that occur are more interesting than mere reflections of my results, even though issues such as vocality and uniqueness arose in each guitarist’s discourse, regardless of the questions asked during interviews or masterclasses. I shall start my discussion with these points of convergence, but I need to highlight that the degree to which each guitarist addresses these issues is different, and their opinions should be viewed on a continuum, from extremely important to not important at all.

One of the main tenets of my analysis of the persona in instrumental rock is the notion of vocality. Guthrie Govan and Joe Satriani are the two guitar players that concern themselves most with sounding vocal, at discourse level. Govan’s statements often tackle the notion of vocality, while Satriani mentions that he tries to play his melodies with a unique guitar voice. Even though to a lesser extent than Govan, Satriani’s discourse still points towards a relationship between the guitar and the human voice. On the other end of the spectrum, however, are Yngwie Malmsteen and, oddly, Steve Vai. Even though Malmsteen mentions that through “a combination and Marshalls and Strats” he can “make the guitar almost sing” (Malmsteen 2005) and Vai notes that he “always [has] the talking guitar thing in [his] arsenal” (Vai 2012a), these two are unusually silent about the vocality of their guitar tone. Vai seems to almost ignore the issue, even though, as my analysis highlighted, he is arguably the most vocal of the four. Overall, the degree to which vocality is essential to their music, at discourse level, is as follows: Guthrie Govan > Joe Satriani > Yngwie Malmsteen > Steve Vai. Even though Vai might be at the end of the spectrum, he still does address the issue and proceeds to describe numerous ways of being vocal on the guitar when confronted with the question during interviews. Vocality is present not only in the music of each guitar player, but also in their discourse, even though my analysis showed that the following order would have been more appropriate, given the musical characteristics: Steve Vai > Guthrie Govan > Yngwie Malmsteen > Joe Satriani.

Uniqueness is another main trope in each guitar player’s discourse. All of them break down uniqueness into multiple facets, mainly phrasing, gear, composition, and self-expressivity. I shall cover the latter separately, as it presents an interesting series of contradictions. In terms of note articulation, phrasing, or techniques, all four admit that they try to be unique and approach each of these elements in a personal manner. Both my musical and discourse analyses point towards
an individual way of bending, sliding, phrasing etc. that each of them use to construct a sound that is entirely theirs. On the level of composition, they differ considerably from one another as well, and they each acknowledge their unique compositional practices in multiple interviews. Gear-wise, the situation is the same. They use their gear to create their own sonic fingerprints. All four use custom-made guitars (Ibanez for Vai and Satriani, Fender for Malmsteen, and Charvel for Govan) as well as custom amps (except for Govan, who uses stock Legacy amps). To this, they add various effects pedals and rack-units to solidify their sound. Vai and Satriani use the same Digitech Whammy pedal for pitch shifting, but in most cases each guitarist uses a particular set of effects in their rigs. Even the wah pedals, a common feature of all four, are manufactured by different companies and have different specifications (for instance, Vai uses his custom Digitech, while Malmsteen uses a standard Dunlop). Consequently, each of them has a distinctive sound, resulting from both a particular touch on the guitar and a specific set of effects units and other gear. They use this gear to not only construct a unique sonic space but also to compose. Composition is essential to all of them, and the way they compose ranges from the most thoroughly composed to the improvised: Steve Vai > Joe Satriani > Yngwie Malmsteen > Guthrie Govan.

Particularly because of the improvisatory nature of some of their music, the notion of self-expressivity becomes essential. What all four have in common arguably more than anything else is their desire to express their inner most feelings. Their music, their technique, their phrasing, everything is used to express musical or extra musical ideas that are entirely theirs. This is particularly interesting for the discussion on personae. While Vai, for instance, acknowledges the presence of some sort of constructed performance persona, the four assume that their music and guitar playing is the result of something real. The discussion thus becomes not how the persona is constructed but if it is constructed. My theoretical model as well as my musical analyses pointed clearly in the direction of a constructed persona, regardless of whether it was a singular individual producing the music. However, each guitar player concluded that their music is self-expressive and is not filtered through any notion of a persona.

This is arguably the biggest contradiction between my model for personae and how the artists themselves see their music. Are the guitarists ignorant of the literature? Is my model completely wrong? Can the notion of the persona not be applied to instrumental rock music? The answer to these is a definite no. The fact that the conclusions are so divergent makes for an
interesting finding, as it just goes to show how much analyst and artist can differ. Even more so, at least some listeners interact with the music of Vai, Satriani, Malmsteen, and Govan without the aid of any mediating persona. I generated a few discussion threads on their forum boards, which even though did not yield as many responses as I hoped for (https://goo.gl/z1Yd5g), still provided fascinating insights into how fans interact with this music, and it seems that the notion of the persona is close to irrelevant to their understanding and enjoyment of their music.

Malmsteen forum board member thewizard argued that “Yngwies [sic] persona doesn’t change how I feel about his music”, but he did acknowledge that someone could think that Malmsteen’s “cocky attitude” could be “why he plays the same thing over and over again”. Users Deuterium and shredofobia respectively, expressed similar ideas, arguing that even though Malmsteen might not be “a model of virtue and charity”, this should take “nothing away from his incredible talent, artistic and compositional skills, and the revolutionary impact he has had on the landscape of modern electric rock guitar”, so that even though “Yngwie’s got a God complex”, “his music speaks for itself”. Member yngvai expressed related thoughts, arguing that “Yngwie’s persona has never directly factored into whether or not I enjoy his music”. However, he explored deeper understandings of the persona and how Malmsteen’s attitude can inform someone’s perception of his music or even of how Malmsteen creates his music. He argued: “Yngwie’s persona indirectly factors into my enjoyment of his music. His persona does not allow for the input of others into the music. It’s ‘the Yng-way or the highway’. His music has been suffering for a long time because of this stance, and it’s reached a point where, over his last couple of albums, he hasn’t even brought in a legitimate singer. It’s reasonable to say that Yngwie’s persona has affected the quality of his music. Lesser quality music is less enjoyable”. While not exhaustive in any way, this brief survey seems to suggest that at least some listeners tend to not interact with the music through any notion of a persona. It could be argued, nonetheless, that what these listeners mean by ‘person’ is what I mean by ‘persona’, in the sense that for them persona means the real guitarist. As it stands, this seems to suggest that persona is neither the construction of playing/composing nor of listening. Could it be relevant only to close inspection and analysis? This highlights how different analyst, artist, and audience interpretation can differ, and could be a research topic in itself. Of course, listeners need not be aware of the technicalities of the music or of the various analytical tools musicologists use to make sense of what they hear, but the fact that some general listeners do not interact with this music through the prism of the
persona makes my endeavour even more worthwhile, as it hints at an entirely unexplored field of interpretation for instrumental rock music, and to a new way of listening to it.

Regarding general notions of personae, none of the four guitarists mention any of the various related features and layers of the persona (although this is to be expected due to their unfamiliarity with the topic). This, again, does not render the model inappropriate. Firstly, I still take the intentional fallacy as normative here. Whether the artists say that the music is the result of their most cherished memories, of reading a book, of wanting to express a certain abstract (or trivial) notion does not necessarily mean that it is so. Even if in the moment of inspiration those were the actual sources, it does not follow that the meaning of a musical track and its realisation with or without the persona depend on that primary moment. Secondly, the fact that a certain composer was unaware of the specific theoretical models he/she was using – in the sense that the model explaining what he/she was doing intuitively was created after the moment of composition – does not invalidate the theory. For instance, contrapuntal writing existed prior to Johann Joseph Fux writing his famous *Gradus ad Parnassum* (where he laid out the various rules one must follow to write a ‘proper’ polyphonic work). Again, all of this just goes to show how far apart analyst and artist can be and how diverse the field of interpretation is, particularly in terms of instrumental music.

**Limitations**

I address a few of the limitations of my research here, but in doing so I must state that these do not impede on my general approach, nor do they invalidate my overall conclusions. As a first drawback, breaking down each individual instrument into its separate persona can pose a problem. While the focus of this research has been on the guitar and, by extension, other similar (mainly) monodic instruments, as I briefly mentioned in the theoretical chapter, massed strings or more complex orchestral textures are harder to make sense of using this model. Similar difficulties can appear in instrumental rock as well, as a track that features multiple independent guitar lines might be more problematic to analyse. While harmonisations are easy to fit into the model because they can be achieved in real-time by playing through a pitch shifting pedal/rack-unit, if the additional overdubs play distinct parts, these cannot be easily attributed to a single persona, even if we know the guitarist overdubbed all of them in the studio.
A solution I offered to this problem was analysing live recordings of the same tracks, as seen mainly in the Joe Satriani analyses, as most of the time the additional guitar lines are either removed or taken up by other instruments. However, in both instances the overall effect is diminished or at least different; it somehow does not represent the same persona. When a guitar line is missing in the live version, does it mean that it was irrelevant in the studio recording to begin with? How does a guitar line changing into a synth line during a live performance affect the persona? Even if there are multiple live performances of the same track (and if the live version tries to reproduce the studio version), we still perceive the change. Granted, this is mostly because often we become so accustomed to the studio recording that we tend to compare every other version to it.

Casual fans of an artist, however, might not even be aware that a live version of a track even exists. Where does this leave the persona? In a state of limbo, it seems. While my intuition points towards the same persona producing both live and studio recordings, there seems to be a gulf between the two mediums of expression. The machine-like accuracy of execution and the pristine quality of the sound itself are impossible to reproduce in a live setting. Is there a difference in tone between the live and studio recordings? How can this difference be interpreted? Are we interacting with the same persona? How does the live version of the track differ from the studio version? Are these changes relevant? Both on stage and in the studio, these musicians make choices about the sounds they make. It is such choices that both reveal – and can be analysed in terms of – their personae. The rock persona is a combination of live and studio expression; one reinforces and clarifies the other. The significance of the live performance is the physical presence of the performer, offering an observable causal relationship between the player’s physical movements (of all sorts) and the sounds they make. The persona here is not just imagined but also, apparently, observed.

While the live environment brings with it a series of problems, it also helps simplify others. In my discussion on the third layer of the persona – the protagonist – I broke down the various guitar tones into three groups: main, secondary, and episodic. While it is rather simple to distinguish between the diverse types of protagonists, it is arguably easier to do so in a live recording, as the sonic possibilities are restricted. The almost limitless amount of manipulation that can occur in the studio dwarfs the limited number of sound-altering devices that can be accommodated by the pedalboard real-estate. Consequently, the possible sounds are fewer. The
question is, then, how does one decide when to stop counting protagonists in a studio recording? If section A is played with settings X and section B is played with settings X + a (noticeable) boost in midrange, should the section B sound be interpreted as a new protagonist? Deciding when to stop seems to depend on who is doing the analysis rather than on some sort of rational method. While this is understandable in the arts, I can conceive a scenario where two different analysts uncover vastly different numbers of protagonists in any given recording. A live performance, on the other hand, particularly if it is experienced in person (to exclude the potential for redoing certain parts or any additional mixing and sound manipulation in post-production), offers only a limited number of effect permutations, mainly do to the fact that certain effects are linked in series and a human foot can only do so many movements at any given time. Again, the live-studio dichotomy seems to be both the source of diverging ideas and the source of converging solutions (some of which pointed out throughout this thesis) to certain problems with the studio recordings.

Of course, my intention was not to fetishize the notion of the persona as a thing rather than an analytic device. The complex layers and the various protagonists do not represent the endgame, but are merely tools used to make sense of the expressivity of music, with persona being a very fruitful way of approaching these issues. Some tracks might not benefit at all from such a thorough breakdown, while others might be in desperate need for it. Regardless, the main concern remains the unique expressivity of each of these guitarists’ music and how the notion of the persona, through the model and various breakdowns I proposed throughout this dissertation, can help uncover what makes a guitarist’s tracks and sound distinctive.

**Future work and applications**

Further work could explore transformations in each guitarist’s persona, such as differences between their very first recordings and their present-day output. Is there a clear change in the way the persona was constructed on their very first tracks compared to their latest tracks? Does this alteration lay in tone? In technique? In composition? Has their discourse on notions of persona, vocality, or phrasing changed as well? These are important questions for the study of instrumental personae. As Moore (2012) points out, following an artist throughout their entire career provides a historical dimension to the persona. People change, and so do the personae that they project. Comparing recordings and performances twenty years apart could provide
invaluable insights. Presumably these decisions are coherent across different musicmaking situations. Growing older is an interesting issue here, as most of these guitarists tend to sound very much the same even though their appearance changes due to age. A 2016 performance of Steve Vai’s ‘For the Love of God’ (Vai 2016a) does not sound that much different to a 1996 performance of the same track (Vai 2008b). Differences exist, of course, but it is clearly the same persona at the control panel. Similarly, Vai’s studio releases employ similar compositional practices as well as similar recording techniques and mixing gestures. However, exploring these issues along with a historical dimension would lead to a more holistic overview of the persona in instrumental rock. It is here where Samples’ (2018, 125) notion of “coherent variability” comes into play, one which “allows a sound to be instantly recognized as one’s own, but also variable enough to fit the expressive needs of a musical situation”. He compares it to a face that can grow a beard, be covered in dirt, or exhibit many expressions and even signs of aging, but still be identified as belonging to the same individual. This “varied vocal profile” is linked to his previous discussion on the “brand persona”, which I touched upon throughout the dissertation (Samples 2018, 120).

While the model offered in this research project is almost exclusively focused on the guitar, it can be applied to other instruments as well. Even though some characteristics that help the guitar take the place of the vocalist would be missing in other instruments’ personae (mainly due to the construction of these instruments), synthesizers, for instance, can easily mimic every possible guitar technique. Particularly modern synthesizers and samplers, with their XY pad and modulation keys can achieve the inflections (bends, slides, dips etc.) possible on the guitar, and the sonic possibilities are endless due to digital synthesizer patches and VSTs. Acoustic pianos might not have the same degree of flexibility, but by manipulating the inner workings of the piano itself, (i.e. the ‘prepared piano’ made famous by John Cage), various timbral qualities can be achieved. The resulting persona is thus more complex and lends itself well to being analysed through the model I presented throughout this thesis. Drums also acquire a more intricate persona due to technology. Even though acoustic drums in themselves can produce a plethora of different effects, the advent of electronic drum kits or hybrid setups brings the persona to an even higher level. By playing on an electronic drum kit or by placing midi triggers on acoustic drums, players can play any conceivable sound loaded into the kit. Now drummers can not only play various instruments within the same track, switching from, say, acoustic drums to classic Roland
808 sounds, but they can also play specific pitches and melodies, or pre-recorded samples. Of course, these instruments should be viewed on a continuum of expression, and not in an expressive and non-expressive binary. Further research might involve expanding the model to work on more than just melodies, and on many other instruments, considering the various technological enhancements each instrument has nowadays.

One of the key aspects for further research is analysing genres outside of rock. Some will be easier to tackle than others, either because the focus of the music is not on the melody or because the music is so complex that a figure-foreground distinction is not enough to properly describe the musical events. Arguably, jazz and other solo-led music can easily be analysed using the model and related issues I have addressed in previous chapters. Some types of electronic music and classical music might be more difficult to address, though. Classical music, as I previously mentioned, poses multiple problems. Cone’s (1974) model, although slightly unwieldly, could be further developed to explain the various happenings of classical music. However, if the notion of the fractured persona is considered, even complex orchestral textures can be framed within the confines of my model. In the case of the brass section, for instance, each individual trombone could be generating its own unique persona. Expanding upon this, there seems to be no reason why, technically, we could do the same with the entire brass section, as the family of instruments share many characteristics. In the same way as a guitar persona might be found at the intersection of multiple main, secondary, and episodic protagonists, a brass section could also be envisioned as being fractured, as being made up main, secondary, and episodic moments from the constituent instruments. Thus, instead of a list of twenty-odd personae, a modern orchestra can be comprised of string, woodwind, brass, and percussion personae, for instance. Of course, the model might not be ideal for more complex pieces. While this falls beyond the scope of this research, a future one might consider not only popular music but also the classical music of different time periods.

Additional research on personae in classical music could explore the complex relationship between composer, performer, and conductor. There seem to be differences between the persona of popular/improvised musics (in which the composer and the performer tend to be the same person) and the persona of a composer who often is not actively involved in generating the music per se. As Schmidt (2012, 654) argues in the case of jazz, given the importance listeners and artists place on recordings, “any performance by any jazz musician—is a work” (even though the
notion is problematic, as Goehr 1992 points out). Particularly with the advent of affordable high definition recording devices and of platforms such as YouTube, any live recording has the potential of becoming the standard to which all other subsequent versions are set. In such cases, the persona of the performer might become so important to the perceived work that it would be impossible to separate their input from the piece. This happens even in classical music, where the personae of performers such as Glenn Gould become at least as important as Bach’s in an audience ‘deciphering’ the music that they are listening to.

Finally, the research did not touch upon, but hinted at, the possibility of a band or collective persona, rather than one revolving around a single individual. Even with a group like Queen, with a frontman as flamboyant and individual as Freddie Mercury, it is highly unlikely that audiences will think about the group as Mercury accompanied by three other people. Recent tours with Paul Rogers and Adam Lambert have been marketed as ‘Queen +’ events, even though Brian May and Roger Taylor are the only original band members left after Mercury’s death in 1991 and Deacon’s departure in 1997. Samples’ (2018) brand persona is again useful here. The various changes in both music and appearance in Queen’s history coalesce to form a brand persona to which the recent tours and singers were just an addition.

We tend to think that compositional and sonic idiosyncrasies make up most of the persona of a specific artist, but the situation is far from being straight-forward, particularly in pop music. A look at Maroon 5’s album credits throughout the years, for instance, reveals an interesting change. Whereas their first album featured singer Adam Lavine and keyboardist Jesse Carmichaelas as songwriters for most songs, with production being done exclusively by engineer Matt Wallace, their recent releases feature three or four different composers and producers on each track. This can be easily heard in the band’s sound, with tracks such as ‘Harder to Breathe’ (2002) or ‘This Love’ (2002) having very little in common with songs such as ‘Animals’ (2014) or ‘Moves Like Jagger’ (2010), save for Lavine’s voice. It is true that the persona seems to revolve around Lavine, given that he is the singer on all releases and he has songwriting credits on most tracks, but even here the band persona - the brand persona - is more potent than a single member’s persona. Future work on the persona can expand the models and issues I described to provide insights on how band/brand personae are constructed and how listeners interact with them. Ultimately, as Agawu (2004, 270-271) points out, “analysis is ideally permanently open, (...) dynamic and on-going, and (...) is subject only to provisional closure”. Expression is a key
element of music, and I hope that this thesis is only the beginning, for myself and future scholars, of a prolific exploration of instrumental music expression through the notion of persona.
Glossary

Active environment = An environment that presents no stylistic or timbral dissonances. Nothing stands out in terms of timbres or styles, with all the parts seemingly supporting the same idea, leaving the protagonist in the limelight.

Blurred environment = An environment that neither sets the harmonic and rhythmic support nor does it set the stylistic and genre boundaries. It might exhibit some elements of a standard environment, but the details are not sufficient to make out what it represents. We are aware that there is an environment, but we cannot make out what it is.

Brand persona = A layer of the star persona which is defined by a set of variables in sound that are attributed to the artist who is “largely responsible for creating the conditions under which [his/her music] could be created” (Heile 2015, 25). It can also represents a guitar (vocal, other instrument) sound that retains recognizability across time and platforms and becomes “an essential sonic marker” for an artist’s persona (Samples 2018, 120).

Dialogue guitar = One of the three approaches to imparting vocality to a guitar (along with the unison/mimicking guitar, and the singer guitar). It involves a guitar acting as either the subject or the response in a call-and-response texture in a track. The guitar can either provide the melodic material that the voice respond to or vice versa. An example would be Joe Satriani’s Crowd Chant (2006).

Episodic protagonist = A guitar sound used sporadically in the ‘cast of protagonist’ of any guitar player, either on a single track or even on sections of a track. An example would be the phaser guitar sound in the tapping section of Joe Satriani’s ‘Satch Boogie’ (1987).

Fictional (instrumental) protagonist = A guitar sound that contrasts the standard tone of a particular guitar player. If a guitarist’s tone is usually the result of guitar and amp alone, then a fictional protagonist would be an extremely processed variation of this. For instance, a fictional protagonist in the music of Guthrie Govan is found in the robot solo section (1:40) of ‘Erotic Cakes’ (2006), given that the tone is considerably different to his customary main protagonist, found on tracks such as ‘Waves’ (2006).

Fictional (instrumental) situation = An instrumental environment that is in contrast with the guitar sound of a particular guitar player. If a guitar player’s tone is usually the result of
guitar and amp alone, then an overproduced environment will represent a fictional situation that the protagonist finds itself in. (The same can be said for an overproduced tone vs. a sparse environment.)

Fractured persona = A term used to argue against the notion of a unified persona, based on the observation that, from a sonic point of view, instrumental music can feature multiple protagonists of the same instrument persona, depending on effects and other processing used. The different guitar sounds might be the result of a single performer, but the sound itself is different from record to record and even from track to track, due to the way the guitar signal is processed and recorded.

Interventionist environment = An environment where an instrumental line that breaks out of the background and is brought to the fore. This can either mean that a certain part switches from chords to distinct melodies, thus creating a polyphonic texture (in conjunction with the main melody), or it can be brought higher in the mix or even have its position within the sound-box modified (say, switching from left to centre). These lines become more and more independent and the distinction between protagonist and environment starts to blur.

Intimate (proxemic) zone = Taken from Moore (2012, 187), it represents a proxemic zone where the protagonist is in very close proximity to the listener, in front of the environment (if an environment exists), with a high degree of separation between them, and featuring soft and clean guitar sounds.

Invidvidual-environment/persona-personic environment = The relationship between the guitar protagonist and the rest of the instrumentation. The environment can occupy one of five positions in relation to the protagonist: blurred, static, active, interventionist, and oppositional. Derived from Moore (2012).

Main protagonist = A guitar sound that is featured on most (if not all) tracks from a guitarist’s catalogue. Main protagonists are usually found under two guises - clean and distorted - depending on the amplifier setting used. Guthrie Govan’s ‘Wonderful Slippery Thing’ (2006), for instance, features both his standard distorted (most of the track) and clean main protagonists (the intro).
Melharmonic = An approach to analysis and composition that “guide[s] the use of harmony in modal musics” (Morris and Ravikiran 2006, 255). It can be “broadly understood as melody with harmony and chords that conform to the modal/scalar, sequential and ornamental principles of highly evolved melodic systems” (Morris and Ravikiran 2006, 255). Its initial use was in traditional Indian music.

Native gear = Devices that most stock electric guitars come equipped with or are attached to the guitar itself. The ones relevant for the thesis are those that help create vocality: the whammy bar, the pickup selector, the volume knob, and the sustainer.

Oppositional environment = An environment where stylistic or timbral dissonances are the norm, and the differences between the protagonist and the environment are so great that they seem to have their origin in completely different pieces of music.

Outboard gear = Devices that are external to the guitar itself and processes the sound coming out of a guitar. The ones relevant for the thesis are those that help create vocality: wah, phaser, flanger, pitch shifter, and volume pedal.

Performer/performer persona = The first layer in Moore’s (2012) model of the persona and the second in Frith’s (1996) and Auslander’s (2009). I conflate it with the real person and exclude it from my model. Intentional fallacy aside, the focus of the thesis was exclusively the sonic aspect of the persona.

Persona-proper = The second layer in my model of instrumental personae. The illusion of “musical ‘body’ and identity” which is created in the studio by altering the parameters of the voice (dynamics, EQ, reverberation and so on), as opposed to the historical human being or the star persona of Frith (1996) and Auslander (2009). Since the “characteristics of sounds are the aural ‘marks’ of bodily actions”, it is this persona listeners interact most with (Cumming 2000, 21f.).

Pitch axis theory = A compositional technique developed by Joe Satriani which involves choosing a tonal centre and then picking out chords from the different modal areas, threading them together in a unified sounding progression (Fisher 1995, 68). Similar to Bartok’s modal melodic interchange, which involves changing modes while maintaining the same modal center.
Private (proxemic) zone = Taken from Moore (2012, 187), it represents a proxemic zone where the protagonist is close to the listener, in front of the environment, with a certain degree of separation between them, and featuring clean to overdriven guitar sounds.

Prosody/musical prosody = The way each guitarist approaches the attack, dynamic, duration etc. of each individual pitch. Prosody is the branch of linguistics that deals with features of speech that fall outside the scope of grammar. In music, these are intonation, stress, hesitation, and rhythm.

Protagonist = The third layer of my model for instrumental personae. It is a guitar sound that has no identity outside of any specific song (i.e. while the persona is the same on any of Guthrie Govan’s tracks, the protagonist of ‘Eric’ (2006) is not the same as the one on ‘Smuggler’s Corridor’ (2015). Each guitar sound features unique effects and studio processing that create unique protagonists.

Protagonist involvement = A continuum that the protagonist finds itself on, from involved to distant, depending on whether there is only a monody (or no lead guitar per se), or whether there are multiple equally important guitar lines that create a polyphonic texture where no single protagonist is central.

Proxemics/proxemic zone = Distances between the various “recorded presences” (i.e. instruments) found on a track (Moore 2012, p. 186), made apparent by mixing techniques. These distances create four proxemic zones: intimate, private, public, or social. These generally refer to the distance between the listener and the lead instrument as perceived according to relative loudness and degree of reverberation.

Public (proxemic) zone = Taken from Moore (2012, 187), it represents a proxemic zone where the protagonist is at a medium distance from the listener, within the environment, with very little separation between them, and featuring overdriven guitar sounds.

Real person = The individual human being that is behind any performer persona. This layer of the persona is the first in most models on personae (Frith 1996 and Auslander 2009, for instance). I conflate it with the performer/performer persona and exclude it from my model. Intentional fallacy aside, the focus of the thesis was exclusively the sonic aspect of the persona.
Realist (instrumental) protagonist = A guitar sound that mirrors the standard tone of a particular guitar player (or is the standard tone). If a guitarist’s tone is usually the result of guitar and amp alone, a realist protagonist would be any track or section of a track that features it. For instance, a realist protagonist in the music of Guthrie Govan is found on any of his recordings, to be contrasted with the fictional protagonist found in the robot solo section (1:40) of ‘Erotic Cakes’ (2006).

Realist (instrumental) situation = An instrumental environment that is in line with guitar sound of a particular guitar player. If a guitar player’s tone is usually heavily processed, then a similar arrangement will represent a realist situation that the protagonist finds itself in. (The same can be said for an unprocessed tone vs. a sparse environment.)

Score persona = One of the two approaches to the study of persona found in the academic literature. It deconstructs features of the music and was pioneered by Cone (1974), who creates an analytical model which consists of vocal persona, instrumental persona, and complete musical persona, all based solely on information found in a score.

Secondary protagonist = A guitar sound that is featured heavily throughout a guitar player’s repertoire, but not as prominent as the main protagonist(s). An example would be the sitar sound in Steve Vai’s music, as heard on tracks such as ‘Freak Show Excess’ (2005).

Singer guitar = One of the three approaches to imparting vocality to a guitar. It involves a guitar standing in for the vocal and becoming the singer-proper of a track. This is the main approach to vocality explored throughout the thesis.

social (proxemic) zone = Taken from Moore (2012, 187), it represents a proxemic zone where the protagonist is at a large distance from the listener, engulfed by the environment, with a high degree of integration between them, and featuring loud and distorted guitar sounds.

Sound-box = A term devised by Moore (2001) and developed by Moore and Dockwray (2010, 181) to describe the “virtual space within which sounds can be located through”. Within this imaginary box of a recording, the virtual Cartesian x, y, and z axes represent the stereo field, frequency spectrum, and degree of reverberation/volume, respectively.
Spectral glide/sweep = A modification of the frequency spectrum by filtering out frequencies outside of a specific range. The resulting resonance can be swept/glided by changing the position of the pedal on an effects unit (usually a wah).

Standard tone = The guitar sound that each guitar player uses preponderantly. For instance, Steve Vai’s current standard tone is created by a combination of his custom Ibanez Evo JEM going through a custom Carvin Legacy III amplifier. Based on this setup (particularly the amp channel), it can be either distorted or clean.

Star persona = One of the two approaches to the study of persona found in the academic literature. It deconstructs features of the star-personality and was explored by scholars such as Frith (1996), Auslander (2009), and Moore (2012). Here, the music assumes secondary position, with the actual performer, or star, being in the limelight.

Static environment = An environment that contains metrical and harmonic backdrop as well as certain genre and style conventions. It does not provides actual meaning to the track and can arguably be attributed to any music.

Subject-position = A term borrowed from film studies to describe “the way in which the construction of a [track] causes a viewer/listener to adopt a particular attitude to what she or he is [hearing]” (Clarke 2005, 92-93). This attitude “can be attributed to properties of the [track] itself” and is different to a subjective response (Clarke 2005, 92-93).

Tone = The recorded sound of a guitar player. Its construction is complex, involving both timbre (resulting from equipment such as guitar and amplifier) and phrasing (resulting from each player’s approach to techniques such as legato, tapping, sweep picking and so on).

Unison guitar/mimicking guitar = One of the three approaches to imparting vocality to a guitar. It involves a guitar imitating a vocal line in unison (or in octaves). An example would be Steve Vai’s ‘So Happy’ (1984).

Unity = Persona studies have tended to see the persona as unitary, as being the result of a single perspective. However, under postmodern thought and due to the songwriting process and how recordings are made, unity cannot be maintained in instrumental rock. On the contrary, I have argued that a fractured perspective is a much more lucrative way to approach this music.
Vocality = The ability of the guitar to produce voice-like sounds. This can extend not only to onomatopoeic sounds but also to particular techniques (sliding, bending etc.) and equipment (wah, phaser etc.) that change the frequency spectrum in such a way as to resemble the opening and closing of the mouth during musical sound production.
Academic references


Interviews

Guthrie Govan


**Yngwie Malmsteen**


**Joe Satriani**


**Steve Vai**


**Webography**


Discography


¹⁰⁹ CD release, not original format (if not CD). Idem for every entry.
Pink Floyd. (1979). ‘Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)’. The Wall. CD. Harvest/EMI.

**Guthrie Govan**

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Joe Satriani

Joe Satriani. (1986). ‘Not of This Earth’. *Not of This Earth*. CD. Sony Music.


Steve Vai


**Yngwie Malmsteen**

Filmography


