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Shocking Intimacy: Techniques, Technologies, and Aesthetics of Amplification in Clara Iannotta's *Intent on Resurrection**

Giulia Accornero

The bones I feel inside my skin
are scaffolding that holds me in.
Earth will glean them when I'm chaff,
and wafted off.
Those bones will be an implement,
an ornament or instrument.
Fingers will wrap themselves around
the hollow sound.
They'll play the bones fortissimo,
disturb me when I'm lying low.
Intent on resurrection—spring,
or some such thing.
(Dorothy Molloy, "Playing the Bones," *Hare Soup*)

Bring your hand to your ear and gently brush a finger from the earlobe up to the cartilage, before spiraling down towards the canal. What do you hear?

Michel Chion would call these "small sounds."[1] Small sounds can reveal themselves in a broad palette of textures: rub a fingernail on the pad of your thumb, close to the ear, and the sound will transform into something

* I started thinking about this topic back in the Fall 2017 when I had the fortune to take Carolyn Abbate's class *Aurality, Listening, Hearing* at Harvard. I am grateful for her encouragement and her revisions on an earlier version of this article. I also want to thank James Bean and Julio Zuñiga for our stimulating conversations about amplification technologies, Christopher Danforth (Harvard Sound Lab) for indulging my request to purchase a megaphone I could experiment with, the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their generous and constructive comments, and Daniel Walden and Megan Steigerwald Ille for their precious suggestions on the final draft.

1 "Certain sounds, even when they are loud or heard from close by, conjure small sources." Michel Chion, *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*, trans. James A. Steintrager (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

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"crisper." Their "small" quality however endures in their "weight-image"—that is, the perceived "strength of the cause in relation to our own scale," regardless of what that cause is and whether or not we identify it.[2]

While Chion's definition focuses on the small scale of their source of emission, I want to draw attention to the feeling of intimacy these sounds generally convey. They may bring to mind the image of a child's room resounding with the whispered words of a bedtime story. Or we might imagine the soothing sounds of a hairbrush running through our hair; or even the smack of a kiss that reddens our skin, embracing for an instant the whole of our face. In the epigraph above, the Irish poet Dorothy Molloy envisions yet another world of small sounds deep underground. She can hear the "hollow sound" of her bones pounding "*fortissimo*," damped by the deafening silence of the earth.[3]

Molloy's poem also serves as the epigraph to Clara Iannotta's *Intent on Resurrection – Spring or Some Such Thing* (2014), a work which invites us to question: what would happen if one attempted to listen to small sounds outside of these intimate, contained spheres? In a concert hall, for example? What happens to small sounds when they are transplanted in a public, larger space of interaction, possibly crowded with people, breathing, yawning, whispering, and brushing their arms against the velvet of their armchairs?

In this article I explore how Italian composer Clara Iannotta (b. 1983) brings small sounds to the public in the first minute of *Intent on Resurrection* (measures 1-13).[4] What are the instruments, techniques, and processes

2 Chion, *Sound*, 7–8.

3 Dorothy Molloy, *Hare Soup* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), 50. See the epigraph at the beginning of this article.

4 The premiere of *Intent on Resurrection* took place on October 17, 2014, at the Concert Hall of the Cité de la Musique, Paris. It was given by Ensemble intercontemporain as part of the Festival d'Automne. The attached recording of the first minute of Iannotta's *Intent on Resurrection* is from track no. 1 of Clara Iannotta, *A Failed Entertainment: Werke 2009–2014*, performed by Ensemble intercontemporain, conducted by Matthias Pintscher, Edition RZ 10023, 2015. The score will be published soon by Edition Peters in a revised version (2021). Clara Iannotta's entire oeuvre, however, is riddled with small sounds. Iannotta was asked to comment on this fact in a 2016 interview for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra blog: "[Sam Adams]: There's an incredible intimacy in your music, particularly in this piece. Not just a metaphorical intimacy, but we are quite literally hearing the most intimate sounds that you can make. It's like you're sucking on a Popsicle, these types of sounds. Is that something that you're really interested in and amplifying in your music, those small gestures? [Clara Iannotta]: Yes. It's been a few years, like four years, that [I've noticed] my sounds have become weaker and weaker—really, really small." Sam Adams, "*Intent on Resurrection* Composer Believes 'Music Should Be Seen as Well as Heard,'" *CSO Sounds & Stories* (blog), May 3, 2016, https://csosoundsandstories.org/intent-on-resurrection-composer-believes-music-should-be-seen-as-well-as-heard/.

that occasion or allow for small sounds? How does our listening craft small sounds, and vice versa? In answering these questions, I will look closely at the relationships between their modes of production, materialities, and aesthetics, paying particular attention to how the affordances of the actors involved exercise technological agency.[5] The more closely we examine small sounds, try to define them, or pin down their acoustic or perceived origin, the more they resemble a moving target, revealing the limits of Chion's static definition. Reconsidering small sounds also leads me to shed new light on music-theoretical elements, such as dynamic signs, and the role of techniques and technologies in generating a sound quality that exists only at the intersection of the acoustic and the perceived worlds.[6] By articulating the technological means harnessed to allow for such a quality to emerge, we reveal the conditions that are necessary for a sound to be recognized as intimate—even when it is experienced in a large public venue.[7]

First, a few words about my approach. The discursive frameworks commonly associated with the construct of New Music—the field in which Iannotta locates herself—could potentially have provided a predetermined

5 Musicological literature has surveyed many technologies of acoustic and spatial illusions. See, for example: Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman, *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Alastair Williams, "Technology of the Archaic: Wish Images and Phantasmagoria in Wagner," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9, no. 1 (1997): 73–87; Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Emily I. Dolan, "E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Ethereal Technologies of 'Nature Music,'" *Eighteenth-Century Music* 5, no. 1 (2008): 7–26; Francesca Brittan, "On Microscopic Hearing: Fairy Magic, Natural Science, and the Scherzo Fantastique," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 3 (2011): 527–600; Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 69, no. 3 (2016): 793–829; Deirdre Loughridge, *Haydn's Sunrise, Beethoven's Shadow: Audiovisual Culture and the Emergence of Musical Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

6 I am using "acoustic" *versus* "perceived" sound in reference to Cornelia Fales's distinction: "the acoustic world is the physical environment where sound as acoustic signal is produced and dispersed; the perceived world is the subjective, sonic world created by listeners as a result of their translation of signals from the acoustic world." Cornelia Fales, "The Paradox of Timbre," *Ethnomusicology* 46, no. 1 (2002): 61.

7 If we are learning through sound what to recognize as intimate, we are engaging in what could be called an "acoustemology of intimacy". Coined by anthropologist Steven Feld in 1992, "acoustemology conjoins 'acoustics' and 'epistemology' to theorize sound as a way of knowing. In doing so it inquires into what is knowable and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening." Steven Feld, "Acoustemology," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 12.

context for my investigations of her work.[8] I will nevertheless keep them at a critical distance. I want to eschew the implicit historiographical discourse of "New Music," which posits a unified trajectory in which individual composers, acting in their capacity as rational minds, mark the progress of Western art music—minds that, as if guided by "immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession,"[9] ensure a unified trajectory in the history of music creation.[10] I also want to avoid the temptation of this discourse to turn materials and mediators into black boxes—opaque devices that unidirectionally transform ideally determined inputs into ideally forecasted outputs.[11]

I am interested instead in what we might gain if we shift our focus from the rational agency of human actors, and towards an alternative perspective that construes the composer as simply one actor in a network among others, thereby privileging an understanding of agency as distributive.[12] This leads me to follow Bruno Latour in decoupling action from consciousness, treating the composer instead as a "node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled."[13]

8 On how Iannotta identifies as a New Music composer, see Giulia Accornero, "Clara Iannotta: Bludenz and the Business of Responsible Curation," *National Sawdust Log*, November 7, 2017, https://nationalsawdust.org/thelog/2017/11/07/clara-iannotta-bludenz-and-the-business-of-responsible-curation/.

9 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 142.

10 Other recurrent tropes of the New Music litany are: the idea of the musical composition as investigation, often in explicit contradistinction to *other* musics created for public entertainment, which justifies commercial failure and the receipt of institutional support; the construal of "Art Music" as a mode of progress and innovation, which generally results in strenuous research for the "new" and the "original," and is coupled by a more or less implicit valorization of New Music above any other music.

11 My effort is inspired by previous works in this direction such as Georgina Born and Andrew Barry, "Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory," *Contemporary Music Review* 37, no. 5–6 (2018): 443–87.

12 Authors like Tim Rutherford-Johnson and Seth Brodsky have recently attempted to renovate our understanding of the "histories of contemporary Western art music" by moving away from the "precepts on which the post-1945 narrative is based" and giving them a new beginning: 1989, the date of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the triumph of a "neoliberal political and economic orthodoxy" and the design of the World Wide Web (launched shortly after in 1991). See Tim Rutherford-Johnson, *Music After the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture Since 1989* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 5–7; Seth Brodsky, *From 1989, or European Music and the Modernist Unconscious* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

13 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New

It also allows me to draw attention to how mediators "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry,"[14] and can thus be understood as part of an actor-network. And finally it compels me to jettison normative *a priori* understandings of this or that entity and their causal relations—be it an instrument and a performer, a composer and an architecture, or an affect and a new technology—in favor of a close observation of how action is distributed and translated between them.[15] Thus, in this article, I explain *Intent on Resurrection*'s small sounds not in conjunction with the course of New Music, but rather in relation to the emergence and withdrawal of the affordances of the sonic techniques and technologies of the past century.

The focus on mediators also leads me to lend the concept of affordance significant weight. In *Music at Hand: Instruments, Bodies, and Cognition*, Jonathan De Souza provides a useful point of reference for how the notion of affordance could be productive for the field of music studies, in particular when it comes to the interactions between humans and objects. Relying on psychologist James J. Gibson's definition of affordances as "possibilities for action by a particular agent," De Souza reminds us that Gibson thought of them "independently of an agent's need or skills," and thus independently of human intentionality.[16] In the next sections, therefore, I will guide you through an exploration of the affordances of megaphonic and microphonic amplification as they emerge from the first measures of *Intent on Resurrection*. These affordances, I will show, are part of scientific and artistic discourses that have been around since the invention of megaphones and microphones—and even

York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 44.

14 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 39.

15 I follow Benjamin Piekut's understanding of Latour's "Actor-Network Theory" as a heuristic methodological tool, rather than a theoretical statement in support of technological determinism. For bibliographical reference of ANT theory in music history and sociology see Benjamin Piekut, "Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and Critiques," *Twentieth-Century Music* 11, no. 2 (2014): 191–215; Born and Barry, "Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory." The New Organology approach proposed by John Tresch and Emily Dolan, which treats musical instruments as "actors or tools with variable ranges of activity" is another important background reference to the present work. See John Tresch and Emily I. Dolan, "Toward a New Organology: Instruments of Music and Science," *Osiris* 28, no. 1 (2013): 281.

16 Jonathan De Souza, *Music at Hand: Instruments, Bodies, and Cognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 12, 52. James Gibson coined the term, which was made famous through his work *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

earlier, when the microphone was just an imagined device—showing how the distribution of compositional agency is not just a synchronic phenomenon but also a diachronic one: it cuts through history.

This exploration will also lead me to the discovery of unexpected forms of interplay between affordances and abilities. On the one hand, I will reveal how the affordances of small sounds as acoustical objects shock the listener, setting out parameters for action. Small sounds invite us to focus our attention into their qualities, amplify them in our awareness, and perceive the sensation that is coupled with such a change in focus—the sensation of entering a zone of intimacy. On the other hand, we, as listeners, also bring into the network bodily and cognitive affordances that shape how we might perceive and identify small sounds.[17]

While following *Intent on Resurrection*'s small sounds at the intersection of the acoustic and the perceived worlds, between human and instrumental technologies, we will necessarily follow the linear trajectory imposed by the means of writing. I hope, however, to disrupt the idea that such a trajectory reflects a specific line of causation. As listening is always at the boundary between nature and culture, we should expect that our affordances craft small sounds just as much as small sounds (and the network of techniques and technologies involved in their production) craft our abilities.

The Enormous Voice of a Pianississimo

Now imagine that you are holding an electric megaphone. Bring your mouth as close as possible to its mouthpiece, turn it on, and move your lips and tongue "slowly and irregularly," as if you were sucking a piece of candy.[18] Actually, you already have part of this technology at hand—or better, at face—as the sound of your mouth can provide you with an approximation if you are in a silent enough room. *Intent on Resurrection* begins with the notation of these actions, entrusted to the flutist, the clarinetist, and bassoonist (see fig. 1). The sounds obtained from these prescribed bodily movements are imme-

17 To say that one's body has affordances means to recognize its "constitutive technicity," as Carolyn Abbate and Michael Gallope (after Vladimir Jankélévitch) have recognized in "The Ineffable (and Beyond)," in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, ed. Tomás McAuley, Nanette Nielsen, and Jerrold Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 748.

18 Clara Iannotta, *Intent on Resurrection – Spring or Some Such Thing*, score (self-pub., 2014), vi.

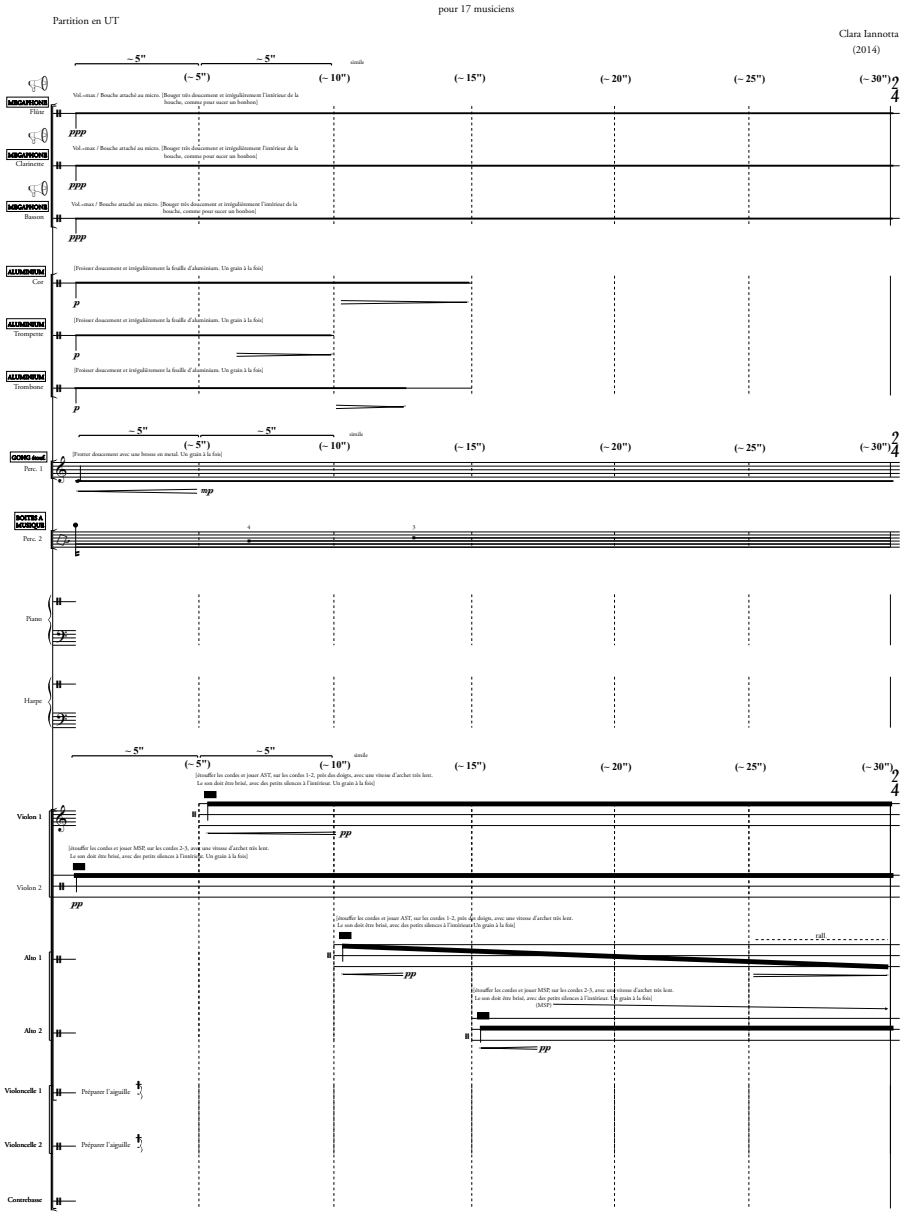

Fig. 1 First page of Clara Iannotta's *Intent on Resurrection – Spring or Some Such Thing*.

diately mediated by electric megaphones placed on stands in front of each performer. The megaphone conceals within it a microphone located at the mouthpiece, which receives the acoustic sound and transforms it into an electric signal; a transistor, which amplifies the input electrical current into a more powerful output; and a loudspeaker, which transduces the electric signal into acoustic waves, amplified further by travel through the exponentially widening concentric ducts of the reentrant horn.

On the score, Iannotta indicates the sound quality these bodily actions should produce: a *pianississimo* (*ppp*). Are these meant to be small sounds? What that *ppp* stands for is unclear, as the megaphone amplifies the mouth sound. If this sign is supposed to apply to the sound of the mouth *before* it is mediated by the megaphone, it would require the performers to focus and nuance their own mouth sounds. This interpretation however proves problematic because the closeness of the megaphone's mouthpiece—"almost touching [it]"—makes it impossible for the performers to listen to their mouth sounds before mediation. They can sense and control their own mouth sounds only through the megaphone's voice.

Perhaps, then, the *pianississimo* applies to an ideal mouth sound that the performers do not actually hear but convert in their imagination from the magnified sound of the horn. The performers then control their mouth sounds based on the feedback they hear from the megaphone. But the megaphone's auditory feedback is complicated further by the presence of "audio feedback"—also known as the Larsen effect—that is created by a positive loop gain between the megaphone and the mouth, which acts as both a sounding board and a *locus* of production. As Iannotta explains in the performance notes:

> NB: opening the mouth slightly, one can cause feedback with a very strong dynamic. The effect itself is very pleasant, and it can be integrated into the texture as long as one moves away from the mouthpiece as soon as one hears the feedback emerging in order to maintain a quiet dynamic.[19]

The performers must therefore also modulate their closeness to the microphone in order to obtain and control the faint growl of the Larsen effect, coupled with the magnified sound of their mouth, while maintaining the "quiet dynamic" Iannotta prescribes. Thus, the mouth sound is from the beginning a megaphonic sound, produced in network with the megaphone.

19 Iannotta, v–vi.

The *pianississimo* the performers must strive for thus quickly loses any quantitative connotation. The level of the constantly changing acoustic mouth sound has an average of 40 decibels (dBA), with peaks of 60 when the tongue strikes the hard palate. However, a 50-Watt megaphone amplifies that sound to 90 dBA near the source—with peaks of 100 when, for example, the tongue is striking the hard palate—and has the potential to cover over 700 meters. (According to the American agency for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a construction site produces circa 100 dBA.)[20] The *pianississimo* must therefore be a qualitative descriptor, rather than a measure of loudness quantifiable in decibels. Preserving a *ppp* despite amplification means preserving the quality of Chion's "small sounds"—ensuring that no matter how loud, the small sound conjures small sources. Dynamic signs thus begin to assume a different depth.

So far, we have observed that small sources are one of the defining features of small sounds, just as Chion suggested. The following exploration of the technologies harnessed in *Intent on Resurrection* will show, however, that focusing on small sources is not enough.

Megaphone: Technologies of Public Intimacy

Having scrutinized how performers, the megaphone, and the notation interact in producing small sounds, I now want to locate the activity of the megaphone within a constellation of historical uses—thereby highlighting what I earlier called the "diachronic" distribution of compositional agency. These uses feed into the affordances of amplification that Iannotta's composition allows to emerge or withdraw to produce an aural-affective experience of intimacy in a large public venue such as a concert hall.

What here is called a megaphone is the combination of a microphone and a horn.[21] The history of sound amplification and its cultural meanings

20 See figure 3 "Typical Sound Levels (dBA)" of the *OSHA Technical Manual (OTM). Section III: Chapter 5*, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, United States Department of Labor, updated August 15, 2013, https://www.osha.gov/otm/section-3-health-hazards/chapter-5. Moreover, it is important to remember that the dBA scale works logarithmically—that is, the level of perceived loudness doubles for every 10 dBA of difference.

21 The horn's reentrant design has the same effect on the sound as a correspondent unfolded version but has the advantage of being more manageable. The amplifying power of the horn, while minimal with respect to that of the transistor, is made possible by increasing acoustic impedance (i.e., the lack of dispersion of soundwaves at both the mouthpiece

have already been thoroughly examined,[22] but I now want to take a closer look at the horn's basic affordance—the power to project sound across space—by considering the ways in which Thomas Edison's *aerophone* (1878) was advertised. The aerophone, which today we might understand as a kind of megaphone, was exalted for its power to *cover* space and reach large gatherings of people, a power enacted in settings "from suffrage protests to the English admiralty."[23] Through it, Edison believed, "the Declaration of Independence may be read so that every citizen in any one of our large cities may hear it." But coverage was only one of the possible social constructions of the aerophone's projective power. Edison also imagined that his invention could be used to reduce distance in communication, so that for instance "steamships [could] converse at sea."[24] In this case, the projective power of the megaphone was directed towards *cutting* through space and generate a sense of proximity, acting as a sort of (unprivate) telephone. Intriguingly, the aerophone was designed to work in tandem with yet another piece of technology called the *megaphone*, as shown in figure 2, which at that time was an ear trumpet shaped to enhance the sound, but only at the receiver's end. In Edison's imagination, not a crowd, but "two persons provided with this instrument, [were] enabled to converse in the ordinary tones of voice some miles apart."[25] In other words, the projection power of the aerophone could afford to spread the loud word of its user to a public (i.e., to cover space), as well as to serve as the bridge for an intimate conversation between two users at a distance (i.e., to cut space).

and the space of the reentrant horn). This allows the sound waves to accumulate resonance before their dispersal into an open space. Moreover, by conveying the sound in a specific direction, the horn makes it louder for those in the line of its projection and softer for those off axis, just as a laser focuses a light beam.

22 For reference, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

23 Gyllian Phillips, "'Vociferating through the Megaphone': Theatre, Consciousness, and the Voice from the Bushes in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 40, no. 3 (2017): 40–41.

24 J. B. McClure, *Edison and His Inventions: Including the Many Incidents, Anecdotes, and Interesting Particulars Connected with the Life of the Great Inventor* (Chicago: Rhodes & McClure, 1879), 141.

25 McClure, 122. The aerophone paired the horn to a source of power (compressed air) that would magnify the sound waves produced by two vibrating diaphragms. This avoided, for example, the need to modify one's dynamic by shouting or vocal projection, involving the mouth, larynx, vocal fold, and trachea—two main shapes known as "megaphone" and "inverted megaphone." See Ingo R. Titze, "The Human Instrument," *Scientific American* 298, no. 1 (2008): 94–101.

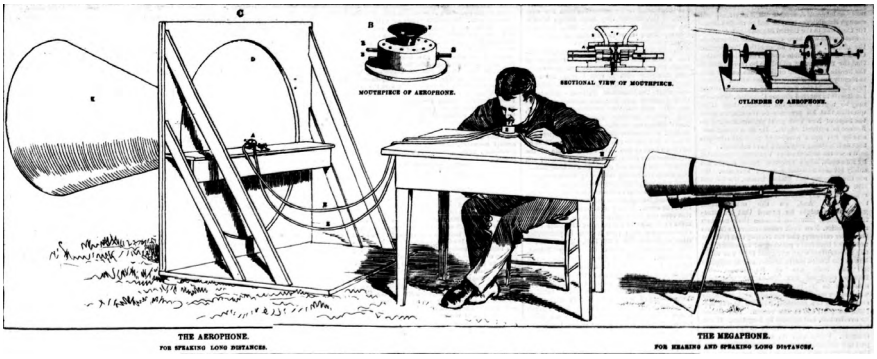

Fig. 2 "The Latest of Mr. Edison's Inventions," *Daily Graphic*, July 19, 1878.

Iannotta's megaphone displays a similar dual functionality. In the first measures of *Intent on Resurrection*, the megaphone participates in an actor-network constituted by sounds that are characterized by low air pressure, and a concert hall, which is generally optimized for orchestral sounds and imposes predetermined distances between performers and public. Thus, in this environment, the megaphone becomes a prosthesis that establishes contact between the small movements of the performer's mouth, and you, sitting multiple rows away in the audience. It thus generates a sense of closeness and intimacy that is customarily associated with the soundscape of the private sphere, *despite* concert-hall distances.[26] What could otherwise be heard only at close proximity now *cuts* through space to touch you.[27] This touch is also enhanced by the fact that the horn seems to be unmediated: unlike a normal microphone, there are no cables or loudspeakers dislocated from the sound source.

At the same time, the megaphone's power to *cover* space serves the public nature of a concert hall. While small sounds are usually heard at close range,

26 As De Souza (following Gibson) acutely reminds us, "the environment is both natural and cultural, so these aspects of affordances should not be opposed. Indeed, they are combined in musical instruments." De Souza, *Music at Hand,* 13. I understand the concept of affordances as merging natural, social, and semiotic agencies. Under what De Souza names the "cultural," I distinguish between "social" and "semiotic," following Latour's insight that these three sources of agencies cannot be clearly differentiated in the definition of an object.

27 It is worth noting that such prosthesis not only allows for small sounds to cut through space, but also preserves their clarity relatively well. In acoustic settings characterized by high reverberation time (e.g., historical cathedrals), small sounds would also be "amplified," but at the expense of clarity.

giving the impression that they are reserved for you alone, the megaphone generates a sense of proximity for an entire concert hall. Thus, an aural and affective oxymoron comes into being: an intimacy meant for public consumption, a proximity within imposed distance. Through its affordances, the megaphone becomes a technology of public intimacy—that is, a technology that can mass-generate a feeling we are meant to experience alone.

There are other ways in which the megaphone reinforces this oxymoron, distorting sound on both a material and a semantic level. As it is designed to magnify mid-high frequencies the most, in order to enhance the clarity of the articulated speech, it inevitably colors the intimacy of mouth sounds with a metallic overtone: "the anonymous bray of the infernal megaphone," in Virginia Woolf's notorious words.[28] Moreover, the megaphone can be detached from the sound source to create an acousmatic setting. This is a feature that has been variously exploited towards artistic effect.[29] The megaphone of *Intent of Resurrection* is clearly visible on stage, but the audience entertains an indirect relation with the actual sound source—i.e., the performer's mouth—because the megaphone also covers it. When we hear someone speaking through a megaphone, we might easily identify the sound source as the whole speaking body. But in the case of Iannotta's small sounds, the source is the mouth alone, and more specifically the inner cavity. Looking at the megaphone "in action," one is confronted with a disturbing ambiguity: does the megaphone simply cut out of our view the sound source it puts us in aural touch with, or does it instead become part of the performer's face, revealing the actual sound source—i.e., the new megaphonic *persona*?[30] In the first case, by covering the sound source, the megaphone might "amplify" for the audience the feeling of an "unnatural" or "artificial" contact.[31] But in the second case, by witnessing the megaphone

28 Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, ed. Mark Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 135.

29 Megaphones have been used to set a "demonic" atmosphere by amplifying off-stage choruses. Think of Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* (1831), or the pre-recorded voices of Luigi Nono's *Intolleranza 1960* (1961), which exploit the horn's ability to dominate spectators through the power of acousmatic voices.

30 *Person* and *persona* are related to the "classical Latin *persōna*," (i.e., the "mask used by a player, character in a play, dramatic role, the part played by a person in life," etc.) Latin writers used the word to indicate the wood mask through which the voice of the Greek theater actor resonated. *Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online*, s.v. "person," last modified September 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/141476.

31 A similar effect was reported by the audiences of some crooners. According to Simon Frith, "'Legitimate' music hall or opera singers reached their concert hall audiences with the

as an integral part of the performer's body, we are reminded that bodies are mediators themselves. From this perspective, the dualism of natural and artificial starts to dissolve, and the various mediators (bodies included) are co-defined by the affordances and abilities revealed in a certain activity—in this case, through the production of small sounds.

A close reading of this actor-network has shown how the megaphone transforms both the acoustic sound it brings forth and its meaning in ways that are ultimately independent from the composer's intention—or, at the very least, that shape the composer's intention. Megaphones never simply serve as prostheses, understood in the narrow sense of "devices that extend the body's 'natural' sound-producing capacities."[32] Rather, this amplification technology, by "*mak*[*ing*] sounds that do not already exist," acquires the poietic function that Johnathan De Souza attributes to musical instruments.[33] According to De Souza, we can salvage the word *prosthesis* (and rehabilitate the prosthetic qualities of instruments) insofar as we understand the term in accordance with philosopher Bernard Stiegler: "a 'prosthesis' does not supplement something, does not replace what would have been there before it and would have been lost: it is added."[34] We can say that the megaphone as *prosthesis* does not represent the boundary between the "natural" human being and an artificial apparatus, but rather rearticulates what we thought of as the performer's body in a new uncanny *persona*.

Microphone: Technologies of Close-Up Intimacy

Let us now shift our focus to the microphonic component of the electric megaphone. Electric megaphones combine the technology of the horn with a microphone, which has the power to gain, magnify, and transmit the faintest sounds through either the horn or loudspeakers. Considering the microphonic component of the megaphone will further enrich our under-

power of their voices alone; the sound of the crooners, by contrast, was artificial. Microphones enabled intimate sounds to take on a pseudo-public presence, and, for the crooner's critics, technical dishonesty meant emotional dishonesty." Frith, "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music," *Media, Culture & Society* 8, no. 3 (1986): 264.

32 De Souza, *Music at Hand*, 25–26.

33 De Souza, 23.

34 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 152. Quoted in De Souza, 26.

standing of how the public/intimate oxymoron plays out through *Intent on Resurrection*'s small sounds.

At first, the integration of a microphone's affordances with those of the megaphone might simply be understood as a *potentiation* of the horn's power to cut distances between the transmitter and the receiver.[35] This is a function exploited in technologies for speech transmission, such as the telephone or hearing aid, which are driven by what Mara Mills calls the concerns of "noise reduction, focused transmission, listener control, selective amplification … This is the history of speech becoming 'signal': a *thing* that could be isolated, amplified and otherwise processed or 'improved.'"[36]

But in addition to the regular "signal" (i.e., the speech), the microphone magnifies another world of acoustic nuance that might go unnoticed by the unassisted ear, *even* at close range. This affordance has been observed many times throughout history—and even was before the technology was invented. In a seventeenth-century treatise, the English clergyman Narcissus Marsh described an imaginary device called the "microphone" that could "render the most minute sound in nature distinctly audible, by magnifying it to unconceivable loudness," as "microscopes or magnifying glasses help the eye to see near objects, that by reason of their smallness were invisible before."[37] In the nineteenth century, D.E. Hughes isolated the ability of Alexander Graham Bell's telephone to "magnify weak sounds" into a prototype of the microphone, an independent tool capable of rendering "the movement of the softest camel hairbrush on any part of the board" as "distinctly audible."[38] And, as Douglas Kahn has observed, the same fascination eventually fed "into the arts, forming the krill in the baleen of musical and artistic experimentalism from John Cage to the sonocytological and nano arts."[39]

35 This is the case of the aerophone, in which an additional source of power in the form of air pressure made it possible "to increase the loudness of spoken words, without impairing the distinctness of articulation." McClure, *Edison and His Inventions,* 140.

36 Mara Mills, "When Mobile Communication Technologies Were New," *Endeavour* 33, no. 4 (2009): 146.

37 Narcissus Marsh, "An Introductory Essay to the Doctrine of Sounds, Containing Some Proposals for the Improvement of Acousticks; As It Was Presented to the Dublin Society Nov. 12. 1683. by the Right Reverend Father in God Narcissus Lord Bishop of Ferns and Leighlin," *Philosophical Transactions* 14, no. 156 (February 20, 1684): 482.

38 D. E. Hughes, "On the Action of Sonorous Vibrations in Varying the Force of an Electric Current," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* 27, no. 185–89 (1878): 365.

39 Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal*, 34. Kahn has written extensively on Cage's aesthetics and techniques for amplifying small sounds. See his *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in*

Iannotta is also fascinated by the microcosmic. In an interview for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, she describes the vision that guided *Intent on Resurrection*:

> I had this image of being in a room completely full of dust in which you do not see anything. … Then, little by little, your eyes get used to this dust, and you can see the little particles of dust, each tiny cell. … The piece, for me, is that image. At the beginning, with all the megaphones, etc., what you hear is basically my dust.[40]

The microphone in Iannotta's megaphone picks up the vibrational components of the mouth sounds that would otherwise be inaudible; in doing so, it turns their spectral micro-properties into an essential textural and timbral component. To return to De Souza's notion of prosthesis, I would argue that the poietic function of the microphone operates on both an acoustical and a semantic level: vibrations that previously fell outside the limits of human hearing are now made perceptible because, first and foremost, they have been gained and pre-amplified *as signal* by the microphone. The amplification system thus functions as a discourse network, defined by Sybille Krämer as "the networks of techniques and institutions that preprocess what will even be considered data in a given epoch."[41] The more sophisticated the amplification system, the more vibrations once considered irrelevant or inaudible will be gained and consequently processed as data, and thus the more richly detailed the perceivable microcosm. By making microscopic sounds audible, when they are usually detectable only at close proximity (if at all), microphones are turned into technologies of close-up intimacy. The sense of intimacy they produce is enacted by the microscopic world of sounds that, without mediation, would unfold as undetected noise.

the Arts (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), especially ch. 6 "John Cage: Silence and Silencing." Nanotechnology allows us to turn the inaudible vibrations of yeasts cells into sound by heightening their amplitude level. See Sophia Roosth, "Screaming Yeast: Sonocytology, Cytoplasmic Milieus, and Cellular Subjectivities," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 332–50. Carolyn Abbate has also shown that the fascination for capturing inaudible sound persisted in the work of film composers and sound engineers who gave sounds to inaudible gestures in what she calls a "microphonic techno-fantasy." See Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," 819.

40 Adams, "*Intent on Resurrection*."

41 Sybille Krämer, "The Cultural Techniques of Time Axis Manipulation: On Friedrich Kittler's Conception of Media," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7–8 (2006): 98.

From this perspective, however, the microphonic affordance of the megaphone seems rather unsophisticated. Indeed, why wouldn't a modern cardioid microphone, to take just one example, render a more detailed acoustical world? I have already partly answered this question by highlighting how the megaphone's horn exercises its agency on an aural as well as on a visual level, in ways that a simple microphone could not substitute. But the issue of genre should also be taken into consideration. Despite the methodological disclaimer I offered earlier, it is undeniable that the field of New Music acts as a genre.[42] And recognizing oneself as a composer within a certain genre imposes the principles, behaviors, and expectations of a specific assemblage of social and institutional settings. In certain European New Music circles, amplification systems that remain visually and sonically transparent—i.e., whose tools are not explicitly raised to the status of musical instruments through the compositional process—are still viewed with suspicion.[43] The instrumental nature and dramaturgic presence of Iannotta's megaphone complies with these expectations.

Nevertheless, during the first rehearsal of *Intent on Resurrection* at the concert hall of the Cité de la Musique in Paris—a space that hosts up to 1600 people—Iannotta discovered that the smallest sounds of her ensemble acoustic instruments were being lost. She thus decided to partially amplify the music box machines, harp, piano, and string instruments with cardioid microphones.[44] Although this is the kind of amplification that could be considered visually and sonically transparent, it acts on small sounds in ways

42 Following Eric Drott's Latourian definition of the concept, I understand genre as a "dynamic ensemble of correlations, linking together a variety of material, institutional, social, and symbolic resources … [that] give rise to an array of assumptions, behaviors, and competences, which taken together orient the (individual) actions and (social) interactions of different 'art world' participants." Drott, "The End(s) of Genre," *Journal of Music Theory* 57, no. 1 (2013): 9.

43 Cathy van Eck has recently dedicated a book to microphones and loudspeakers used in New Music for explicitly artistic purposes, from Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Mikrophonie I* (1964) to her own composition. However, she never mentions the status of microphone and loudspeaker in New Music when they are not manipulated towards unconventional results. See Cathy van Eck, *Between Air and Electricity: Microphones and Loudspeakers as Musical Instruments* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

44 It may also be worth reflecting on the fact that this extremely important part of the sound design is generally handed off entirely to the sound engineer. The score, beyond recommending amplification, does not specify which kind of microphones are required, or where they should be positioned. The discretion is left to the sound engineer who, like actual performers, "can give a stylistically appropriate account of a piece" in accordance with the conventions of New Music. See Drott, "The End(s) of Genre," 10.

that no bare instrumental technique would make up for. For cardioid microphones, placed extremely close to the sound source in the technique known as "close miking," allow for the hyper-amplification of peripheral spectral components and enhance the intimacy of the soundscape in several ways.

First, close miking (especially with cardioids) produces what is known as the "proximity effect," which is characterized by an increase in low frequency response that grants the sound a "warmer" quality. This effect was artistically deployed in crooning—the technical name of a vocal style popular from the 1920s onward, which paired the amplification technology of the microphone with softer voices, delivering (first by radio and then live) a recognizably "intimate singing aesthetic."[45] Second, close miking catches the direct sound and excludes many of the collateral reflections, providing the "subjective impression of listening to music in a large room and its sounding as though the room were small [, which] is one definition of intimacy."[46] Finally, increasingly sophisticated microphones have perfected the gain and fidelity of frequencies in the higher range as well, providing the listener with what is often described as a brighter and richly detailed sound. That sound is also associated with a lack of reflections from the environment, and thus suggests closeness to the sound source.

Since the premiere of *Intent on Resurrection*, amplification has been "highly recommended" on the score. Iannotta's decision to place it there confronts the stigma that associates amplification with poor orchestration, shaped by the humanistic fear of spoiling the ear with the artificiality of live amplification. In her next work, *Troglodyte Angels Clank By* (2016)—which she thinks of as a continued exploration of the same material from *Intent on Resurrection*—the amplification takes on a structural role in the compositional process, and the piece is explicitly written for "amplified ensemble."[47] Iannotta not only fully acknowledges the poietic potential of "amplification" as part of the compositional process—she also introduces contact microphones in line with her interest in "creating and hearing the internal sound of each object."[48]

45 See Allison McCracken, *Real Men Don't Sing: Crooning in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), ch. 2 "Crooning Goes Electric: Microphone Crooning and the Invention of the Intimate Singing Aesthetic, 1921–1928."

46 Leo Beranek, *Concert Halls and Opera Houses: Music, Acoustics, and Architecture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Springer, 2004), 513.

47 Clara Iannotta, *Troglodyte Angels Clank By, for Amplified Ensemble* (Leipzig: Peters, 2018).

48 Adams, "*Intent on Resurrection*."

To allow for small sounds to emerge in the concert room, however, the amplification of megaphones and microphones is still not enough. These affordances act within the "small sounds" network only thanks to the combination of a specific set of compositional and instrumental techniques. If we consider the initial texture of the piece, which lasts around a minute, we observe that Iannotta excludes the production of any louder instrumental sound or the presence of an articulated speech that would lead to an energetical and informational auditory masking effect.[49] Moreover, the specific texture the instruments produce reinforces the haptic perception of a sound heard close-up, as if the matter generating those very sounds could enter in contact with our skin. For this reason, I will call these techniques of haptic intimacy.

The Instruments' Grain: Techniques of Haptic Intimacy

Media theorists demonstrated decades ago already that no technology operates as a transparent medium for a transcendental theoretical sound. (Adorno showed us for instance what it would mean to listen to a Beethoven sonata over the radio rather than live.)[50] But this phenomenon proves even truer in this case—or at least, true on a different level—given that the medium takes on an additional poietic function. Media theorist Wolfgang Ernst has clarified that "musical theory in the occidental tradition continued the Pythagorean epistemology of harmonic calculations. Sound is thus not perceived as the sonic event in itself but becomes a phenomenon of mathematics in the widest sense of the symbolic regime."[51] But the unstable, unpredictable, and inharmonic events of *Intent of Resurrection* invite us to listen quite differently. Musical instruments, including megaphones and microphones, do not simply convey a transcendental sound; their materiality does not simply "allow" sounds vibrations to be, but has a hand in the creation of their specific spectral texture that emerges in our acoustic foreground. The material of this piece is thus self-referential, in the sense

49 Masking indicates "how sensitivity for one sound is affected by the presence of another sound." Stanley A. Gelfand, *Hearing: An Introduction to Psychological and Physiological Acoustics,* 6th ed. (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2018), 251.

50 Theodor W. Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

51 Wolfgang Ernst, *Sonic Time Machines: Explicit Sound, Sirenic Voices, and Implicit Sonicity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 22.

that it stages the agency of the media that produced it.[52] What saturates our attention is the moist flesh of the mouth before the megaphone, the metallic distortion of the horn, the sensitivity of the diaphragm of the microphone to low frequencies, the stickiness of the rosined bow against the metal string—what I call the the *grain of the instrument*.

With the word *grain*, I intend to evoke two different discourses, both quite well known in music studies. The first is Roland Barthes' concept of the "grain of the voice," which indexes the bodies of singing humans through the sonorous materiality of their voice.[53] My own understanding of the word grain is however distinct from his in two respects. First, unlike Barthes, who deems certain voices as "without grain," I assume that the material conditions of sound production are inescapable, and thus that the grain of the instrument is always present. What changes is its level of emergence, or its centrality in the awareness of the audience. Second, the voice we hear in Iannotta's work is that of the classical instruments, megaphones, and microphones played by trained musicians—not only human bodies, but instrumental bodies as well.

To better explain what is at stake in this definition, I find it useful to draw on Brian Kane's model, which "diagnoses" how the voice (*phoné*) can be articulated: through *logos* (i.e., as conveyer of semantic meaning), *echos* (i.e., *phoné*'s "purely sonorous aspect, capable of subjection to all the standard forms of phonetic and acoustic analysis"), and *topos* (i.e., the voice's "site of emission," its "source.")[54] According to Kane, Barthes aims with the "grain of the voice" to shift the focus toward *topos* and *echos*: the sonorous materiality of the voice produced by a given body. But, as he reminds us, the voice is never essentially just one of these things (*logos*, *echos*, *topos*), but is rather the "perpetual displacement" between these poles, a displacement—and here comes the most important point—"modified by *technê*," which is to be understood both as technologies and bodily techniques.[55] Applying Kane's

52 In Pierre Schaeffer's terminology, the above-mentioned "self-referentiality" of the material would possibly translate as a prevalence of the "range of *concrete* sounds" (*possibilités concrètes*) of the instrument. See Michel Chion, *Guide to Sound Objects. Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*, trans. John Dack and Christine North (self-pub., EARS, 2009), 54, http://ears.huma-num.fr/onlinePublications.html.

53 Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 179–89.

54 Brian Kane, "The Model Voice," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3 (2015): 673.

55 Kane, "The Model Voice," 675.

model to the grain of the instrument, we observe that the source of the voice we hear, the *topos*, is that of *technê* in the action of displacing *phoné*. Hearing the grain of the instrument is hearing the voice of *technê*. Furthermore, in this specific instance, as a product of the overlap of *topos* and *technê*, what emerges in the listener's attention is not a body *per se* as the site of sound emission, but its materiality. Rather than an acousmatic question, this condition stimulates a haptic perception of the material friction produced by the matter of both human and instrumental bodies involved in the kinetic act of playing. The *echos* of the sounds I am dealing with is characterized by what Chion would call high "materializing sound indices," or qualities that cause one "to 'feel' the material conditions of the sound source."[56]

The second discourse about the grain that I am invoking here is the one developed by Pierre Schaeffer in his typology of sound objects. For Schaeffer,

> grain is a microstructure of the matter of sound, which is more or less fine or coarse and which evokes by analogy the tactile texture of a cloth or a mineral, or the visible grain in a photograph or a surface. … every time it is the *"overall qualitative perception of a large number of small irregularities of detail affecting the 'surface' of the object."*[57]

What interests me about Schaffer's definition is the experience of a microstructure of discrete components rather than a continuum—an experience afforded, in his reflection, by a slowed-down tape recording. The shift from continuum to discrete—that is, from a sustained pitched sound to a sound composed of recognizable microstructures of sonic "grain"—is, I argue, what allows for the emergence of an experience of sound as *echos* (in particular, its material indices) rather than *logos* (e.g., an A440 heard within a specific harmonic system).[58]

Let's return to the first texture of Iannotta's piece and examine the performance techniques that allow for the grain of the instruments to emerge. On the score (see figure 1), the composer asks the horn, trumpet, and trom-

56 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, 2nd ed., trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 112.

57 Chion, *Guide to Sound Objects*, 171.

58 Martin Scherzinger, in this same journal, also notes in passing how "Barthes' famous notion of the voice's *grain* … actually echoes *Schaeffer*'s notion of the grain." See his "Event or Ephemeron? Music's Sound, Performance, and Media (A Critical Reflection on the Thought of Carolyn Abbate)," *Sound Stage Screen* 1, no. 1 (2021): 152.

bone players to crinkle (*froisser*) aluminum foil gently and irregularly, "one grain at a time."[59] "One grain at a time" also appears in the instructions to the percussion player, who must rub (*frotter*) a damped low gong with the edge of a small *dobachi*, or singing bowl. The violins and violas are also damped and instructed to move a heavily rosined bow on the strings with the highest degree of pressure (*écraser*) but extremely slowly. This gives rise to a shattered (*brisé*) sound, cracked by small silences, that must be maintained between a nearly inaudible *dal niente* and *pp.* The texture is further enriched by the sounds that come from a music box machine, which allows the performer to control twelve different music boxes simultaneously. Four of these are activated in sequence six seconds apart, set to rotate so slowly that the pins of the drum pluck the teeth of the comb against it one at a time, complementing the granularities obtained by the other instruments with a short crackling sound.[60] By renouncing periodic vibrations—the defining feature of the "musical tone" of Western classical tradition—this texture encourages listeners to discard their propensity to listen for pitch, and direct their attention towards the exploration of sonic events unfolding in an unmeasured microtime. Thanks to its high materializing sound indices, this texture can be perceived haptically, as if unfolding against our skin.[61]

Tuning into the Small Sounds: Techniques of Hyper-Intimacy

Iannotta's metaphor generates yet another reflection. She asserts that the illuminated dust is defined by the clarity of our attention. Taking her idea seriously means accepting that the dust, her microcosmos of sounds, cannot actually be perceived clearly (as she would wish) without our attention tuning into them. Our attention is not a set of given and unchangeable cognitive abilities; instead, we, as listeners, can be "shocked" into attun-

59 Iannotta, *Intent on Resurrection*, vi.

60 Iannotta, viii. Machine A and B were designed by the Berlin artist collective Quadrature. Each consists of a six-track sequencer that can put into action through a button as many music boxes, each producing a "carillon-like" tune. The performer can also regulate the speed of each box independently with a nob. For info about the collective see https://quadrature.co/.

61 As Iannotta decides to provide the performers with notation, she requires a writing technology that does not presume a unity of rhythmic measure or stable pitch identities—two basic assumptions of Western classical notation. Chronometric notation is thus interpolated as an alternative in various segments of the piece. I suggest that Iannotta's notion of grain relies on Pierre Schaeffer's and that the techniques she employs to obtain it are akin to those we find in Helmut Lachenmann's *musique concrète instrumentale*.

ing to new ones. According to Vladimir Jankélévitch, tools such as musical instruments impact the performer's cognition in unpredictable ways through "reverse shock"— i.e., through the way "they work, their material possibilities and the gestures they enable, and what they feel like under one's hands."[62] Similarly, I argue that small sounds, bearing the material traces of the instruments and amplifying apparatus that generated them, are the instruments that shock the listener into generating new cognitive abilities. Hearing small sounds is, first and foremost, hearing our own senses tuning in to a different perceptual wavelength as their affordances define our abilities. They shape our sense of hearing, touch, scale, and spatial distance.

But at the same time, our bodily and cognitive affordances shape the way we turn small sounds into a perceptual object, into what might become an aural-affective feeling of intimacy.[63] I choose the word intimacy because it encompasses both spatial features (it etymologically refers to the innermost, the deepest) and the affective world—in fact, despite being a spatial indicator, we have learned to use the word intimacy mostly in a figurative sense, in reference to a range of affections and feelings.[64] In this sense, we as listeners could be thought of as microphones, transducing sound to our consciousness through more or less vibrating, more or less receptive membranes. Unlike actual microphones, however, our affordances are constantly changing. The level of vibration and receptivity is affected by our own story; and, unlike objects which are constantly changing according to the law of decay, our affordances can follow unpredictable patterns. Only if we are disposed to receive closeness and touch, can we then indulge in the pleasure of tuning into a heightened sense of emotional or haptic connectedness, turning anything else into background noise.

If we can afford such an attunement, then small sounds could be turned into hyper-intimate objects, heralds of intimacy despite the reality of a public concert hall with its imposed distances. The prefix "hyper" can be

62 Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," 803. The reference is to Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 27.

63 See De Souza, *Music at Hand*, 13.

64 Etymologically, the word "intimate" from Latin *intimus* "inmost, deepest, profound" (adj.) has first and foremost a "spatial" connotation. However, we generally use it "figuratively" in reference to "inmost thoughts or feelings." See *Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online*, s.v. "intimate, adj. and n.," last modified September 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/98506.

Fig. 3 Marilyn Minter, *Blue Poles*, 2007, enamel on metal, 60 x 72 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York. © Marilyn Minter

understood in reference to the artistic genre of Hyperrealism.[65] In a Hyperrealist portrait, the artist confronts us with a saturation of details that goes beyond the photographic—beyond what we might notice in something physically present, close-up, erasing the visual appearance of the whole. It involves pictorial techniques that seem to augment or shock our senses. In Marilyn Minter's *Blue Poles*, shown in figure 3, the grain of the skin overwhelms us with its details: its innumerable pores and freckles, infinitesimally small folds and wrinkles, the glistening points of sweat or grease, the sparkling makeup surrounded by thousands of thin hairs—all this, despite the distances a museum environment typically imposes, with its velvet ropes and museum guards.

65 "Photorealist art refers to images of reality rendered in extreme detail, often with aid of photographs." Hyperrealism, is "a term once synonymous with Photorealism, but which came to suggest an enhanced reality with heightened details, color, light and shading." See Anne K. Swartz, "Photorealism," in *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art* (Oxford University Press, 2011), https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195335798.001.0001/acref-9780195335798-e-1600.

Conclusions

In *Intent on Resurrection*, we see how the multiple affordances of the megaphone emerge as technologies of public intimacy, and those of the microphones as technologies of close-up intimacy. We also witness the combination of compositional and performance techniques that enable the emergence of what I have called the grain of the instrument, leading the audience in turn to experience a haptic sense of intimacy. I have furthermore shown that we as listeners can craft small sounds as hyper-intimate objects, or turn them into undesired noise, as much as small sounds shock our perceptual abilities.

The locution "small sounds" has served in this recognition as a sort of place holder. I asked you to experience them through a brief exercise—"bring your hand to your ear…"— as well as through your imagination. You heard them in the first minute of *Intent on Resurrection*. We also searched for them with the performer, between the score and the movement of their megaphonic mouth; in the microphones and the loudspeaker; and finally, in the interplay between amplified material traces and our bodily and cognitive abilities. Small sounds, in other words, are best understood as relational, located neither in the "acoustic" nor in the "perceived" world, and always at the intersection between ourselves and the materialities of the sound source, sound waves, and space of resonation.[66]

Departing from Chion's static definition, we observed how small sounds are constantly dislocated throughout the actor-network I have here unraveled, and how their identity is each time constituted through provisional assemblages of specific mediators. My hope is that the necessary linearity of my descriptions was disrupted by the detailed acknowledgment of a continuous feedback loop that involves an actor-network of small sounds, and that this undermines the temptation to search for unidirectional vectors of agency that originate with the composer, or any of the other actors involved.

The play of affordances I have so far retraced, in my last section, reflects back at us, as we realize how the right sort of microphones, real and metaphorical, can allow for the amplification of the smallest of sounds—not only those close to our bodies, but even within it. Dorothy Molloy's ep-

66 This provides us with a concrete example of what Isabella Van Elferen has defined "timbrality." See "Timbrality: The Vibrant Aesthetics of Tone Color," in *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre*, ed. Emily I. Dolan and Alexander Rehding (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 69–91.

igraph witnesses the achievement of such an attunement: she can hear the microscopic sounds of her bones inside her body, behind the skin, out of sight, buried and damped in the earth playing *fortissimo*. Even microscopic sounds can become *fortissimo*—and "*vicinissimo*" ("very close"), I would add—once we have tuned into them. Could Molloy's internal sound be brought into a concert hall? The answer might be yes, as long as your ears had the right microphonic prosthesis.

Perhaps scientists have provided the means. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, researchers in the field of surgical diagnosis—particularly one of its pioneers, a certain Professor Hueter—envisioned that possibility…

> *The introduction of the microphone for the purposes of surgical diagnosis … has led Professor Hueter of Greifswald to try whether it would not be possible by its means to detect certain sounds, whose existence might be a priori asserted, but which are inaudible by ordinary means. … He has proved that we can not only hear the rush of blood through the capillaries of the skin (dermatophony), but also the sounds of muscular contraction (myophony), of tendinous extension (tendophony), and of the vibration of the long bones when percussed (osteophony.)*[67]

67 "Dermatophony," *The Medical Times and Gazette*, February 15, 1879, 179.

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Abstract

"Certain sounds, even when they are loud or heard from close by, conjure small sources." Small sounds, as Chion (2016) describes them in this quote, usually appear in intimate or contained settings, where their relatively low strength will not be spoiled by the masking effects of a noisy public sphere. What happens, however, when they are shared with an audience in a concert venue? Privileging a distributive understanding of agency, I explore the interactions of instruments, techniques, and processes through which the composer Clara Iannotta (b. 1983) brings small sounds to the public space of the concert hall in the first minute of her composition *Intent on Resurrection – Spring or Some Such Thing* (2014). By

articulating the technological means harnessed to allow for the qualities of small sounds to emerge, I reveal the conditions that are required for sound to be recognized and experienced as intimate. Along the way, I draw connections between the amplification aesthetics of Iannotta's work and Hyperrealist art, and theorize the concept of the "grain of the instrument" drawing on ideas from Roland Barthes, Pierre Schaeffer, and Brian Kane.

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ARTICLES

Attention, Music, Dance: Embodying the "Cinema of Attractions"*

Davinia Caddy

Who doesn't love online cat media? Evil Cats, Incredible Singing Cats, Idiot Cats That Will Make You Laugh Out Loud: according to a recent estimate, a segment of the human race shares millions of cat images and videos each day, a global trend that both satisfies and stimulates a fondness for animal acrobatics, all things cute and wasting time, while modelling a liberated uninhibitedness (the cats) and self-facilitated entrapment (ourselves) by rampant corporate surveillance.[1] Particularly off-beat, and potentially off-putting, is a 22-second sequence—readily available on YouTube, the unofficial home of homemade cat media—titled *Boxing Cats*. Featuring two sparring felines (wearing shoulder harnesses and boxing gloves), a boxing ring (pushed to the very front of the picture plane) and a referee (one Professor Henry Welton, owner of a travelling "cat circus"), this short film dates from the very first crop of cat media to be commercially distributed across the US and Western Europe. This was back in the nineties, at the dawn of a new media age: that is, the 1890s.[2]

It is this originary aspect—the historicity of the pugilistic pair—that interests me in this article. Filmed in July 1894 inside Thomas Edison's New

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1 See Harriet Porter, "Why Cool Cats Rule the Internet," *The Telegraph*, July 1, 2016.

2 A 2015 exhibition at New York's Museum of the Moving Image—*How Cats Took Over the Internet*—celebrated the history of cats on screen: see reviews in the *New York Times* (August 6, 2015), the *Guardian* (August 7, 2015), and *TIME Magazine* (September 22, 2015). For a nuanced account of the feline take-over, see E. J. White, *A Unified Theory of Cats on the Internet* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

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Jersey-based Black Maria studio, *Boxing Cats* is notorious not only as the world's original cat video; it also has been seen to epitomize and encapsulate the so-called "cinema of attractions"—a genre of early silent film first identified and analyzed by film specialists Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault.[3] With minimal editing, a largely stationary camera, and limited depth of field, films of this kind aimed entirely at visual spectacle, foregrounding the act of display. Most of these bizarre products documented live performances (magic tricks, comedy skits, acrobatics, feats of strength) or simulated travel voyages across exotic terrains; others recorded public events (parades, funerals, sporting activities) or different kinds of objects in motion (trains, bullets, knives, waves). Storytelling and character psychology were avoided. Conveying a sense of immediacy and physical presence, the "cinema of attractions" aimed to show not to tell, to exhibit not to explain; as a result, the sense of punctual temporality denied any kind of narrative development, offering little in the way of diegetic coherence, sustained characterization, or causality. Equally significant, for present purposes at least, "attractions" cued a different configuration of spectatorial attention from that of now-standard, story-telling cinema: Gunning calls this "exhibitionist confrontation," a type of sensory fascination or visceral *jouissance* that contrasts entirely with classic narrative absorption, its seemingly uncritical transport and panoptic projection into the fictional screen space.[4]

Boxing Cats—preserved as a single 33-foot reel in the archives of the Library of Congress—is exemplary.[5] Clearly, there is no sense of narrative suspense, no linear plotting. (Indeed, the impulse, when watching online, is to click repeat—an action that echoes the workings of Edison's own film

3 See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56–62. Gunning's second essay on the topic is "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Art & Text* 34 (1989): 31–45. See also André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, "Le cinéma des premiers temps: un défi a l'histoire du cinéma?" in *Histoire du cinéma: nouvelles approches*, ed. Jacques Aumont, André Gaudreault, and Michel Marie (Paris: Sorbonne, 1989), 49–63; Eng. ed. "Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History," trans. Joyce Goggin and Wanda Strauven, in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 365–80.

4 Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions," 59; also see Gunning's entry "Cinema of Attraction," in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (London: Routledge, 2005), 124–27.

5 Henry Welton, *The Boxing Cats* (West Orange, NJ: Edison Manufacturing Co., 1894), video, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, https://www.loc.gov/item/00694112/.

loop system, used in his peep-show-like Kinetoscope.)[6] Instead, the cinematography appears to hypostatize a single, autonomous moment: lighting (from above, a Rembrandt-like luminescence), framing (the ring, a typical frame-within-a-frame), and planar dimensionality (the dark backdrop, conveying minimal depth of field) direct the viewer's attention towards the fighting cats. As does Professor Welton—or, rather, as does his disembodied head. Grinning, the professor looks directly at the camera, acknowledging the viewer's presence and seeming actively to solicit our gaze. More like a cinema showman (or is it shaman?) than a sports umpire, the professor performs a wholly pedagogical function, training his cats for the viewers' scopophilic pleasure.

The visual scene, the technology for capturing and projecting images, the conditions of viewing: these are defining components of what Gunning calls the cinematographic *dispositif*, a concept that embraces both the material apparatus of early silent film and the attention economy such apparatus appears to endorse.[7] Indeed, in the "cinema of attractions," on both sides of the Atlantic, the apparatus was arguably the real star of the show,

6 See Ray Phillips, *Edison's Kinetoscope and Its Films: A History to 1896* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997).

7 There is a voluminous literature on the concept and definition of the *dispositif*, embracing film, media, and communications studies as well as critical theory and philosophy. Important work includes Jean-Louis Baudry, "Cinéma: effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base," *Cinéthique* 7–8 (1970): 1–8; Eng. ed. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic apparatus," trans. Alan Williams, *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974): 39–47, and his "Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité," *Communications* 23 (1975): 56–72; Eng. ed. "The Apparatus," *Camera Obscura* 1, no. 1 (1976): 104–26; Raymond Bellour, "La querelle des dispositifs / Battle of the Images," *Art Press* 262 (2000): 48–52; Gilles Deleuze, "Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?," in *Michel Foucault. Philosophe: rencontre internationale, Paris, 9, 10, 11 janvier 1988* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), 185–95; Eng. ed. "What is a dispositif ?," in *Michel Foucault Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 159–69; Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," a conversation with Alain Grosrichard et al., in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194–228; Jean-François Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Galilée, 1994); and Christian Metz, *Le signifiant imaginaire: psychanalyse et cinéma* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1977); Eng. ed. *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). Davide Panagia offers a particularly useful account of the breadth of significance of the term as used by Foucault; see his article "On the Political Ontology of the *Dispositif*," *Critical Inquiry* 45 (2019): 714–46. Specifically related to the topic of this article is Frank Kessler, "La cinématographie comme dispositif (du) spectaculaire," *CiNéMAS* 14, no. 1 (2003): 21–34; and Kessler's chapter "The Cinema of Attractions as *Dispositif*," in Strauven, *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, 57–69.

as intimated by firsthand accounts of the earliest Lumière screenings in the 1890s. Recalling what was a characteristic mode of presentation, spectators describe how films were initially presented as still, frozen images, before the projector cranked up and brought the images to life. Here is French film-maker Georges Méliès:

> A *still* photograph showing the place Bellecour in Lyon was projected. A little surprised, I just had time to say to my neighbor: "They got us all stirred up for projections like this? I've been doing them for over ten years!"
> I had hardly finished speaking when a horse pulling a wagon began to walk towards us, followed by other vehicles and then pedestrians, in short all the animation of the street. Before this spectacle we sat with gaping mouths, struck with amazement, astonishment beyond all expression.[8]

These "gaping mouths," besides the intensity of physical movement, can act as a useful stimulus: in this article I want to take up the question of whether the "cinema of attractions" might be a useful tool for critical analysis not only of early silent film and its approach to spectatorship, but also of theatrical dance from the period. Certainly, as historicized by Gunning, Gaudreault, and other colleagues, the "cinema of attractions" appears to encode the culture of modernity from which it arose: the onslaught of stimulation, visual spectacle, sensory fascination, bodily engagement, mechanical rhythm, and violent juxtapositions, besides new experiences of time and space now available within the modern urban environment.[9] Moreover, as one of the most popular performing arts of the period, dance was central to the "attractions" industry (and to its origin in variety shows and vaudeville theater), prime raw material that starred The Body in Motion, a favorite fascination of contemporary cinema.[10] It seems inevitable, then, that there was some connective tissue: cinema and dance

8 Quoted in Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment," 35.

9 On the emergence of cinema as part of the modern urban experience, see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and the essay collection *Film 1900: Technology, Perception, Culture*, ed. Annemone Ligensa and Klaus Kreimeier (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2009).

10 See Laurent Guido, "Rhythmic Bodies/Movies: Dance as Attraction in Early Film Culture," in Strauven, *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, 139–56; and Charles Musser, "At the Beginning: Motion Picture Production, Representation and Ideology at the Edison and Lumière Companies," in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (London: Routledge, 2004), 15–30.

might not only share subject matter and affective lure; the two might also cue a similar mode of attention or visuality. And yet visuality is hopelessly narrow.

While the topic of attention, as both a historical phenomenon and a theoretical problematic, has risen to prominence across the humanities, it has barely impacted scholarship on music and dance.[11] This is perhaps not surprising, given the fairly recent christening of so-called "choreomusicology," besides its obvious (if rarely acknowledged) analytical-structuralist inheritance.[12] Yet the topic is surely ripe for questioning. How might we conceptualize dance theater as a form of attention, a perceptual complex embracing not only visuality but also the auditory sense, its cognitive capacities, affective intensity, and imaginative dimension? Alternatively, might dance be understood as a form of address, an exhibitionist regime of intermedial and purely "monstrative attractions"?[13] As for dancers themselves, how can we account for their individual and collective attentive capacities: their visual, aural, kinetic, and spatial relationships to their own music-drenched diegesis? And what has all this to do with the notoriously complex business

11 From the wealth of recent interdisciplinary studies of attention, I have found the following most inspiring: Richard Adelman, *Idleness and Aesthetic Consciousness, 1815–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Eve Tavor Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading: Print Culture and Popular Instruction in the Anglophone Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Thomas H. Davenport and John C. Beck, *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001); Lily Gurton-Wachter, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); and Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016). Earlier studies that remain important include: Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); and James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

12 Dance scholar Stephanie Jordan offers a helpful review of music-dance research in her "Choreomusical Conversations: Facing a Double Challenge," *Dance Research Journal* 43, no. 1 (2011): 43–64. Jordan's own research—including the award-winning books *Moving Music: Dialogues with Music in Twentieth-Century Ballet* (London: Dance Books, 2000) and *Stravinsky Dances: Re-Visions Across a Century* (Alton: Dance Books, 2007)—illustrates the dominant methodological and conceptual tendencies of music and dance studies over the past twenty or so years. Having said this, her more recent work—for example, *Mark Morris: Musician – Choreographer* (Binsted: Dance Books, 2015)—treads new ground, exploring perspectives from the cognitive sciences.

13 Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions," 97–99.

of representation, invoking dancers' various figurative, pictorial, decorative, indexical, symbolic, scriptural, or structural functions?[14]

Clues to these questions might emerge from burgeoning conversations outside "choreo" confines: opera studies, for example, has developed a hermeneutical strain of musicology that was fashionable in recent decades, speculating at times wildly on issues of embodiment, materiality, and the senses, besides what Carolyn Abbate once called opera's "transgressive acoustics of authority."[15] More immediately helpful in my search for stimulus for this article has been an accumulation of ideas within now-canonic film literature, including Gunning's and Gaudreault's many similarly-themed studies, as well as books by Charles Musser and Ben Singer.[16] Before venturing further, though, I need to go back to my primary proposition—that the "cinema of attractions," as both species of entertainment and discursive construct, might provide some purchase on theatrical dance of the period—and raise an objection, one that readers are likely to have sensed. Cinema, on one hand; theater, on the other: how can we reconcile the two? More specifically, how can we analogize the cinematographic *dispositif*—its reproductive aesthetic, industrial mechanicity, and silent politics of acknowledgement (embodied in the work of the camera)—to a theatrical and specifically choreographic context? In the pages that follow I want to suggest that music can play a role, can help determine and sustain a particular attentive praxis while pointing to itself—*à la* Professor Welton—as artifice or contrivance.

Facticity

My first and perhaps most obvious example is the American modern-dance pioneer Loie Fuller, known for her multi-colored dance-and-light displays.

14 I attempted to tackle this last question in my chapter "Representational Conundrums: Music and Early Modern Dance," in *Representation in Western Music*, ed. Joshua S. Walden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 144–64.

15 Carolyn Abbate, "Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 235

16 See footnote 3 as well as André Gaudreault, *From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990); his later article "Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1994): 203–32; and Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*.

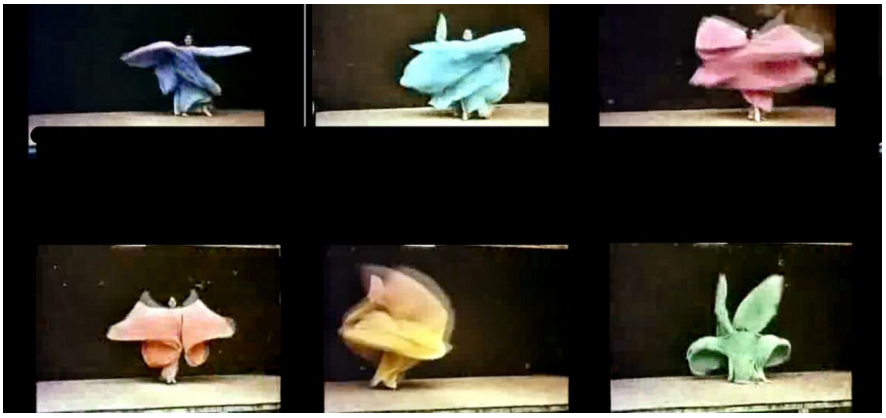

Fig. 1 Still frames from the Lumière brothers' *Danse serpentine [II]*, 1897. Lumière Catalogue Number 765,1. © Institut Lumière

"Displays," indeed, is apposite, for Fuller's was a "dance of attractions"—she whirled giant veils around her barely-seen body while colored lights projected onto her shifting form—that rivalled contemporaneous cinema for novelty and sensationalism. Moreover, like the "cinema of attractions," Fuller's dancing was largely without narrative or characterization, besides any sense of linear trajectory. And it, too, was exhibitionary at base, designed to flaunt the spectacular potential not of Fuller's dancing body, for that body was almost wholly concealed, but of her carefully coordinated props, the huge drapes of cloth attached to baguettes that she twirled, as well as her trademarked electric light inventions. This cinematic potential was not lost on historical observers. Along with phantom voyages and physical comedies, Fuller-style veil-dancing (she had legions of imitators) became popular silent-screen footage—providing a "goldmine" of source material, as noted by French observer Louis Delluc.[17] Perhaps the most famous example is the 1897 short film by Louis and Auguste Lumière, one of their earliest cinematic attempts. A short sequence of silk-swirling by a convincing Fuller look-alike, *Danse serpentine* captures the striking iridescence of Fuller's characteristic staged metamorphoses: the brothers tinted the veils of each frame by hand in order to depict the continually changing colored effects (see figure 1).[18]

17 Louis Delluc, "Cinéma: *Le Lys de la vie*," *Paris-Midi*, March 8, 1921.

18 Louis and Auguste Lumière, *Danse serpentine [II]* (1897), Lumière Catalogue Number 765,1. See, also, the short films by Edison (*Serpentine Dance*, 1894) and Pathé (*Loie Fuller*, 1905).

It might seem strange, then, that this cinematic aspect of Fuller's performance has received relatively little attention in the academic literature on the dancer.[19] Following legendary critics Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, both of whom wrote about Fuller's dancing at the theater, scholars have tended to conceptualize a dance of abstractions, envisaging Fuller as an apparition—to Jacques Rancière, a (dis)embodiment of pure potentiality: "the poetic operation of metaphoric condensation and metonymic displacement."[20] The role of the spectator, according to this line of argument, is primarily hermeneutical: attention is understood as an interpretive effort of sustained contemplation and creative conjecture—a kind of theatrical *flânerie* or imaginative license to investigate and intensify the mysteries of modern-day popular culture; and also a license that extends to musical experience. Listening to one of Fuller's shows—she usually performed to preexisting instrumental pieces, familiar to audiences, such as Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"—was thought to call on an audience's imaginative insight, provoking a seemingly unending process of interpretation of music and its elusive, ever-shifting meaning. Fuller herself encouraged spectators to "read your own story into a dance, just as you read it into music," seeming to endorse contemporary accounts of the mobility of musical meaning, the indeterminacy of the orchestra, and the special symbolic quality that her performance managed to exude.[21]

It is doubly strange, then, that this Mallarméan habit of thinking gives way under pressure of enquiry, a recently tapped vein of evidence reveal-

19 There are two notable exceptions: Tom Gunning, "Light, Motion, Cinema!: The Heritage of Loïe Fuller and Germaine Dulac," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 46, no. 1 (2005): 106–29; and Felicia McCarren, *Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), esp. 43–64.

20 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London: Verso, 2013), 99. For historical sources, see Stéphane Mallarmé, "Considérations sur l'art du ballet et la Loïe Fuller," *National Observer*, May 13, 1893 and Paul Valéry, "Philosophie de la danse" (1936), reprinted in *Oeuvres*, vol. 1, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 1390–1403. Kristina Köhler offers a summary account of both Mallarmé and Valéry on dance in her chapter "Dance as Metaphor—Metaphor as Dance: Transfigurations of Dance in Culture and Aesthetics around 1900," *REAL Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 25, no. 1 (2009): 163–78.

21 Fuller, quoted in "Lois [sic] Fuller in a Church," n.d.; clipping, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Theatre Collection Clippings 1. She continued: "No one can tell you what Beethoven thought when he wrote the Moonlight Sonata; no one knows Chopin's point of view in his nocturnes, but to each music lover there is in them a story, the story of his own experience and his own explorations into the field of art … You can put as many stories as you wish to music, but you may be sure that no two people will see the same story. So every dance has its meaning, but your meaning is not mine, nor mine yours."

ing an alternative reception history.[22] Reports of technical malfunctions, an acutely negative press, defeat in a US infringement suit, rampant commercialization and merchandising: an accumulation of historical sources reveals a kind of gestalt switch, a shift in perspective from envisaging Fuller as a unique, irreplaceable form of semiotic wealth to eyeing her image for its marketable potential, draining her body of that boundless metaphoricity so vaunted by the Symbolists.[23] In this revisionist analysis, attention can be understood as a kind of gawking or *badauderie*, an incredulity that has been dubbed "the lowest-common-denominator culture of the street."[24] Indeed, this is the same open-mouthed astonishment that Gunning describes: "the viewer of attractions is positioned less as a spectator in the text, absorbed into a fictional world, than as a gawker who stands alongside, held for the moment by curiosity or amazement."[25]

As for music listening, evidence suggests that Fuller's characteristic soundtrack functioned less as a launch-pad for interpretive reverie than as a signature tune or aide-mémoire, a form of branding that circulated in a repetitive orbit, bearing and gathering the authenticating weight not of origination, consent, or any kind of cultural patrimony, but of consumption and commodification, an ethos of multiplicity.[26] Consider, for example, the music used to accompany Fuller's Serpentine Dance in her first run of solo performances at the Casino Theatre in New York City, February 1892. Ernest Gillet's *Loin du bal* was chosen by theater director Rudolph Aronson not for its expressive potential or pictorial associations; rather, the tune, played initially by a single violin in a darkened theater, was immediately recognizable, identifiable, "hummable"—"a perennial drawing-room

22 See my chapter "Making Moves in Reception Studies: Music, Listening and Loie Fuller," in *Musicology and Dance: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Davinia Caddy and Maribeth Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 91–117.

23 See Caddy, "Making Moves in Reception Studies" and, on the legal case, Anthea Kraut, "White Womanhood, Property Rights, and the Campaign for Choreographic Copyright: Loïe Fuller's *Serpentine Dance*," *Dance Research Journal* 43, no. 1 (2011): 2–26. Emma Doran provides an informative account of Fuller's product branding—how she pioneered her own merchandizing, harnessing the press and the consumer industry to her advantage—in her article "Figuring Modern Dance within Fin-De-Siècle Visual Culture and Print: The Case of Loïe Fuller," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 13, no. 1 (2015): 21–40.

24 Gregory Shaya, "The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860–1910," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 1 (2004): 51.

25 Tom Gunning, "The Whole Town's Gawking: Early Cinema and the Visual Experience of Modernity," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1994): 190.

26 For more on this, see Caddy, "Making Moves in Reception Studies."

favorite," according to an entry on Gillet in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*.[27] What's more, when relocating well-known "classical" extracts within her personal design aesthetic (based, as intimated, on the cinematic smack of the instant), Fuller could divest that music of its originary connotations. It is tempting to argue, even, that she metaphorized—or, rather, musicalized—the cinematic practice of gazing at the camera. While filmed "attractions" functioned by acknowledging the facticity of the cinematic apparatus (its mechanics, frames, dimensions, sequencing of shots), in Fuller's theater, it was music that was factic: bits of Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schubert, and Wagner no longer simulated illusionistic depth or psychological nuance, but rather served to remind audiences of music's rootlessness and repeatability, its a-signifying potential.

Suture

Before we turn to a second "dance of attractions," one in which music also functions within a quasi-cinematographic *dispositif*, it will be useful to sketch a contrasting or, even, contrary example: an example where narrative and causality define onstage activity, voyeurism, and identification, and where dance music functions as an integrative component of a theatrical diegesis—if you like, as pure suture. If, in the above case, visual and auditory attention can be understood as a kind of gawping or incredulous amazement, here a form of what we might call "fictive absorption"—enabled by visual design, gesture, and music—characterizes the spectatorial experience. Or perhaps "conventional fictive absorption" is more appropriate, because this kind of spectatorship, and this kind of music, has of course a long and illustrious history.

It is "La Loie," perhaps ironically, to whom we can turn once again, here in a theatrical performance that flashes red in the dancer's history. Unlike her typically abstract and decorative displays, Fuller's production of *La Tragédie de Salomé*, premiered at the newly renovated Théâtre des Arts in Paris on November 9, 1907, was dramatic through and through. Based on a libretto by theater director Robert d'Humières and a newly commissioned

27 Quoted in Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895–1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 251 n40. Marks notes that *Loin du bal* was included in the volume *Masterpieces of Piano Music*, ed. Albert E. Weir (New York: Carl Fischer, 1918), 365–67. For more on the Serpentine Dance, see Sally R. Sommer, "Loie Fuller's Art of Music and Light," *Dance Chronicle* 4, no. 4 (1981): 391.

Fig. 2 Program cover, *La Tragédie de Salomé*, Théâtre des Arts, Paris, 1907. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 12, 2021.

score by the young French composer Florent Schmitt, Fuller's "drame muet" (silent drama) comprised seven scenes, each designed to illustrate a particular aspect of the Judean princess's changing character. Carefree and coquettish in the "Danse des Perles"; proud and haughty in the "Danse du Paon" (peacock); sensual and sinister in the "Danse des Serpents"; cold and cruel in the "Danse de l'Acier" (steel); lascivious and perverse in the "Danse d'Argent" (money); and terrified and delirious in the "Danse de la peur" (fear): Fuller portrayed them all (to varying degrees of success, according to contemporary observers), as can be seen in figure 2, the program front cover, with its six studio headshots—some distance from standard Fuller iconography. Moreover, besides these carefully choreographed in-character dances, the production offered a strong and detailed plot, replete with fin de siècle decadence and female seduction, as well as impressive scene and costume changes, including an outfit made from 4,500 peacock feathers, a six-foot artificial snake and a sea that turned to blood.

In terms of conveying the drama, Schmitt's score did more than its share of heavy lifting. Praised in the press for its "skillful" and "sumptuous" orchestration, the music—dedicated to Igor Stravinsky—was thought to offer a "symphonic description" of the developing goings-on:[28] it supplied the unspoken words of the drama, conjured the somber mood, added a touch of mystery, and expressed the lascivious perversity of the dancing.[29] To one commentator, moreover, it simmered with an inner life that not even the onstage choreography managed to incarnate: Schmitt's score almost single-handedly evoked the "demonic phantasmagoria," besides the numerous cataclysmic events that unfolded throughout the drama.[30]

Clearly, the music was dramatically contingent, an integrable part of the stage diegesis, and one that succeeded in enabling shifting identifications, variously binding spectators into the fiction. Consider, for example, the sixth scene ("Danse d'Argent"), which begins with Salome performing a diegetic dance before Herod. This was a typical "attraction," we might

28 Addé, "Courrier des Spectacles: La Soirée au Théâtre des Arts," *Le Gaulois*, November 10, 1907; Henri Gauthier-Villars, "Théâtre des Arts – La Musique," *Comoedia*, November 10, 1907; see also Gaston Carraud, "Les Concerts," *La Liberté*, November 12, 1907. Clair Rowden offers a useful account of the ballet in her chapter "Loïe Fuller et Salomé: les drames mimés de Gabriel Pierné et de Florent Schmitt," in *Musique et chorégraphie en France de Léo Delibes à Florent Schmitt*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2010), 215–59.

29 See André Mangeot, "*La Tragédie de Salomé*," *Le Monde musical*, November 15, 1907.

30 Gauthier-Villars, "Théâtre des Arts," 2.

suppose: indeed, the dancing seems purely exhibitionary, designed to be displayed; and the music seems to endorse this diegeticism, its melodic patterning, textural clarity, and rhythmic propulsion setting apart the stage spectacle within the scene. Yet the dance tune—shrieking woodwind sixteenth notes, punctuated by off-beat string and brass chords—screams Salome: it is a melodic inversion of the opening motif of the work, performed to a closed curtain, an undulating line in the cellos and basses that offers a sonic inscription of the dancing body absent from the stage. Here in the sixth scene, this formerly floating signifier takes corporeal form: it is, as it were, territorialized, bringing to the diegetic display a heavy dose of dramatic character, and one with which spectators are invited to identify.

But identification is soon skewed. After only two bars, this diegetic dance is interrupted by a change of musical motif: blazing sixteenth notes are swapped for a drawn-out and sustained crescendo previously associated with Herod, just as—according to the stage directions—Herod himself gets up out of his seat. The two motifs jostle as Herod moves towards the dancer, grabs her, even throws himself on top of her, stripping her of her clothes. Salome lies naked on the floor, Herod's motif blaring from the upper winds and strings, repeated no less than fourteen times (at rising pitches and in various rhythmic diminutions). The message here—what the music is insisting on with all its repetitions—seems clear enough. To gain maximum impact, not only does Salome have to be naked; she has to submit to patriarchal musical discourse.

Whatever we might think of this gendered argument (and its resonance across a vast terrain of Salome-themed scholarship), music's dramatic contribution—its interdependence with gesture and visuals—seems assured.[31] Even the most cursory analysis of Schmitt's score reveals a striking incongruity within Fuller's choreographic output: while her typically abstract dances paraded music as a mere postulate, an empty and de-territorialized signifier, her *Salomé* featured a specially simulated soundtrack, tightly interwoven with choreography and dramatic action. Moreover, as press critics suggest, listening to that soundtrack involved a kind of figural entrainment: figural, as in bound to forms or characters derived from life;

31 Interestingly, Fuller's production was regarded as a feminist statement by both *Le Temps*, a daily newspaper, and the journal *Fémina*. Ann Cooper Albright discusses this aspect of the production, and Fuller's earlier Salome outing (1895), in her book *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), ch. 4 "Femininity with a Vengeance: Strategies of Veiling and Unveiling in Loïe Fuller's Performances of *Salomé*," 115–43.

entrainment, as in a process through which we as distanced spectators are incorporated into the diegesis and, as a result, invited to assume ideological complicity. Broadly speaking, this process itself can be conceptualized as an aural equivalent of the "optical visuality" described and historicized by film scholar Laura U. Marks (leaning on art historian Alois Riegl): a voyeuristic practice of dominance and control, associated with the emergence of Renaissance perspective, in which spectators distinguish figures as distinct forms within an illusionistic space, before imaginatively projecting themselves into that space.[32] Certainly, it is a mode of listening that, while traditional, falls some distance from the open-mouthed astonishment of the "attractions" industry. Indeed, the latter has more to do with what Marks identifies as "alternative economies of looking" associated with the "cusp of modernism," economies in which the spectator relinquishes mastery over what is seen and heard in favor of an immediate embodied response.[33]

Modernity, Metropolis, Monstration

My second "dance of attractions," as heavily mythologized as the first, encapsulates precisely this perceptual economy; in doing so, moreover, it rivals early cinema as a distinct aesthetic practice. To be sure, the conceptual origins of productions such as *L'Oiseau de feu, Pétrouchka*, and *Le Sacre du printemps*—staged in the early twentieth century by Sergey Diaghilev's Ballets Russes—are thought to lie principally within Russian music theater and folk history. Since the pioneering efforts of Richard Taruskin in the early 1980s, scholars such as Tatiana Baranova Monighetti and Olga Haldey have located models for the troupe and their productions in Russian folk song, the *Mir Iskusstva* circle, and Savva Mamontov's private opera, to name a few.[34] Yet the "cinema of attractions" might provide an alternative optic through which to view—and to hear—the

32 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

33 Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 167, 169.

34 See, for example, Richard Taruskin, "Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33, no. 3 (1980): 501–43; Tatiana Baranova Monighetti, "Stravinsky, Roerich, and Old Slavic Rituals in *The Rite of Spring*," in *"The Rite of Spring" at 100*, ed. Severine Neff, Maureen Carr, and Gretchen Horlacher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 189–98; and Olga Haldey, *Mamontov's Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theater* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

famous Russian company, off-setting now-familiar claims of Russian primitivism with a vision of Euro-American modernity, distinctly urban, technological, and vernacular.[35] Suggesting this is not to deny the decade-or-so discrepancy between the two: the fact that, by the time of the Ballets Russes's theatrical ascendancy in the early 1910s, the "cinema of attractions" had, according to Gunning, sunk "underground," magic acts, moving trains, and other purely exhibitionist displays replaced on film by the narration of stories set within self-enclosed fictive worlds populated by relatable characters. Nonetheless, early cinema engendered an urban modernity—a particular experience described in terms of novelty, mobility, instability, and physical sensation—that continued to find expression, if not on screen, then in amusement parks, circuses, waxwork museums, postcards, posters, and, we might argue, music theaters.[36] Moreover, despite the superseding of "attractions" by narrative film in the second decade of the century, its perceptual possibilities became the focus of film-theoretical discourse in the 1910s (and into the 1920s). As the Ballets Russes were winning audiences in London and Paris, the first film theorists on both sides of the Atlantic were contemplating new kinds of knowledge, feeling, and sensation that (they thought) only cinema could create, cinema lauded not for its realism or objectivity, but for its radical possibilities of perception.

Perhaps my particular example from this repertory will not surprise. Of all the Ballets Russes's pre-war productions, *Le Sacre du printemps* is the most obviously monstrative, non-narrative, and confrontational: it is a ballet, at base, about the act of display. What's more, in its ability to circumvent a developmental trajectory, *Le Sacre* is marked by the same kind of formal non-continuity, dynamism, and flux that characterizes the "cinema of attractions." It too aestheticizes the effects of modernity on city life, proceeding by means of temporally disjunct bursts of presence, eruptions of activity that signal what Gunning describes as "the present tense" of pure display.[37]

35 I should also note the alternative perspectives offered during centennial celebrations by two expert musicological voices: Annegret Fauser, "*Le Sacre du printemps*: A Ballet for Paris," and Tamara Levitz, "Racism at *The Rite*," both in Neff et al., *"The Rite of Spring" at 100* (83–97 and 146–78 respectively).

36 Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions," 57. For more on this body of primary literature, see Viva Paci, "The Attraction of the Intelligent Eye: Obsessions with the Vision Machine in Early Film Theories," in Strauven, *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, 121–37.

37 See Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," *Velvet Light Trap* 32 (1993): 3–12.

Musicologists have long pointed to the defining compositional principles of Stravinsky's score, describing musical disjunctions and unsignaled interruptions as typically Russian: according to Taruskin, examples of *drobnost'*, the quality of splinteredness or fracture, of a whole being the sum of unrelated parts; and *nepodvizhnost'* or immobility, a moment-by-moment absence of any forward-going motion.[38] Yet these principles are also emblematic of early silent film. Take, for example, the multi-shot films of Georges Méliès, in which, according to historian John Frazer, "causal narrative links … are relatively insignificant compared to the discrete events. … We focus on successions of pictorial surprises which run roughshod over the conventional niceties of linear plotting. Méliès' films are a collage of immediate experiences which coincidentally require the passage of time to become complete."[39] Collage as a structural technique (with distinct temporal ramifications) can also be associated with *Le Sacre*, which—as mentioned a moment ago—is characterized by the abrupt juxtaposition of musical ideas separated in time and space (register, texture, timbre, or instrumentation).[40] Indeed, the manner in which Stravinsky's music foregrounds its own formal apparatus—devices of superposition, stratification, and what Pierre Boulez famously called "false counterpoint"[41]—is also reminiscent of the "cinema of attractions," known not only for its characters' self-conscious gazing at the camera, but also for its promotion of the latest technological machinery, often over and above the visual content to be displayed.

Before drawing any further analogies in terms of spectatorship or attention, it might be useful to lend some specificity to this generalization about apparatus. To recall an earlier argument: in Fuller's typically

38 See Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through "Mavra"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 2:1677–78. There is a sizeable music-theoretical literature on Stravinsky's characteristic structural disjunctures, including Pieter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Jonathan D. Kramer, "Discontinuity and Proportion in the Music of Stravinsky," in *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 174–94; and Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

39 John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), 124.

40 See Glenn Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernists* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994).

41 Pierre Boulez, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, trans. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 57.

non-narrative productions, music's overt familiarity—its function as a signature tune wiped of pictorial or expressive meaning—engendered an equivalent to the aesthetic of acknowledgement (the staring at the camera) characteristic of the "cinema of attractions:" put bluntly, her music drew attention to itself as part of the artifice of presentation, the theatrical spectacle. In *Le Sacre du printemps*, I argue, this same effect is created but by quite different means. For while Fuller's dancing seems to have proceeded regardless of her musical accompaniment, the dancers in *Le Sacre* betray a striking receptivity to theirs. Indeed, such is the nature of this receptivity that the dancers function as another kind of mediating technology: an apparatus for the inscription of music as visual pattern and visceral force.

A Poetics of Workmanship

This idea of the dancers in *Le Sacre* as some kind of technological apparatus is not new.[42] Critics at the premiere described automatic and reflex movements, as well as an overall sense of dehumanization:[43] even the choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky admitted in a 1913 interview that "there are no human beings in it."[44] Scholars and practitioners over the years have tended to agree, showing in careful and detailed analyses how Nijinsky's choreography was strictly coordinated to Stravinsky's underlying musical pulse, as well as to the complex play of rhythmic counterpoint that unfolded across it.[45] In "Rondes printanières" (Spring Rounds), for exam-

42 Linda M. Austin explores the trend towards marionettes and activated dolls in ballets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in her article 'Elaborations of the Machine: The Automata Ballets', *Modernism/modernity*, 23/1 (2016), pp. 65–87. On dance's centrality to modernist machine aesthetics, see McCarren, *Dancing Machines*.

43 Truman Bullard collates and translates all extant reviews of *Le Sacre* (dating from the months after the premiere) in his doctoral thesis "The First Performance of Igor Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1971), from which this article's English translations are taken, unless otherwise noted. See, in particular, Gustave de Pawlowski, "Au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées: *Le Sacre du Printemps*," *Comoedia*, May 31, 1913.

44 "The Next New Russian Ballet," interview with Vaslav Nijinsky, *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 15, 1913, 5.

45 See, for example, Jordan, *Moving Music*, 36–42; Millicent Hodson, *Nijinsky's Crime Against Grace: Reconstruction Score of the Original Choreography for "Le Sacre du Printemps"* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1996); and Hodson and Kenneth Archer, *The Lost Rite: Rediscovery of the 1913 "Rite of Spring"* (London: KMS Press, 2014).

ple—and as Stravinsky himself indicated in his choreographic notation—one group of dancers moves to the syncopated rhythms of one musical motif, while a second group accents the downbeats of another. Earlier in "Les Augures printaniers" (The Augurs of Spring), this choreo-musical interplay is visualized within the body: while the dancers jump to the musical downbeats, their arms and upper bodies bring out the music's irregular accents.

Underlying these examples is what we might call a poetics of workmanship, a model of the body as a laboring machine. But it might be useful to speculate further on the type or kind of machine we tend to envisage—such speculation might help us, now over a hundred years after the premiere, towards a more nuanced conceptualization of the original interrelations between music and dance. On the one hand, prompted by the ballet's setting and scenario, it is tempting to conjure up the very earliest technologies of inscription: prehistoric bones, rocks, or other hard materials incised with series of notches, marks, or tallies. Clearly, visual artefacts such as figure 3—a broken baton from the Grotte du Placard, dating from Magdalenian IV (approximately 15,000 years ago)—have nothing to do with pictorial representation; they are evidence, instead, of the abstract origins of counting, a one-to-one correspondence between a notch and, say, the sighting of an animal or the appearance of the moon. This singular correspondence, as archaeologists have revealed, likely involved neither physical resemblance nor abstract numeration: no stories or words accompanied the notches; nor were they necessarily conceived mentally as incremental numbers. The notches simply recorded single, unitary events: one animal or moon, one mark.[46]

46 My admittedly crude account of the prehistory of counting is heavily influenced by the work of James Elkins: "On the Impossibility of Close Reading: The Case of Alexander Marshack," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (1996): 185–226, and his book *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 5 "The Common Origins of Pictures, Writing, and Notation." Elkins himself, as the title of the above article makes clear, draws on the writings of archaeologist and art historian Alexander Marshack, especially his *The Roots of Civilization: The Cognitive Beginnings of Man's First Art, Symbol, and Notation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971, and on Denise Schmandt-Besserat, *Before Writing*, vol. 1, *From Counting to Cuneiform* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

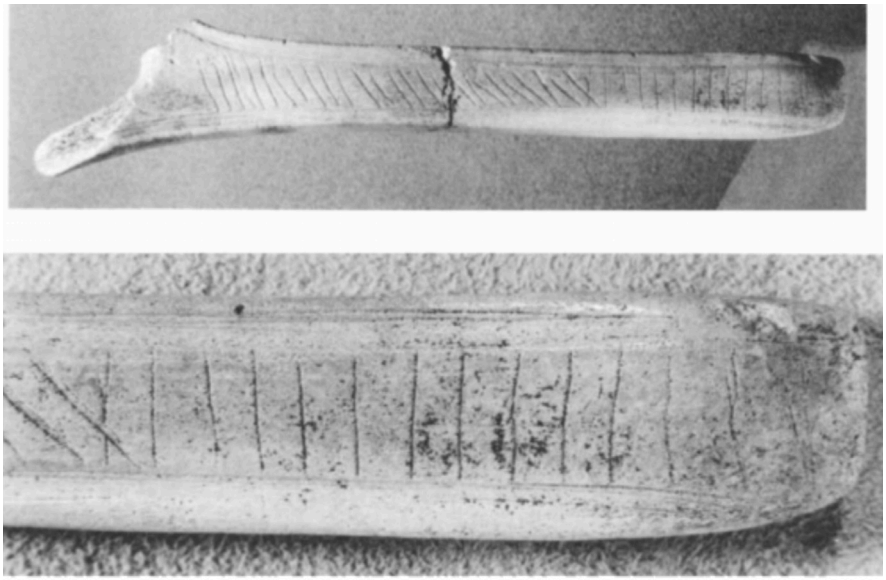

Fig. 3 Magdalenian perforated baton, Grotte du Placard (Charente, France), PL 55064. Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France. © Alexander Marshack

Is it possible for us to envisage *Le Sacre* as a similar technology, a form of prehistoric inscription that exists outside any and all pictorial, symbolic, and narrative domains? To follow this thread might be to recall the anecdotal history of the ballet, replete with tales of counting: Nijinsky, at the premiere, screaming the number of beats from the wings;[47] dancers trying to internalize complex meters (that often departed from notated musical ones).[48] We might also look afresh at the bent-over "stamping" motion—the hunkered-down bodies—that characterizes the ballet, at least in "Les Augures printaniers": for what is this episode if not the ritual demonstration of non-figurative tallies, series after series of stubbornly illegible, meaningless notches inscribed onto three-dimensional space?

47 See *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, ed. Joan Ross Acocella, unexpurgated ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), xiii; and Mindy Aloff, *Dance Anecdotes: Stories from the Worlds of Ballet, Broadway, the Ballroom, and Modern Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 15.

48 Stravinsky commented on this disparity in his notes to the four-hand piano version of *Le Sacre*; see Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *"The Rite of Spring": Sketches 1911–1913* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1969), Appendix III, 38–39.

On the other hand, attending to these notches—to a system of inscription that runs against our tendency to interpret images as signs or narratives—might lead us towards the opposite end of the historical spectrum: that is, to much more advanced apparatus. Recent commentators have argued that *Le Sacre* fractures and fixes bodily movement in a manner similar to contemporary technologies of visualization such as early film and chronophotography, the name given by French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey to his method of capturing separate frames in succession and then graphically inscribing them alongside each other.[49] But, more important for present purposes, the ballet also fractures and fixes music, picking apart melodies and metrical systems, then rendering them as discrete, measurable units. The choreography, perceived in this way, might be envisaged as a particular type of machine, a sound-writer or phonautograph—the first instrument devised to inscribe the movements of a taut membrane under the influence of sound. Indeed, early technologies of sound recording (i.e., not playback) were understood as predominantly visual apparatus: they translated soundwaves into series of etches or grooves, a type of visual patterning not unlike the notches and tallies described above (see figure 4).[50]

Of course, "reading" any modern art—literature, music, theater—against a backdrop of contemporary technological invention is a now-trending critical maneuver. Inspired by the work of Friedrich Kittler and, more recently, Sara Danius, scholars readily assume a dialectical relationship between technology and early modernist aesthetics: the two, we are led to believe, are co-constitutive.[51] The nub of the argument here seems to relate to the dancers' perceived internalization of a technological mode (however prehistoric or modern we consider the apparatus): that is, their function as a sensory-perceptual machine, a technology of musical inscription that filters, segments, and registers sound as a series of atomized quanta. There is also a more basic point here: according to this argument, the dancers

49 See, for example, Juliet Bellow, *Modernism on Stage: The Ballets Russes and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), esp. 57.

50 For more on the earliest technologies of sound inscription, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Haun Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm: Orality and Its Technologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

51 See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

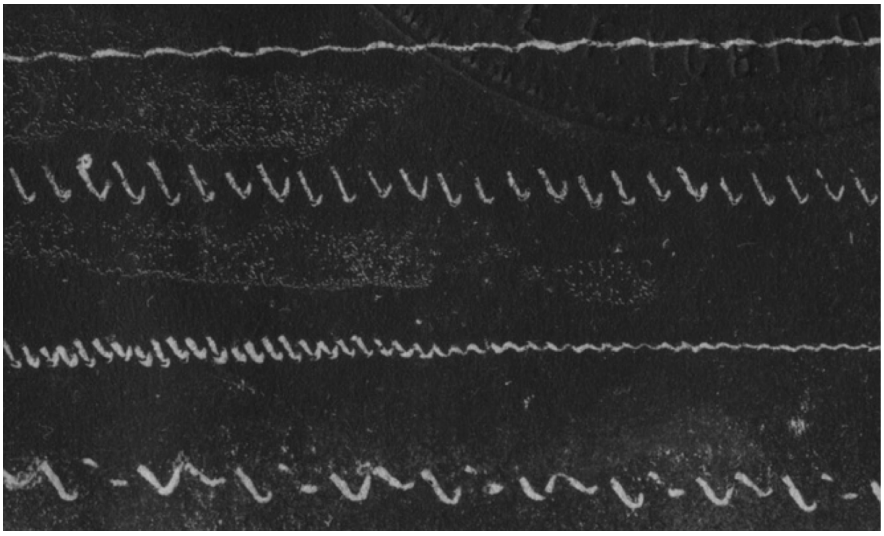

Fig. 4 Detail of a phonautogram by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville, *Phonautographie de la voix humaine à distance*, 1857. INPI. Credits: FirstSounds.org

are defined phenomenologically not in terms of their visual capacity, as we might expect following traditional Enlightenment notions of self and narrative, but in terms of audition—hearing is thematized onstage, is privileged as a perceptual phenomenon.

This point also resonates across the literature. Recent studies, particularly within literary criticism, have explored the heightened significance of sound and auditory experience in modernity, gesturing not only to the development of various acoustic technologies in the early twentieth century (the telephone, phonograph, and later radio), but to an emerging affiliation between the self and the ear—what Steven Connor calls "the modern auditory I."[52] Indeed, at a time when increasingly complex visual apparatus brought into question the reliability of the naked eye, threatening a continuity between seeing and knowing, the ear opened up a new and different way of engaging in the world, a mode of lived experience defined in terms of presence, immediacy, and embodiment. More specifically, as Connor ex-

52 See Steven Connor, "The Modern Auditory I," in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), 203–23. I have also enjoyed (on literature) Angela Frattarola, "Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce," *Journal of Modern Literature* 33, no. 1 (2009): 132–53; and (on aurality more broadly) Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

plains, if the visual self can be conceptualized as a single perspective from which the exterior world opens up in three-dimensional certitude, the listening self is defined "not as a point but as a membrane, not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel."[53]

The Body and the Senses

Connor provides another—and especially useful—analogy, one that might well recall the above description of *Le Sacre*'s hunkered-down bodies, nudging us further towards that argument about the dancer as a laboring machine, an intermediary apparatus through which "noises and musics" pass. We could push the argument further by suggesting that *Le Sacre* stages the "modern auditory I": that, like literature by Auguste de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Marcel Proust, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (and, later, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce), the ballet uses sound and auditory experience to subvert traditionally ocular conceptualizations of subjectivity, in doing so modelling a new kind of phenomenological experience. Indeed, if as Connor writes "visualism signifies distance, differentiation and domination," then audition implies intimacy, immediacy, and immersion—a way of being in the world that appeals directly to the body and the senses.[54]

Connor's words are further instructive in that they provide a useful segue into the topic of attention: that is, the auditory experience of bodies in the audience, as well as those onstage, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, on the evening of May 29, 1913. There is of course an embarrassment of literature about spectators' response to *Le Sacre*, of which a good deal, particularly interviews and memoirs written many years after the premiere, has been exaggerated for effect. Historians, perhaps inevitably, have made much of the "tumultuous demonstrations":[55] the hissing, snickering, shouting, laughter, whistling, hushing, and applauding of an audience seemingly divided into strongly opposing camps. But efforts have also been made to get to the facts, in particular, the consternation felt with regard to Nijinsky's choreography: whereas Stravinsky remained well respected and highly esteemed by the bulk of the audience (the composer was merely heading

53 Connor, "The Modern Auditory I," 207.
54 Connor, 204.
55 Pierre Lalo, "La Musique," *Le Temps*, June 3, 1913, 3.

in the wrong direction, having "compromised" himself by working with Nijinsky), the choreographer was subjected to a barrage of criticism, his choreography labelled "ugly," "monotonous," and "tedious."[56]

Less has been made, though, of two features of critics' reviews that strike a resonant chord with Connor's words, above. One is the sense of overall astonishment reported, an astonishment that no doubt contributed significantly to the infamous "ruckus," but also to a critical loss for words. A number of commentators in the daily and specialist press acknowledged that *Le Sacre* seemed designed to shock, confuse, and startle;[57] some confessed their own professional bewilderment, admitting that they couldn't express an opinion, couldn't even understand the work, and couldn't work out whether it was a masterpiece or not.[58] Certainly, there was a shared sense of critical non-comprehension: an inability to register, contemplate, and compare the ballet to works of a more assured and collectively approved greatness.[59]

This feature of the reviews, which might seem ironic in view of later attempts to co-opt Stravinsky's score into an emerging aesthetic of "cérébrisme,"[60] comes into greater clarity when viewed alongside a second feature: critics' visceral reactions to the ballet. For while their mental and intel-

56 Lalo, 3. As Bullard notes, Lalo's review offers a particularly severe criticism of Nijinsky (and his "lack of choreographic imagination"), while remaining deferential to Stravinsky ("a prodigiously ingenious and skillful composer"). See Bullard, "The First Performance," 2:85. For a careful and thorough account of critics' reviews, see Sarah Gutsche-Miller, "What the Papers Say," in *The Cambridge Companion to "The Rite of Spring,"* ed. Davinia Caddy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

57 See, for example, Gustave Linor, "Au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées: *Le Sacre du Printemps*," *Comoedia*, May 30, 1913; and Marguerite Casalonga, "Nijinsky et *Le Sacre du Printemps*," *Comoedia illustré*, June 5, 1913.

58 See, for example, Louis Vuillemin, "Au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées: *Le Sacre du Printemps. Ballet en deux actes, de M. Igor Stravinsky*," *Comoedia*, May 31, 1913; Georges Pioch, "Les Premières. Théâtre des Champs-Elysées: *Le Sacre du Printemps*," *Gil Blas*, May 30, 1913; and Pierre Lalo, "La musique." As Bullard notes, only the most hostile critics—Adolphe Boschot, Paul Souday, Henri de Curzon, and Adolphe Jullien—wrote with any degree of self-assurance; see Bullard, "The First Performance," 1:166–67.

59 Jacques-Émile Blanche, writing an annual overview of theatrical life in the French capital, admits that "I hesitated a long time before I dared to take *Le Sacre du Printemps* as the principal subject of these remarks." He goes on to acknowledge that, following the 1913 Russian season, "it has taken us a little while to regain our aplomb"; see his article "Un bilan artistique de 1913. Les russes—*Le Sacre du Printemps*," *La revue de Paris*, December 1, 1913 (Bullard, 2:313–14).

60 See the January–February 1914 edition of the short-lived journal *Montjoie!*, including editor Ricciotto Canudo's "Manifeste de l'art cérébriste," 9.

lectual capacities may have been compromised, commentators registered acute sensory stimulation. To be sure, this kind of intense physiological response was not unusual in the face of a Russian extravaganza. Describing, at the outset of his *Le Sacre* review, the effect of Diaghilev's first Parisian ventures, composer-critic Xavier Leroux writes:

> We trembled on our legs like drunken men as golden pinwheels and diamonds danced before our eyes, as our temples pounded. Slowly we emerged from this state of numbness; and with our bodies still blue with ecchymosis we could finally reopen our eyes in which a thousand phosphenes were exploding.[61]

Others thought—or rather sensed—in similar ways. *Le Sacre* brought about "an absolutely new feeling," a feeling "never before experienced and of the most incisive acuity." It had an "overwhelming," "intoxicating," "suffocating" effect: it "crushes us"; it "knocks us flat."[62] In a long and perceptive review, Jacques Rivière elaborated further. To Rivière, the "oddities" of Stravinsky's score in particular were designed not to startle or to provoke admiration, but, rather, "to put us into direct contact, into immediate communion with the most wonderful and amazing things": "[they] bring us close … to introduce us to the object on an equal footing."[63] That "object," we learn, is "the passions of the soul":

> We are brought closer to them, we are led into their presence in a more immediate way, we contemplate them before the arrival of language, before they are hemmed in by a host of innumerable and nuanced yet chattering words. … In the dark night of the intelligence, we are aware; we are there with our body, and it is that which understands.[64]

Presence, immediacy, embodiment: this is a tantalizing proposition, and one that echoes Connor's words on the lived experience of the "modern auditory I," a condition shot through with visceral reactions and almost erotic stimulation. Are we to imagine, then, a shared mode of sensory receptivi-

61 Xavier Leroux, "La saison russe," *Musica* 12, no. 131 (August 1913), 153 (Bullard, 2:214).

62 See René Chalupt, "Le mois du musicien," *La Phalange* 8 (August 20, 1913): 169–75 (Bullard, 224–30); and Jean Marnold, "Musique," *Mercure de France* 24, no. 391 (October 1, 1913): 623–30 (Bullard, 250–68).

63 Jacques Rivière, "*Le Sacre du Printemps*," *La Nouvelle revue française* 5, no. 59 (November 1, 1913): 706–30 (Bullard, 280).

64 Bullard, 298.

ty—symptomatic of a self immersed in the world—both on stage and off? Are the spectators in the theater to be aligned, in their mode of auditory attention, with the dancers pounding the floor? *Aligned* might be the wrong word to use here, for at issue is the collapse of conventional boundaries between spectator and spectated: the capacity of auditory experience to disintegrate and reconfigure space. For the self as membrane, we might argue, spills out over the stage and into the stalls: with a marked auditory consciousness, that self enjoys direct, untrammeled access to the world, an affective experience that is inherently embodied and intersubjective.

Haptics

It is tempting to describe this experience in terms of haptics, a relatively modern term, trending across phenomenology and film studies, that emphasizes proximity and mutually constitutive exchange: that is, a sense of reciprocity between subject and object, the former an active agent in a corporeal and quasi-erotic encounter with the latter. Laura U. Marks, mentioned earlier, has proved highly influential on the subject, exploring the remit of what she calls "haptic visuality," a mode of experience in which the eyes function like organs of touch. Marks's seminal study *The Skin of the Film* investigates "haptic aesthetics" in relation to a specific kind of intercultural cinema, a genre that, dealing with "the power-inflected spaces of diaspora, (post- or neo-) colonialism, and cultural apartheid," appeals to an intimate, embodied viewing experience—the sensory and affective process of coming into contact with the skin of the film text.[65]

Marks's work is not only interpretive, not only concerned with the fundamental nature of the decisions we make about how films embody meaning. It also has a valuable historiographical dimension aimed at loosening the grip of art-historical narratives that uphold the superiority of Western illusionistic representation. "Haptic aesthetics," she explains, emerge within distinct cultural historical periods, such as modernism, when "meaning came to reside in the embodied and intersubjective relationship between work and viewer or reader."[66] Referencing a "modernist revaluation of tactility" ("the return of materiality to the mediums of art and literature"), Marks identifies the modernist period with a flare up of interest in the sub-

65 Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 1.
66 Marks, 168.

jectivity and physiology of vision, gesturing towards her broader attempt "to redeem aesthetics from their transcendental implications by emphasizing the corporeal and immanent nature of the experience of art."[67] Particularly important within Marks' analysis, at least for present purposes, is a case singled out for its overt haptic dynamics: "the early-cinema phenomenon of a 'cinema of attractions,'" a genre that, according to Marks, appealed to an immediate, "embodied response."[68] Enabling what she calls "bodily identification," rather than "narrative identification," the "cinema of attractions"—as Gunning has not tired of telling us—addressed spectators directly, sometimes exaggerating the sense of confrontation such that it takes on the quality of a physical assault.[69] Contact between subject and object, not mimetic representation, was the source and means of meaning constitution; distanced identification was substituted for the immediacy and intersubjectivity of sensory perception.

An Aesthetic of "Attractions" (Conclusion)

Marks thus steers us back towards the framing analogies that this article has sought to elaborate: at base, between the "cinema of attractions," Fuller's dance theater, and the Russians' *Sacre du printemps*; and between all three and the phenomenology of the modern metropolis. The first analogy, as I hope to have shown, is based not only on an equivalence of structure (fractured), temporality (disjunct), teleology (denied), narrativity (also denied), presentational mode (exhibitionary), and representational aspect (non-figural); parallel modes of attention (immediate, embodied, haptic, immersive) and experience (non-identificatory) can be discerned within historical source materials and envisaged in a hermeneutical sense. This is not to mention the positioning of music, in the two dance examples, as artifice, apparatus, or mediating technology—the sonorous equivalent of Professor Welton's frontal stare: silent cinema's aesthetic of acknowledgement. Indeed, I would argue in favor of this musical equivalence despite radically different means. To put this other words, how both examples establish and sustain a similar musical disposition differs drastically: Fuller tends to disregard her music's expressive connotations, but powerfully foregrounds

67 Marks, 167, 169.
68 Marks, 170.
69 Marks, 170–71.

that music's status as a signature tune, an artificial component of the theatrical spectacle; *Le Sacre* also foregrounds music as part of an apparatus of presentation, but does so by means of an intensity of inscription, a battery of music-movement alignments that suggests a distinctly modern and auditory phenomenological experience.

In closing, I want to raise, albeit briefly, some further considerations on the historical stakes of my analogies. Following Gunning, Gaudreault, and others, I have presented "attractions" as unique to the early twentieth century, a contingent product of a specifically modern experiential landscape defined in terms of mobility, flux, incredulity, novelty, non-continuity, and perceptual change. Yet this claim surely oversimplifies: what, we might ask, of the emergence of "attractions" in other periods and genres? The cinematic "attractions" of Sergei Eisenstein's montage practice, established in the early 1920s, come immediately to mind, as do the operatic "attractions" of nineteenth-century Italy (say, the typical Rossinian cabaletta), twentieth-century Brechtian theater, besides the "acinema" of Jean-Francois Lyotard's philosophical imagination. A more obscure example might be the so-called "theater music" associated with the ancient Greek dithyramb—a choral hymn to honor Dionysus. This musical genre conforms almost exactly to the "attractions" template, with an emphasis on display, innovation, and variety, a formlessness of structure, an irregular temporality, an ethos of conscious display, and an appeal to the senses not to the intellect.[70]

What if we were to embrace these far-flung examples as a call to envisage the "attractions" model not as a locus of stability or fixed meaning, but rather as an impulse of change, transformation, and mutability? Charting "attractions" across historical periods and places might well unlock dimensions of significance that help us chronicle emergent practices of looking, listening, and spectating, as well as, in a formal-aesthetic sense, shifting modes of presentation, enunciation, intermediality, and address. This call to problematize the cinematographic *dispositif* might also lead inwards: that is, to a realization of the variability or transmutation that can emerge within a single work. In the case of *Le Sacre*, my thoughts on the hunkered-down "stamping" might well prompt a comparison of ballet and early cinema; but this comparison cannot be sustained across the entire

70 See Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson, eds., *Music and the Muses: The Culture of "Mousikē" in the Classical Athenian City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Barbara Kowalzig and Peter Wilson, eds., *Dithyramb in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

work. To me at least, the very opening of the ballet does indeed epitomize the "attractions" aesthetic: the bassoon, acting as a kind of cinematic barker or *bonisseur*, accustoms the audience to a state of shock, its musical discourse (non-continuous temporality, wandering structure, agglutinative development, undisciplined rhythm and meter, as well as the uncertainty and variability of sound production) a means of mediating the theatrical "attraction" to follow.[71] But then there is the very end, the Chosen One's Sacrificial Dance. Some commentators (Taruskin, Adorno) have described the vacuous dance of a helpless individual—Stravinsky's "Great Victim," the original title of the work—willing to sacrifice herself "to the collective," "without tragedy" and through "self-annihilation."[72] With an emphasis on shocks, reflex actions, and physical immediacy, as well as Stravinsky's musical "hypostatization," this now-standard description evokes a Chosen One acted upon by the theatrical apparatus—evokes an aesthetic of "attraction," we might argue.[73] But what about an alternative perspective (following Tamara Levitz's nuanced and historically sensitive scholarship) that emphasizes the communicative potential of dance, the emotional experience of the spectator, and Nijinsky's/the dancer's angry passion?[74] This line of interpretation might endorse the very opposite of the "attractions" principle—namely, narrative and causality, distanced identification, listening as that kind of "figural entrainment" described earlier.

Going further might raise the issue not of identifying opposites and generating labels, but rather of sketching the displacement process: the ways in which dance theater reshapes a cinematographic *dispositif* in its primordial dimensions; and, in doing so, produces new and heterogeneous subjectivities. While the concept of subjectivity has remained under the surface of this study, it surely demands interrogation, if only as a way of deconstructing basic dualisms such as activity and passivity, subjugation and domination, identification and estrangement, absorption and theatricality.

71 For more on the traditional *bonisseur*, see Germain Lacasse, "The Lecturer and the Attraction," in Strauven, *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, 181–91.

72 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 111; see also Richard Taruskin, "A Myth of the Twentieth Century: *The Rite of Spring*, the Tradition of the New, and 'The Music Itself,'" *Modernism/Modernity* 2, no. 1 (1995): 1–26.

73 Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, 1:962.

74 See Tamara Levitz, "The Chosen One's Choice," in *Beyond Structural Listening? Postmodern Modes of Hearing*, ed. Andrew Dell'Antonio (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 70–108.

With this last pairing, one that gestures to the landmark art-historical work of Michael Fried, I may have stepped into perilous waters:[75] How does the concept and practice of theatricality—the assumption of objecthood and attendant self-consciousness of viewing—relate to the cinematographic "attraction"? Does absorption, into a kind of transcendental sphere, necessarily imply identification, what I loosely described as "figural entrainment"? What sort of phenomenological engagement might be shared by viewers of painting and performance art, and spectators of cinema and ballet? And how does art, not to mention Fried's "non-art," variously disclose, uphold, and subvert the positions and activities of its beholders? On these questions, as on the matter of subjectivity/-ties, there is much work to be done, work that might well be both extensive, invoking multiple genres or media, and foundational, grappling with longstanding issues of art, its ontological reality, agentive qualities, signifying regimes, and psychic address, not to mention its in-built concept of the spectator, their sensory perceptions, and physiological orientation. This is not to mention the significance of what is nowadays a loaded business, "context": in the present case, the distinctly modern and newly sensualized spectacle characteristic of the Western metropolis. I hope that the wide-angled searching for conceptual equivalence attempted in this article might be productive going forward: on the one hand, it might help open up our subjects of study to truly interdisciplinary critique; on the other, it might prompt us to refine and refocus our attention on music and the intimations of meaning that flow from it.

75 See Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, and his essay "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967): 12–23.

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Abstract

In this essay I take up the question of whether the "cinema of attractions," as identified and analyzed by film scholars Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault, might be a useful tool for critical analysis not only of early silent film, its exhibitionist aesthetics, and approach to spectatorship, but of theatrical dance from the period. Certainly, as for its general historical currency, the "cinema of attractions" is thought to encode the culture of modernity from which it arose: the visual spectacle, sensory fascination, bodily engagement, mechanical rhythm, violent juxtapositions, and new experiences of time and space available within the modern urban environment. Moreover, that cinema relied in no small part on dance itself: as a performing art, dance was central to the "attractions" industry, prime raw material starring The Body in Motion, a favorite fascination of contemporary art and popular entertainment. My aim is to push the analogy further, suggesting how cinema and theatrical dance might cue a similar mode of attention: that is, despite the former's reliance on the camera, its reproductive aesthetic and industrial mechanicity, and the latter's live theatrical aspect. Indeed, in the latter, I argue, music can be analogized to the camera itself, helping determine and sustain a particular attention economy, while pointing to itself—just as filmed objects stare at the camera—as artifice or contrivance.

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ARTICLES

Performance as Transformation: The Laughing Songs of *Death in Venice* in Literature, Film, and Opera

Janina Müller

In a scene towards the end of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* (1912), a musical performance leads to an outburst of laughter. Shortly after the protagonist Gustav von Aschenbach becomes aware that cholera is spreading in the city of Venice, a band of Neapolitan street musicians entertains the unsuspecting guests of the Grand Hôtel des Bains on the Lido. Both Aschenbach and his beloved Tadzio are present in what seems to be a precarious situation: the boy constantly turns his gaze toward the older man, who is trying hard to keep his affection from being noticed by Tadzio's family. Meanwhile the band performs a love duet and a popular tune. The conspicuous looking guitarist-singer with his red hair, his salacious gestures, and carbolic smell soon reminds us of similar uncanny figures that already have crossed Aschenbach's path: the wanderer who stirred the protagonist's desire for an adventurous journey at the cemetery in Munich, the grotesque "false youth" on the ship to Venice, and the Charon-like gondolier. For the knowing reader, then, the leader of the ensemble is entangled in a net of symbolic references to death, sickness, and the Dionysian spirit that haunts Aschenbach's soul. With this in mind, we can now turn to the fatal encore of the performance: "a brash popular number in an unintelligible dialect and with a refrain of laughter."[1] The laughter soon spreads around the audience, who does not realize that it is being ridiculed by the outrageous figure:

> He bent his knees, slapped his thighs, clutched his sides, he nearly exploded, shrieking now rather than laughing; he pointed to the terrace, as if there were nothing more amusing than the people laughing up there, and before long

[1] Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 115.

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> everyone was laughing, everyone in the garden and on the verandah, including the waiters, lift attendants, and porters in the doorways.[2]

Through this act of mimetic contagion, the whole performance culminates in a Dionysian frenzy. At the same time, the uproarious laughter hints at the dissemination of the cholera disease, symbolically anticipating the fateful destiny of those present, including Aschenbach.

The performance of the street musicians marks a particularly rich and dramaturgically central scene, one in which laughter gains a "transformative power" over the members of the audience, turning them from spectators into co-participants.[3] As such, it is given special weight in the two most famous adaptations of the novella—Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* (*Morte a Venezia*, 1971) and Benjamin Britten's eponymous opera, which premiered only two years after the film.[4] Except for the "brash popular number" with the laughing refrain, Mann does not specify the repertoire performed by the band in detail. Thus, each adaptation can potentially enrich the scene by inserting preexistent or newly composed songs that provide some sort of commentary on Aschenbach's infatuation. While it has occasionally been pointed out that the songs used by Visconti and Britten ring with irony,[5] it remains to be more fully explored how both the film and the opera

[2] Mann, *Death in Venice*, 116.

[3] My reading draws on Erika Fischer-Lichte's notion of performance as a liminal and transformative event from which "change to the physiological, energetic, affective, and motoric state" of the audience can emerge. Though her focus lies on performance art since the 1960s, her understanding of performance as transformation is particularly well suited to examine the novella scene and its intermedial transpositions. See her *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, transl. Saskya Iris Jain (London: Routledge, 2008), 177.

[4] Several authors deal with the novella, film, and opera in a (media-)comparative approach without commenting on the scene at hand: Ernest W.B. Hess-Lüttich and Susan A. Liddell, "Medien-Variationen: Aschenbach und Tadzio in Thomas Manns *Der Tod in Venedig*, Luchino Viscontis *Morte a Venezia*, Benjamin Brittens *Death in Venice*," in *Code-Wechsel: Texte im Medienvergleich*, ed. Ernest W.B. Hess-Lüttich and Roland Posner (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), 27–54; Roger Hillman, "Deaths in Venice," *Journal of European Studies* 22, no. 4 (1992): 291–311; Philip Kitcher, *Deaths in Venice: The Cases of Gustav von Aschenbach* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[5] Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Film and Literature. The Case of *Death in Venice*: Luchino Visconti and Thomas Mann," *The German Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1980): 169. With regard to Britten's opera, Lloyd Whitesell notes the music's "mocking, streetwise commentary on the ridiculousness of [Aschenbach's] desires." See his "Notes of Unbelonging," in *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on An Inexplicit Art*, ed. Vicki P. Stroeher and Justin Vickers (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), 226.

convert an instance of narrated music into extended musical moments of embodied spectacle and the way in which they actualize or reconfigure the transformative space of the performance. A particular focus of this article, therefore, lies on the various manifestations of the laughing song. Originally a popular hit dating back to the early days of phonography, Mann first transcribed it from sound to text, after which it was re-rendered in sound again.[6] In addition to tracing this versatile phono-graphic shifting of the song and its paroxysm of laughter, I will also situate the respective scenes within the different interpretative frames adopted by Visconti and Britten.

Mann and Myth: Adapting Death in Venice

As Linda Hutcheon reminds us, "the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective."[7] With this in mind, we can deliberately bypass some of the more dismissive evaluations championing Mann's original over its allegedly inferior remediations.[8] In-

[6] The laughing song described in the novella shows striking similarities with Berardo Cantalamessa's popular Neapolitan hit "'A risa." That this song provided the template for Mann is also noted by Paolo Isotta, *Il ventriloquo di Dio: Thomas Mann, la musica nell'opera letteraria* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1983), 160, and Fausto Petrella. The latter claims that Mann knew the song from one of his Venetian sojourns, citing a letter from Erika Mann to Mann's Polish translator, Andrzej Dołęgowski, dated 24 September 1964 as proof. See his *L'ascolto e l'ostacolo: psicoanalisi e musica* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2018), 167–70. In her letter, Erika Mann writes that everything depicted in the novella, including the encounter with the street singers, had really happened during the family's 1911 stay at the Grand Hôtel des Bains in Venice. With this, she echoes the well-known autobiographical account given by Mann himself in his *Lebensabriß* (1930). However, since Mann makes no reference to either the song or Cantalamessa, the connection remains implicit.

[7] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. with Siobhan O'Flynn (London: Routledge, 2013), 8. Within the field of adaptation studies, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "dialogism" has proven especially influential in overcoming the pitfalls of "fidelity criticism." See Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation" in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000), 54–76 and, more recently, Dennis Cutchins, "Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 71–86.

[8] This kind of criticism was mostly directed against Visconti, whose film was seen as failing to match the complexity and subtle irony of Mann's novella. Furthermore, his equation of Aschenbach and Gustav Mahler drew strong objections. See, for example, Philip Reed, "Aschenbach Becomes Mahler: Thomas Mann as Film," in *Benjamin Britten: "Death in Ven-*

stead, let us start by recalling a few characteristic features of both adaptations that affect the scenes at hand. In the opera, Aschenbach's experience is rendered subjectively as a sort of interior monologue. What happens on stage might be conceived as a projection from within the protagonist, made visible.[9] This change in point of view, while allowing Aschenbach to express himself in his own musical voice, entails a loss of narrational distance that Mann so carefully composed into his telling of the story. The narrator here serves as a moral compass by which Aschenbach's increasing infatuation with Tadzio is measured and eventually denounced:

> What the very skillfully shaped opera story jettisons is Mann's narrator, the mocking, moralizing, explicitly ironizing voice that both describes what Aschenbach does or thinks, and tries to direct our thoughts about it. […] The outer narrative dimension was… absorbed into the music, submerged so to speak in the musical element, and especially into the orchestra.[10]

Edward Said's observation provides us with a first clue regarding the role of the staged performance of the "Strolling Players" (act 2, scene 10). As we will see, the scene furnishes exactly this kind of ironic commentary in place of the absent narrator.

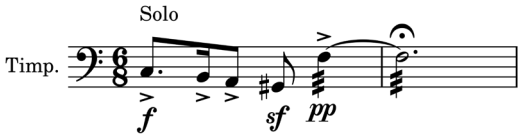
Another substantial change concerns the visual as well as musical spelling-out of the novella's symbolic subtext. The ominous half-mythological figures appearing in the story are impersonated by the same bass-baritone who also interprets the voice of Dionysus (besides the roles of the Hotel Barber and the Hotel Manager). Musically, this row of Dionysian harbingers is connected by a returning motif associated with percussion instru-

ice," ed. Donald Mitchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 178–83. Yet, as has also been remarked by several critics, turning the protagonist from writer to composer is more in tune with the possibilities of the filmic medium, favoring the immediacy of aural experience. See, for instance, Irving Singer, "*Death in Venice*: Visconti and Mann," *MLN* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1348–59.

[9] The idea of visualizing the scenario as if it were a projection from the inside of Aschenbach's mind also informed Colin Graham's minimalist staging of the first production of *Death in Venice* with Peter Pears in the role of Aschenbach, which took place on June 16, 1973, at the Snape Maltings Concert Hall (Snape, UK) near Aldeburgh. See Christopher Chowrimootoo, "Bourgeois Opera: *Death in Venice* and the Aesthetics of Sublimation," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 22, no. 2 (2010): 183–85.

[10] Edward W. Said, "Not All the Way to the Tigers: Britten's *Death in Venice*," in *On Mahler and Britten: Essays in Honour of Donald Mitchell on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Philip Reed (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), 269.

ments creating an exotic aura of strangeness. It is first presented by the timpani, when the mysterious Traveller appears on the steps of the mortuary chapel in the Munich cemetery (act 1, scene 1). Though the motif has no fixed melodic or rhythmic structure, being varied throughout the opera, it nevertheless has a distinct shape, combining a descending scale movement with an upward leap (see example 1).



Ex. 1 Britten, *Death in Venice*, act 1, scene 1, rehearsal no. 13, Traveller's motif. Transcribed by permission of Faber Music, London.

After the Traveller's aria, it immediately infiltrates Aschenbach's vocal line ("Strange, strange hallucination," rehearsal no. 16), as he is inevitably drawn into the stranger's vision of a faraway tropical wilderness. In the remainder of the opera, it recurs in the vocal parts of the Dionysian characters themselves (see, for instance, the introductory phrases of the Elderly Fop and the Gondolier at rehearsal nos. 27 and 48), while various drums, including tom-toms, are usually present to remind the listener of their foreign origin.

Through musical means, then, the opera renders explicit what is only implied in the novella. This extends to the ancient gods themselves: Dionysus and Apollo both make a vocal appearance contesting Aschenbach's soul. For the silent role of Tadzio, Britten comes up with an ingenious solution. The boy and his entourage are cast as dancers as to occupy their own expressive realm, removed from that of Aschenbach. Tadzio's glittering, light-flooded sonority invokes idioms of gamelan music. As such, it is more obviously connected to the sphere of Apollo as manifested in the balletic beach episode (The Games of Apollo, act 1, scene 7), which closes the first act.[11]

[11] Before his visit to Asia in 1956, Britten had come in contact with Balinese music through the Canadian composer and ethnomusicologist Colin McPhee. In the words of Anthony Sheppard: "Britten particularly enjoyed watching the performance of the boys' gamelan, a type of ensemble initially formed by McPhee twenty years earlier. This connection between the musical exotic and homosexual opportunity is central to several of Britten's operas and

Visconti's filmic adaptation, by contrast, eliminates the novella's mythological layers, including Aschenbach's nightmare of a bacchantic orgy signaling his complete surrender to the god of ecstasy, desire, and madness. Thus, we do not necessarily identify the guitarist-singer with the Dionysian force to which Aschenbach, in both the novella and the opera, falls prey. Yet, with his pale face and decayed teeth, he remains an unsettling appearance, combining features of death and devil. Roger Wiehe places the musicians' scene in the late-medieval iconographic tradition of the *danse macabre*.[12] Since the *dance macabre* imagery became popular with the spreading of the Black Death plague in the fourteenth century, the historical connection is clear enough. However, Wiehe's reading remains largely deaf to the music and the laughing song in particular, which gains a different meaning in light of Visconti's intertextual strategy.

As many critics have noted—in some cases with a disapproving tone—Visconti turned to Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947) in search of material that could be interwoven with the idea of Aschenbach as a late-romantic composer and Gustav Mahler's doppelgänger.[13] To establish this link in a straightforward manner, Visconti has his protagonist arriving in Venice on a steamer named *Esmeralda*. Further borrowings are restricted to flashback scenes, one of which shows Aschenbach visiting a brothel. The episode is evidently a reference to the fateful syphilis infection which seals Adrian Leverkühn's pact with the devil. Another noticeable allusion to *Doctor Faustus* is the mocking laughter, a gesture originally associated with Leverkühn. Through its occurrences throughout the film, it links

receives its clearest expression in his final opera, *Death in Venice*." *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Music Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 143. For a detailed account of Britten's compositional use of gamelan idioms, see Mervyn Cooke, *Britten and the Far East: Asian Influences in the Music of Benjamin Britten* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 220–44.

[12] Roger Wiehe, "The *Danse macabre* as the Crucial Moment in Story and Film Versions of *Death in Venice*," in *The Symbolism of Vanitas in the Arts, Literature, and Music: Comparative and Historical Studies*, ed. Liana DeGirolami Cheney (Lewiston: Mellen, 1992), 89. The argument was first introduced in his earlier article "Of Art and Death: Film and Fiction Versions of *Death in Venice*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1988): 210–15.

[13] Vaget, for example, finds that "Visconti's toying with the Doctor-Faustus-connection strikes one as pretentious and constitutes a blunder in the conception of the film." See "Film and Literature. The Case of *Death in Venice*: Luchino Visconti and Thomas Mann," 172. Philip Kitcher makes a similar argument in his *Deaths in Venice*, 132. For a more positive assessment of Visconti's alterations, see Werner Faulstich and Ingeborg Faulstich, *Modelle der Filmanalyse* (Munich: W. Fink, 1977), 20–23.

the various fateful encounters and invests the respective characters with diabolical overtones. I will come back to this point later on.

The film's soundtrack, with the Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth Symphony as center piece, plays a key role in evoking a specific turn-of-the-century ambience. While the Adagietto is more intimately tied to Aschenbach's inner state, the diegetic musical scenes add authentic local flavors through their use of popular genres, including operetta and Italian song, as well as their deliberately flawed, true-to-life sound (think of the amateurish ensemble performing a potpourri of excerpts from Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* in the hotel lobby or Esmeralda's piano playing in the brothel). With regard to the street musicians, however, Mann already provided a detailed account of the event, down to minute descriptions of lighting, poses, gestures, singing style, as well as audience reactions. For Visconti, the novella scene thus offered a sort of performance script that could be brought to life on the film screen.

The Street Musician's Scene in Visconti's Death in Venice

We enter this scene *in medias res*, the music having already begun. Visconti indeed takes great care to reproduce the theatrical setting as described by Mann:

> The two men and two women stood by the iron post of an arc lamp, lifting their faces, white in the glare, to the large terrace, where the guests sat ready, over coffee and cold drinks, to submit to the exhibition of local color. … The Russian family, eager to enjoy everything to the hilt, had had wicker chairs moved down into the garden so as to be closer to the performers and sat there contentedly in a semicircle.[14]

The camera soon cuts away from the musicians to the terrace where Aschenbach is smoking a cigarette, his facial expression revealing his tense inner state. Next, we see the reason for his anxiety. In one of his characteristic zoom shots, Visconti captures the figure of Tadzio leaning on the balustrade while turning his head twice toward Aschenbach in a self-assertive gesture.[15] The second time, the camera comes to rest on a medium close-up

[14] Mann, *Death in Venice*, 108–9.

[15] On the narrational function of the zoom, see Michael Wilson, "Art is Ambiguous: The Zoom in *Death in Venice*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1998): 153–56.

of him, just as the band finishes its casual entrance number. Throughout the scene, there are several synch points between the image and the music, lending a rhythmical flow to the editing.

Downstairs the band continues its program with the popular tune "Chi vuole con le donne aver fortuna" ("He who wants to be lucky with women") by the Neapolitan singer-songwriter Armando Gill, who was famous in Italy during World War I. The lyrics abound with irony when seen in light of Aschenbach's situation. First, the heteronormative framework of the song reminds us of his "aberrant" desire. Second, the light-hearted approach to love that the singer advocates stands in obvious contrast to Aschenbach's desperate and insatiable yearning.[16]

At the beginning of the song the band walks up to the terrace (figure 1). The guitarist first approaches Aschenbach and then continues to walk around the other guests, including Tadzio's family.[17] His mother is repelled by the unpleasant appearance of the man but tries to keep her composure. Tadzio, however, does not attempt to hide his repulsion: he backs away from the guitarist's approaches and seeks Aschenbach's eyes. For a brief, intense moment, the latter returns the gaze by looking directly into the camera, which has taken Tadzio's position. In granting this intimate encounter (if only implicitly), Visconti again takes a liberty with the novella. In the source-text, Aschenbach strictly avoids meeting Tadzio's eyes out of fear of being exposed. With an inviting gesture, the guitarist holds his arm out in front of Aschenbach as he sings the last line of the fourth stanza "come mi attira il letto di quel fiume" (How the bed of that river entices me.) Not coincidentally, this allusion to death as relief from suffering is directed at Aschenbach. Tadzio's mother soon becomes aware of the delicate constellation between the older man and her son and casts a watchful eye on both.

[16] The song tells the story of a man who temporarily ponders killing himself after having learned of the suicide of his former lover. However, the last stanza concludes: "Vorrei morire per non soffrire, | ma il cuore si ribella, | dice: 'perché? | tante ce n'è! | La troverai più bella!'" (I want to die so I won't suffer anymore | but the heart refuses, | saying: "Why? | There are so many [women]! | You will find a more beautiful one!").

[17] In this the film deviates from the scene in Mann's novella, where the whole ensemble remains separate from the audience on the terrace until the guitarist comes forward and starts collecting the money.

Fig. 1 Visconti, *Death in Venice*, the guitarist visits the terrace

The Strolling Players Scene in Britten's opera

In Britten's opera, the corresponding staged performance (act 2, scene 10) opens with the announcement of the Strolling Players. While Mann himself speaks of "Straßensänger" (street singers) or "Bettelvirtuosen" (beggar virtuosos), the somewhat antiquated term referring to a traveling theater group is introduced by Helen Tracy Lowe-Porter in her 1928 translation of the novella that Britten and his librettist, Myfanwy Piper, used for their adaptation.[18] Differing from the original ensemble, the group here consists of a boy, a girl, the Leader, and two acrobats who mime several instruments (i.e., flute, guitar, and trumpet). At the beginning of the scene, the solo timpani's repeated minor sixth leap (G♯2–E3), accompanied by a swirling triplet figure in the clarinet, immediately recalls the Traveller's motif. The musical texture with the ostinato scale passages in the piano is similar to the one that Britten employs for the hotel in scene 4 of act 1 (rehearsal no. 66). Having tied the identity of the Leader to earlier scenes of the opera,

[18] Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 524. Lowe-Porter's translation was instrumental in introducing *Death in Venice* to an English-speaking public. In 1925, she had been granted exclusive rights to translate the works of Mann from German into English by Alfred A. Knopf. For a critical study of the novel-to-opera adaptation of *Death in Venice*, see Clifford Hindley, "Contemplation and Reality: A Study in Britten's *Death in Venice*," *Music & Letters* 71, no. 4 (1990): 511–23.

the timpani motif conspicuously reappears at the end of the performance when the character finishes his "Laughing Song" with a "wild gesture" (rehearsal no. 257). While the hotel staff ushers the guests to their tables ("This way for the players, Signori!"), the latter respond with a brief chorus commenting on the show they are about to see. Its parodistic technique is explicitly signaled by the line "with old songs new turned." Through this extended introduction Britten prepares the listeners for the ensuing performance that actually unfolds as a play-within-a-play, making Aschenbach the prime target of mockery.

The first number "O mio carino" is a waltz-duet sung by the Girl and the Boy,[19] while the second piece "La mia nonna" marks the entrance of the sinister Leader. Both numbers are parodies of Italian folk songs. "O mio carino" is based on "Giovanottino, mi garbate tanto" for voice and piano by the composer and band leader Mario Ferradini (1863–1907).[20] It was published as sheet music in 1903 by the Florentine publisher Genesio Venturini and subsequently recorded in various arrangements by several different singers. While the precise origins of this popular Tuscan folk song remain unclear, it appears in several anthologies dating from the mid-nineteenth century at the earliest.[21] Piper translated Ferradini's version into English and provided a few additional verses, exposing Aschenbach as the object of ridicule ("For you forgotten honour, work, and duty"). Besides, the song's religious rhetoric ("How shall I save my soul, l'anima mia?") adds quite naturally to the mocking irony of the scene in suggesting that Aschenbach's relationship is morally reprehensible.

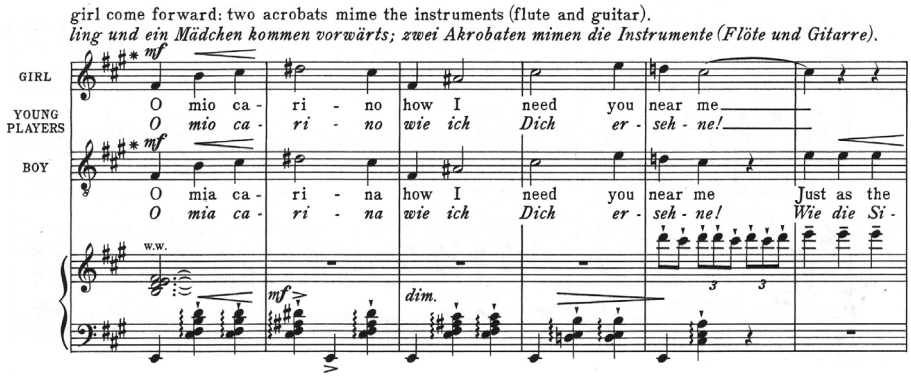
The parodistic tone is further enhanced by Britten's burlesque arrangement and its sudden harmonic shifts (example 2). Musically, the verses are grouped in six pairs, each featuring the same melody closely modelled after the first five bars of Ferradini's song. The oom-pah-pah accompaniment of the waltz is supplied by timpani, strings, and harp. Throughout the

[19] "O mio carino," as well as the first version of the Leader's song which Britten had to drop due to copyright issues, were already included in his sketchbook for the opera. See Colin Matthews, "The Venice Sketchbook," in Mitchell, *Benjamin Britten:* "*Death in Venice*," 56.

[20] See Andrea Sessa, *Il melodramma italiano, 1861–1900: dizionario bio-bibliografico dei compositori* (Florence: Olschki, 2003), 188.

[21] See *Canti popolari toscani, corsi, illirici, greci, raccolti e illustrati da N. Tommaseo con opuscolo originale del medesimo autore*, 4 vols. (Venice: Girolamo Tasso, 1841), 1:104–9; *Canti popolari toscani: raccolti e annotati da Giuseppe Tigri* (Florence: Barbera, 1856), 80 as well as *Canti popolari toscani, scelti e annotati da Giovanni Giannini* (Florence: Barbera, 1902), 143–44.

song, the timpani plays a rhythmicized E pedal tone occasionally dropping "false" accents on the weak second beat. While the key signature indicates A major, the initial melodic ascent introduces B major and then turns to the tonic via a lowered D5 ("near me").



Ex. 2 Britten, *Death in Venice*, act 2, scene 10, "O mio carino," beginning, vocal score. Reproduced by permission of Faber Music, London.

A similar shift occurs in the harmonization of the second verse "Just as the Siren needs the salt sea water," which—after a succession of dominant seventh chords (B^7, $F\sharp^7$, E^7)—plunges into the relative F♯ minor. The characteristic waltz accompaniment is temporarily suspended when Aschenbach and Tadzio appear on stage (rehearsal no. 241). Right at this moment, celli and bassoons pick up the so-called "longing motif" associated with Aschenbach's amatory fixation. A row of shimmering chords by vibraphone and glockenspiel—Tadzio's signature sound—signals the visible presence of the boy on the terrace. In contrast to the novella and film scene, in which the exchange of glances establishes a more intimate connection between the two (Tadzio actually seeks the eyes of the older man), the opera keeps them at a safe distance. However, as Philip Rupprecht aptly observes, there is a gaze-like quality about the boy's musical presence in that its vibrant glistening texture and arrested temporality seem intrinsically linked to Aschenbach's perception. Referring to the latter's first catching sight of the boy (act 1, scene 4), Rupprecht notes:

> Suddenly, everything *gleams*—the timbre of the vibraphone theme itself, and the iridescent cluster-chords beneath. The freezing of the musical action here

> is a cessation of harmonic motion. … Once Tadzio has gone, Aschenbach, as if released from hypnosis, reverts to the rational mood (and dry timbres) of his piano recitatives.[22]

Through what he calls Aschenbach's "sonic gaze,"[23] Tadzio is rendered an object of remote exotic fascination and sensory appeal.

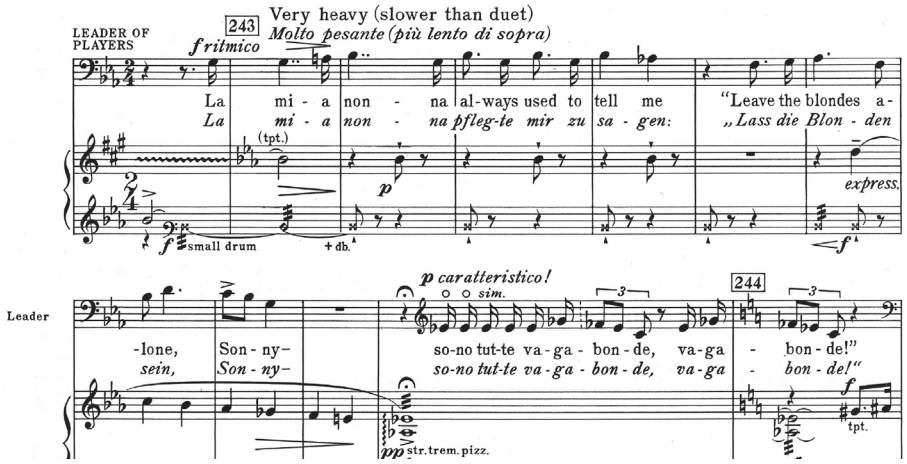
From this point on the scene gets more and more oppressive as a brash trumpet signal announces the entrance of the Leader. While the lyrics of his number "La mia nonna always used to tell me" are inspired by the popular song "La mia mamma mi diceva," the punctuated melody itself (example 3) alludes to the beginning of the Piedmontese song "Le tre colombe."[24] Compared to the preceding duet and its subtle innuendos, the Leader's solo—though not explicitly engaging with Aschenbach—strikes an uncannier note. On the surface, the song pokes fun at the infidelity of women, but the musical setting adds a grim undertone to the whole, thereby exposing the threatening character of the figure. Each of the three stanzas is set in a different key according to a sequence of rising half steps (G4 – G♯4 – A4), with the incipit played by the solo trumpet and immediately taken up by the vocal line. Otherwise, the instrumentation is utterly sparse, featuring a small drum as characteristic token of the Dionysian musical exoticism, "thrummed" pizzicato strings and piano. The latter provide a series of brusque, dissonant arpeggios accentuating the Leader's repeated *falsetto* line "Sono tutte traditore!" like an out-of-tune guitar.[25] The first of these disruptions (one measure before rehearsal no. 244) occurs with a bitonal harmony mixing C major with A♭ major. The vocal melody of "sono tutte vagabonde" further adds to the chromatic harshness through its modal inflection. The effect thus created is less comical than unsettling.

[22] Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 269.

[23] Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 267.

[24] See Paul Banks, ed., *Benjamin Britten: A Catalogue of the Published Works* (Aldeburgh: Britten-Pears Library, 1999), 145. Bank lists the song under the title "S'ai son tre colombe bianche."

[25] The *falsetto* voice is also used to characterize the Elderly Fop in the boat scene of act 1, scene 2.



Ex. 3 Britten, *Death in Venice*, act 2, scene 10, "La mia nonna," beginning, vocal score. Reproduced by permission of Faber Music, London.

The same can be said of the closing *stretta* marked "Gaily," in which the Leader repeatedly blares out his sarcastic punch line "So I shall never be able to marry—Evviva la libertà!" The instrumentation now comes to include a tuba, whose dark and menacing tone carries associations of death and disease, as we will see shortly.[26]

As in the novella and the film, Aschenbach inquires about the disinfection of Venice when the Leader collects money from the guests. Here, Britten recalls another prominent motif signaling the eminent threat to which Aschenbach remains willfully oblivious. It consists of four notes combining a descending whole tone and a half tone step separated by a rising major third, and is most commonly referred to as a sounding symbol of the plague.[27] However, tracing its deployment in the opera, it becomes clear that it has thematically intertwined connotations, ranging from Dionysian enchantment and desire to death. Britten first introduces the motif at the beginning of the Traveller's aria, set to the words "Marvels unfold!" (rehearsal no. 14). Its mysterious timbre is produced by the overlapping of sustained notes in the horn and bassoon, which also features a trill. At the end of act 1, in the section preceding the love vow, the motif now resounds

[26] See Christopher Palmer, "Britten's Venice orchestra," in Mitchell, *Benjamin Britten. "Death in Venice,"* 137–38.

[27] See Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 526.

in the low register of the bassoon (six measures after rehearsal no. 185), semantically enriched by undertones of madness and sickness as Aschenbach rebukes himself for succumbing to the illusion of befriending Tadzio ("The heat of the sun must have made me ill"). However, it is only with his following visit to the Hotel Barber's shop (act 2, scene 8) that the motif's linking with the plague becomes the predominant meaning. When the chatty Hotel Barber—who is part of the Dionysian ensemble—asks Aschenbach if he feared the sickness spreading in Venice, the latter spontaneously expresses his irritation: "Sickness! Sickness! What sickness?" (rehearsal no. 198), while the tuba repeats the motif twice in a row (D2 – C2 – E2 – E♭2). In its accumulation of meanings, the musical theme thus serves as a symbolic nexus connecting the spread of the cholera with its mythical correspondence—that is, the coming of the "stranger god."[28] The dialogue between Aschenbach and the Leader (rehearsal no. 248) is interspersed with pungent cluster versions of the motif played by the flute, oboes, clarinets, and a muted trumpet. At this point it has taken on an overtly menacing tone belying the Leader's explanations about the disinfection measures.

Rather than providing a mere comical insert, the performance of the Strolling Players is punctuated by motivic references. The orchestra, while supplying the music for the pantomimed instrumental playing on stage, also acts as a narrating voice, underpinning and connecting key moments of the unfolding drama. Though the songs themselves are rooted in popular Italian folk music and thus add *couleur locale* to the performance, Britten's parodistic treatment with its harmonic tensions and characteristic instrumentation serves to integrate them into the musical language of the opera as a whole.[29]

[28] In the novella, Dionysus is referred to as the "stranger god" due to his foreign Asian origins. Thus, his pursuing of Aschenbach is symbolically connected to the spread of Asian cholera into Europe.

[29] Drawing on Bakhtin's notions of "dialogism" and "polyphony" in the novel, Luca Zoppelli argues that stage music with its diverse musical idioms and genres contributes to the "dialogical" character of operatic discourse. The characters speak for themselves in their own musical voice and thus become emancipated from the style and narrational control of the author. See "'Stage Music' in Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2, no. 1 (1990): 29–39. In the case of Britten's *Death in Venice*, however, the composer's voice closely aligns itself with Aschenbach. The musical "I" of Aschenbach could be said to present a plural, fragmented consciousness in that it is infiltrated or populated by multiple, opposing voices, each represented through a specific musical idiom, such as the sober voice of reflection articulating itself in the recitativic parts accompanied by the piano, the Apollonian voice embodied in the gamelan-inspired orientalism pertaining to Tadzio, and the more threatening vocal realm of the Dionysian.

The Laughing Songs of Death in Venice

Let us now turn to the climax of the performance—the ominous laughing song. In Mann's literary rendering, the laughter, as part of the song's refrain, has an ambiguous character. In its rhythmically ordered structure, it constitutes an artificial musical device. Yet, when uttered by the guitarist, the laughter gains a seemingly "lifelike" quality ready to cross the boundaries of the performance itself. The breaking of the fourth wall occurs gradually in the act of singing, as the stylized laughter of the refrain veers into plain mockery aimed at the clueless audience.[30] In an ingenious manner, Mann fleshes out this liminal moment when the guitarist breaks into spasm losing control over his body and voice:

> he would choke, his voice would falter, he would press his hand to his mouth and hunch his shoulders till at just the proper moment an unbridled laugh would break, burst, bellow out of him and with such verisimilitude that it had a contagious effect on the audience, causing an objectless, self-perpetuating hilarity to take hold on the terrace as well.[31]

In its display of bodily excess, the scene exhibits a "carnivalesque" quality. Social etiquette is finally overthrown, as the audience falls into a state of intoxication. When the performance has finished, the guitarist sticks his tongue out at them, a gesture that explicitly symbolizes the inversion of hierarchy.

In the novella, music and sound are associated with the foreign sphere of Dionysus. As such, they border on the chaotic, the sexual, and the incomprehensible—from the strange, inarticulate murmuring of the gondolier and the alien-sounding idiom of the laughing song to the overpowering sonic assault of the Bacchantic round dance that Aschenbach

[30] As Manfred Dierks pointed out, it is Euripides' late tragedy *The Bacchae*, in which Dionysus triumphs over King Pentheus who refuses to worship him, that served as a model for the novella and for this scene in particular. In the play, the god comes to Thebes in human disguise, accompanied by a traveling band of Bacchantes from Asia. When the messenger announces Pentheus' death, the chorus mocks him with a foreign-sounding song of triumph. See Dierks, *Studien zu Mythos und Psychologie bei Thomas Mann. An seinem Nachlaß orientierte Untersuchungen zum* «Tod in Venedig», *zum* «Zauberberg» *und zur* «Joseph»-*Tetralogie* (Bern: Francke, 1972), 21–25.

[31] Mann, *Death in Venice*, 116.

joins in his dream.[32] For Britten's librettist, however, the "unintelligible dialect" of the song posed a problem of its own. For the Leader's second number to fit into the trajectory of the scene and develop its full dramatic potential on stage the lyrics had to be intelligible or least contain some allusive expressions:

> The real facer was the laughing song. What language could it be written in? Though incomprehensible, words here and there ought to be understood. I toyed with macaronics, using Italian, French and English or German perhaps, but my Italian was not good enough to play about with, my German almost nonexistent and there seemed no excuse for French. I thought of nonsense verse but even if it had been possible, the Englishness of it would have been unacceptable. At last it occurred to me that the Venetian dialect would have been incomprehensible to the Hotel Guests, Aschenbach included, […]. So with the help of a book of old Venetian ballads and nursery songs … I wrote a version of what was eventually used.[33]

With the draft in hand, Piper eventually consulted an Italian language expert who helped produce a more refined version in proper Venetian dialect. The refrain itself, however, was kept in English. The fact that Mann himself hints at the Neapolitan background of the guitarist ("He seemed less the Venetian type than of the race of Neapolitan comedians") is strangely ignored.[34]

The "Laughing Song" of the opera (figure 2) consists of five stanzas comprising rhetorical questions such as "Do roses flower in the midst of ice" answered by the chorus "How ridiculous you are!" While the first two stanzas present paradoxical phenomena, the following two question amorous relationships between young and old as if they were paradoxical, too. The tone of mockery is much more personal than in the novella as the Leader seems to be quite aware of Aschenbach's passion for Tadzio and his desolate condition ("Can a tired bird whistle"). One could indeed speculate whether the whole scenario, as conceived by Piper and Britten, arises from the guilt-ridden consciousness of the old man who punishes himself for his illicit feelings. On the other hand, however, the lyrics also contain an element

[32] See Marc A. Weiner, "Silence, Sound, and Song in *Der Tod in Venedig*: A Study in Psycho-Social Repression" *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 23, no. 2 (1987): 137–55.

[33] Myfanwy Piper, "The Libretto," in Mitchell, *Benjamin Britten. "Death in Venice*," 52.

[34] Mann, *Death in Venice*, 112.

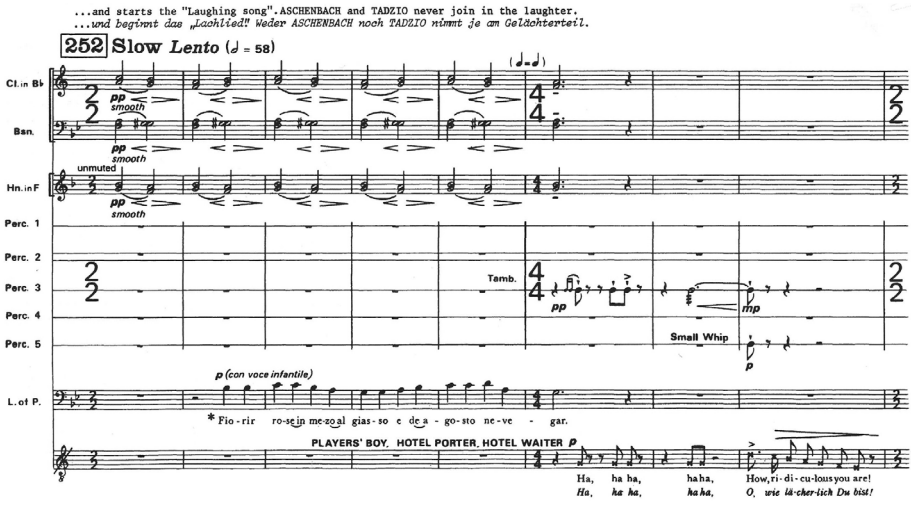
of concealment, since they avoid any obvious reference to the homoerotic nature of Aschenbach's feelings.

Fiorir rose in mezo al giasso e de agosto nevegar. How ridiculous you are!	Do roses flower in the midst of ice. Does snow fall in August. (Chorus)
Trovar onde in terra ferma e formighe in mezo al mar. How ridiculous you are!	Are there waves upon the dry land, or ants in the middle of the sea. (Chorus)
Giovinoto che a na vecia tanti basi ghe vol dar. How ridiculous you are!	Does a young man want to give an old woman kisses. (Chorus)
Bella tosa che se voia co un vecio maridar. How ridiculous you are!	Does a pretty girl wish to marry an old man. (Chorus)
Oseleto un fià stracheto che sia bon da sifolar. What a lot of fools you are!	Can a tired bird whistle. (Chorus)[35]

Fig. 2 *Death in Venice*, Piper's "Laughing Song," lyrics

For the composer, the idea of mocking laughter provided an opportunity to exploit a genuinely operatic effect, as for example Carl Maria von Weber in his *Freischütz* and Verdi in *Falstaff* had done before. While one might have expected to find the ominous "plague motif" integrated into the musical texture, Britten opts for another, less obvious solution that gives the song a completely different twist. His "Laughing Song" sounds like a dull nursery rhyme accompanied by a dreary change of chords in horns, clarinets, and bassoons imitating a concertina (example 4), while the vocal part is marked "con voce infantile."

[35] The English translation is included in the printed full score. See Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice*, an opera in two acts, op. 88 (London: Faber Music Limited, 1979), appendix.



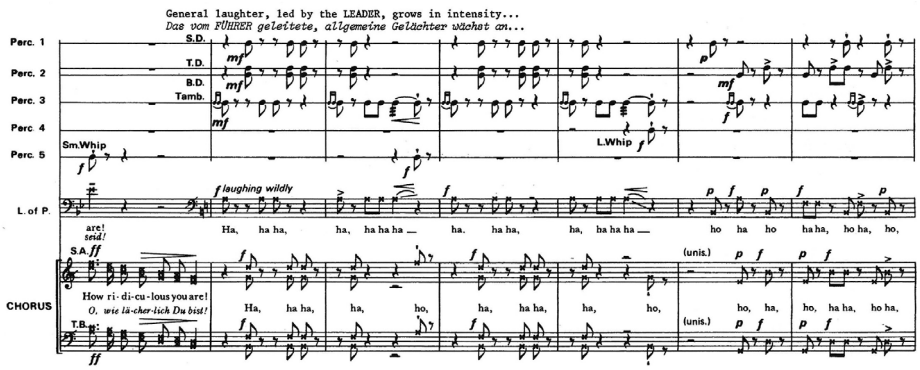
Ex. 4 Britten, *Death in Venice*, "Laughing Song," beginning. Reproduced by permission of Faber Music, London.

Following the initial stanza, the boy, a waiter, and the hotel porter first join in with a rhythmically patterned laughter segued into the refrain. The next burst of laughter—the group is now enlarged by two hotel guests—interrupts the second stanza in a hocket-like manner with the voices imitating each other. The laughing chorus gradually builds in intensity as well as rhythmic complexity as soprano and alto voices are further included. Throughout the song, the vocalized laughter is doubled by percussion instruments: tambourine, side drum, tenor drum, bass drum, as well as a small and large whip. While the drums recall once more the Dionysian sonic realm, the whips add another characteristic component that lends an aggressive tone to the Leader's performance. Britten uses them only in this particular song, thus casting a special meaning to them. As a symbol of dominance, the whip is strongly reminiscent of another ominous character—i.e., the mesmerist Cavaliere Cipolla from Mann's novella *Mario and the Magician* (1930).[36] In his show, the magician exercises power through the hissing tone of his riding whip, which can induce as well as remove trance-like states in members of the audience:

[36] Britten likely knew the story as it was included in the 1954 Vintage Books edition *"Death in Venice" and Seven Other Stories* (translated by Lowe-Porter) which can be found at the Britten-Pears Library in his house in Aldeburgh (ref. 1-9601308).

> Two main features were constant in all the experiments: the liquor glass and the claw-handled riding-whip. The first was always invoked to add fuel to his demoniac fires; without it, apparently, they might have burned out. On this score we might even have felt pity for the man; but the whistle of his scourge, the insulting symbol of his domination, before which we all cowered, drowned out every sensation save a dazed and outbraved submission to his power.[37]

In the "Laughing Song," too, one gets the impression that the audience is under the spell of the Leader, especially when looking at the climactic coda (two measures after rehearsal no. 255). Here, the sound of the two whips is especially prominent (example 5).



Ex. 5: Britten, *Death in Venice*, "Laughing Song," coda. Reproduced by permission of Faber Music, London.

Just before the beginning of the coda, the Leader suddenly changes the refrain line into "What a lot of fools you are!" thereby insulting his obedient audience. He then starts to take control over the laughing chorus who follows his vocal utterances in close imitation. Alternately, small and large whips accentuate the high points of his rising glissandi. These become more and more strident until the Leader stops the escalating laughter by means of a single gesture. It is accompanied by the cracking of both whips at once (rehearsal no. 256), as if to release the hotel guests from their spellbound state. The transgressive element of the laughing song that we encountered in Mann's novella is thus transformed. Instead of an uncontrolled outbreak

[37] Thomas Mann, *Mario and the Magician and Other Stories*, trans. Helen Tracy Lowe-Porter (London: Vintage, 1996), 146.

of natural laughter, here we witness an uncanny act of will control exerted by the savage Leader. Though the whips are not visible on stage, their sound exposes the violent nature of the scenario.

Compared to Britten's musical realization, the laughing song heard in Visconti's film comes much closer to the "brash popular number" described in the novella. Surprisingly close, one could say, since it unveils and gives a tangible presence to Mann's own source. In 1895, during the early days of phonography, the Neapolitan singer and actor Berardo Cantalamessa came across a popular American tune called "The Laughing Song" composed and recorded numerous times by the Afro-American singer George W. Johnson.[38] Discovered as a New York street artist with a penchant for whistling, he began to produce recordings on wax cylinders for several companies, including the New York Phonograph Company, the New Jersey Phonograph Company, and Columbia in 1890. Both "The Laughing Song" featuring Johnson's distinctive, musically-timed laughter and another tune called "The Whistling Coon" established his pioneering role as the first black voice to gain fame in the nascent industry.[39] His enormous success, however, stemmed not only from the catchy melodies themselves but also from the then popular image of the "coon" (i.e., a racialized portrayal of the black man as the big-lipped, lazy fool that became a standard trope of the so-called "coon song)."[40] Placing "The Laughing Song" in the wider context of early recording, Jacob Smith further emphasizes that "the laugh was a significant and powerful index of presence for the first audiences of prerecorded performances."[41] As a case in point he cites the peculiar genre of the laughing records that flourished in the first decades of the twentieth century. They feature deliberately flawed performances of classical music—usually in the form of a vocal or an instrumental solo containing some mistake—interrupted by a sudden breaking up in laughter from a member of the audience. This, in turn, affects the musician who bursts out in laughter as well. This idea of a reciprocal in-

[38] Some of Johnson's recordings—including different versions of "The Laughing Song"—can be found and listened to in the *Collected Works of George W. Johnson*, Internet Archive, added February 20, 2004, https://archive.org/details/GeorgeWJohnson.

[39] For a more detailed account of Johnson's life and career, see Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890–1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 15–71.

[40] The coon song emerged in the tradition of the minstrel shows, where it was typically performed by white men in blackface. In 1894, Johnson himself joined a group of performers named the Imperial Minstrels who recorded miniature versions of minstrel shows on cylinder.

[41] Jacob Smith, *Vocal Tracks: Performance and Sound Media* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 19.

fection between performer and audience marks a striking parallel to Mann's novella scene hinting at its own intermedial character.

The song that comes closest to Mann's description, however, is not Johnson's original but its Neapolitan parody—namely, Cantalamessa's "'A risa." How the Italian singer came to adapt the song in 1895 is recollected by his partner Nicola Maldacea, another famous Neapolitan comedian:

> On a certain day, after a rehearsal at the Salon, we stopped in the Galleria at a shop by the side of the Crociera. … For the first time there were phonographs in Naples, a very recent invention. … The major attraction was a popular song by a black North American artist. I don't remember the name of the song. I know only that it created in Cantalamessa and me a very great impression because it communicated an irresistible joy. The singer laughed at the sound of the music, and his laughter was so spontaneous and so entertaining that he [Cantalamessa] was prompted to imitate it.[42]

By 1895, Johnson's cylinder recordings had made it to Italy, where they were showcased by exhibitors to a paying public.[43] Cantalamessa was not the only one to seize upon the comic potential of Johnson's song by producing his own version of it (figure 3), but he was one of the few Neapolitan artists at the time whose voice was preserved on cylinder and disc. In August 1901, he recorded several solo and duet numbers, including "'A risa" on Edison cylinders with the Milan-based Anglo-Italian Commerce Company.[44] The

[42] "Un certo giorno, dopo la prova al *Salone* [*Margherita*], ci fermammo in Galleria in un negozio di quel lato della Crociera, […]. Vi erano esposti, per la prima volta a Napoli, i fonografi, recentissima invenzione. … La maggiore attrattiva era costituita da una canzonetta in inglese, speciale fatica di un artista moro del Nord America. Non ricordo il nome della canzonetta. So solo che essa produsse in Cantalamessa e in me una grandissima impressione, perché di allegria irresistibilmente comunicativa. Quel cantante rideva a suon di musica, e la sua risata era così spontanea e così divertente che si era invitati senz'altro imitarlo." Nicola Maldacea, *Memorie di Maldacea: vita, morte e resurrezione di un Lazzaro del XX secolo* (Naples: F. Bideri, 1933), 141–42; the English translation is taken from Simona Frasca, *Italian Birds of Passage: The Diaspora of Neapolitan Musicians in New York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 84.

[43] That Johnson's recordings reached an international market is indicated on the cover of the sheet music for the "Laughing Song," published in 1894. The advertising line reads, "Over 50,000 records up to date for phonograph use all over the world." Quoted in Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 40.

[44] Anita Pesce, *La sirena nel solco: origini della riproduzione sonora* (Naples: Guida, 2005), 44–45. On the early international distribution of Neapolitan songs, see her chapter "The Neapolitan Sound Goes Around: Mechanical Music Instruments, Talking Machines, and Neapolitan Song, 1850–1925," in *Neapolitan Postcards: The Canzone Napoletana as Transnational Subject*, ed. Goffredo Plastino and Joseph Sciorra (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 45–72.

following year another version of his "canzonetta eccentrica," now under the Italianized title "La risata," ("The laugh") appeared on shellac disc (78rpm). It was issued by the International Zonophone Company, then the biggest competitor of the Berliner Gramophone Company.

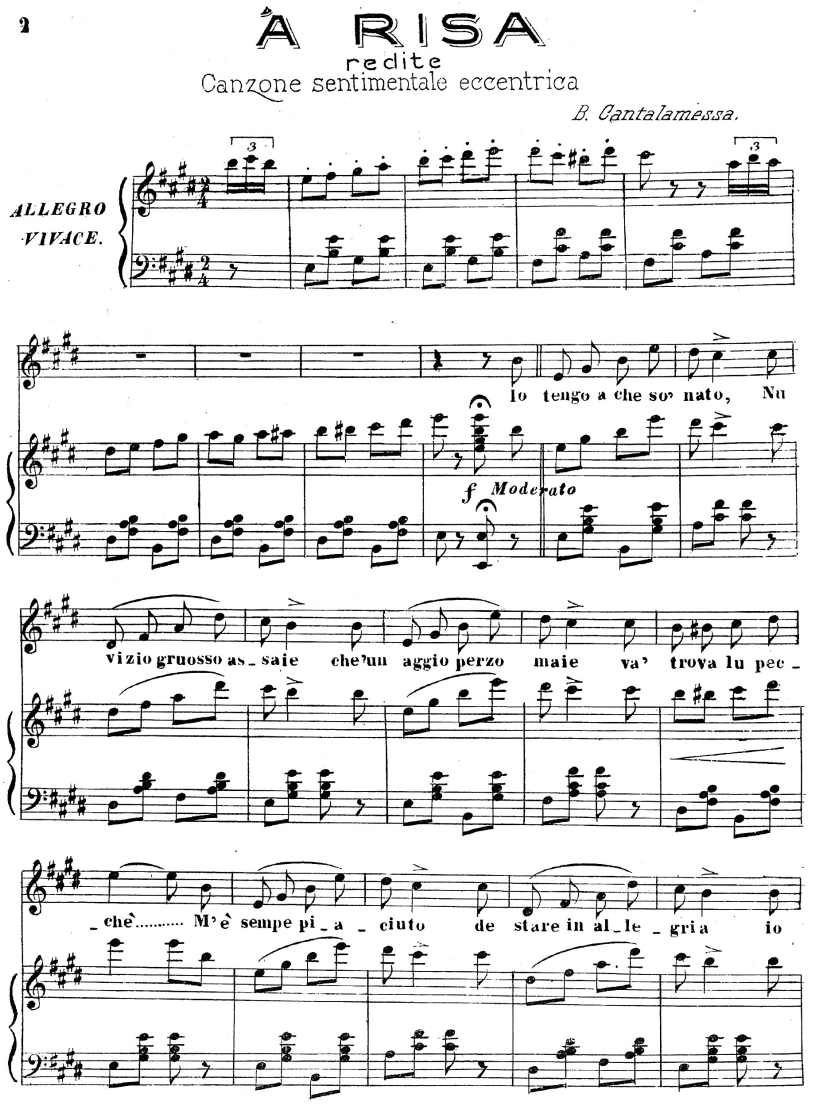


Fig. 3 Cantalamessa, "'A risa", cover of sheet music and first page

Around the mid-1890s Thomas Mann was living in Italy, where he visited Rome, Palestrina, Venice, and Naples in December of 1896. If he ever saw one of Cantalamessa's performances during this stay remains unclear, but it seems more than likely that he heard the song in one form or anoth-

er and later incorporated it into his novella.[45] For Visconti the connection must have seemed evident, all the more so since "'A risa" can be considered a popular classic. Due to its hilarious spirit, it works perfectly in the film. When the guitarist starts singing the song, it quite naturally excites a mindless gaiety among the audience. If we consider the lyrics (figure 4),[46] the function performed by the laughter is that of a comic catharsis. In the context of the scene, however, this idea is ironically inverted. Instead of becoming liberated through laughter, the audience is infected by it and thus symbolically rendered sick.

Io tengo 'a che sò' nato, 'nu vizio gruosso assaje, nun l'aggio perzo maje, va' trova lu ppecché! Mm'è sempe piaciuto di stare in allegria. Io, la malinconia, nun saccio che cos'è!	Since I was born I have A very bad defect That I never got rid of, I wonder why! I always liked To enjoy myself. What melancholy is, I really don't know!
Sarrà difetto gruosso chistu ccà! *(ride)* Ah, ah, ah, ah. Ma 'o tengo e nun mm' 'o pozzo cchiù levà! *(ride)* Ah, ah, ah, ah.	It's probably a big weakness, this one here! *(laughs)* Ha, ha, ha, ha! But I have it and I can't get rid of it! (laughs) Ha, ha, ha, ha.
Io rido si uno chiagne, si stongo disperato, si nun aggio magnato, rido senza penzà. Chist'è 'o difetto mio, vuje già mo lu ssapite, 'nzieme cu me redite ca bene ve farrá!	I laugh when someone cries, when I'm desperate, when I'm hungry, I automatically laugh. This is my flaw, You know it already, Laugh with me It will be good for you!
Redite e ghiammo jà: *(ride)* ah, ah, ah, ah! Ca bene ve farrà: *(ride)* ah, ah, ah, ah.	Laugh and let's go: *(laughs)* Ha, ha, ha, ha! It will be good for you, *(laughs)* Ha, ha, ha, ha.[47]

Fig. 4: Cantalamessa, "'A risa," lyrics

[45] See note 6.

[46] The lyrics are printed in the sheet music for "'A risa." The song originally comprises three stanzas, but the film uses only two of them in a free arrangement.

[47] The English translation is mine.

Again, Visconti has the guitarist walk around the guests beginning with the groups seated down in the garden. The musician's performance is interspersed with buffoonish behavior as well as slightly obscene gestures, such as an explicit movement of the hip towards a woman at the Russian table. In the middle of the song, then, the actual singing ceases for a moment as waves of giggling break out in the audience. The guitarist alone then revisits Aschenbach on the terrace, continuing incessantly with his rhythmical laughter. As the singer approaches Tadzio (who is not visible in the frame), Aschenbach tosses and turns uneasily in his chair. After a prolonged zoom shot lingering on his erect posture and anxious face, Visconti cuts to the whole ensemble, who have meanwhile returned to the original position (figure 5). Compared to the novella, the performance resumes in a less hysterical manner. The mean-spirited guitarist brazenly points his finger at the hotel guests, taunting them with derisive laughter as the song continues. The camera remains focused on the band vanishing into the dark from where it had come. In a last close-up, the guitarist's starkly lit pale face reemerges from the darkness, sticking his tongue out.

Fig. 5 Visconti, *Death in Venice*, mocking of the audience

Uncanny Resemblances: Death in Venice *and* Doctor Faustus

In the film, the mysterious figures not only share similar features, such as a foreign look and obnoxious behavior, but they all laugh at Aschenbach in a devilish manner. This is not the case in the novella, and it seems unlikely that Visconti simply added this element to make their relationship more obvious. The entrance of the young-old man is a case in point: before he enters the frame, we hear a goat-like bleating sound turning into sardonic laughter when the camera catches his sight with a quick zoom-in. The gondolier, too, answers the protagonist's feeble objection to being taken to the Lido by him with a sneering laugh before continuing with his unintelligible murmuring.

This chain of motivic association, however, also comes to include the protagonist himself as well as Alfred, his friend (or alter ego). After Aschenbach's breakdown at the fountain, Visconti cuts to a symphonic performance of one of his works, which is booed by the audience. The scene does not represent an actual flashback, but rather a nightmare, as is clarified afterwards when we see Aschenbach tossing and screaming in his hotel bed. In the dream, he begs Alfred to send the hostile audience away: "Send them away? I will deliver you to them!" shouts the latter, breaking out in vicious laughter. Since his friend's philosophical outpourings on music's ambiguity and the demonic side of artistic creation directly reveal *Doctor Faustus* as their source of origin, his laughter, too, gains an uncanny diabolical resonance.

To be sure, Visconti's conflation of the two Mannian subjects has not gone without criticism. However, while his interpretative approach is certainly idiosyncratic, there are striking thematic similarities that should be considered. Aschenbach and Leverkühn are both driven by a subconscious desire for inspiration and transgression, an altered state of consciousness, which they eventually achieve through Dionysian or diabolical intoxication. Tadzio and Esmeralda, whom Visconti parallels by visual and musical means (they both play Beethoven's *Für Elise* on the piano), serve as catalysts for this experience. Furthermore, in both novels, the Dionysian/diabolical appears in different disguises, as noted by T. J. Reed: "Fate in *Doktor Faustus* and the technique used to suggest it recall *Der Tod in Venedig*, often down to minute detail." And he goes on to explain that:

> Schleppfuß, who disappears from the university scene with the same suggestive unobtrusiveness as the stranger in the monumental mason's yard, recurs

like him in the Leipzig guide and in the Devil in Palestrina. The figures of the two works even share the distinctive reddish hair.[48]

In light of these analogies, Visconti's intertextual reworking seems well motivated, even if the palimpsestic overlayering of Aschenbach, Leverkühn, and Mahler bears certain inconsistencies.[49] When Aschenbach, while leaning wearily against the fountain, eventually erupts in convulsive laughter himself, this gesture not only brings to mind the young-old man, whose decadent appearance he has come to resemble, but it more generally reveals him as a "prefiguration of Leverkühn."[50] Visconti indeed lends particular weight to this moment through the musical synchronization of the scene. Not coincidentally, Aschenbach's outbreak of laughter coincides precisely with the last poignant eruption and subsequent tonal resolution at mm. 94–95 of Mahler's Adagietto. Echoing the music's release of tension, the laughter does not sound desperate but rather liberating, as if the protagonist were finally embracing the demonic inside of him. In the novella, this act of identification (i.e., Aschenbach's final surrendering to Dionysus) occurs during the nightmare: "But the dreamer was now with them, within them: he belonged to the strangergod. … And his soul savored the debauchery and delirium of doom."[51] Though Visconti's scene does not quite match the symbolic explicitness of this depiction, it nevertheless hints at Aschenbach's yielding to the darker forces he has tried to suppress. The mocking laughter, culminating in the laughing song of the guitarist, now has become his own.

Transforming the performance

As a musical moment of liminality and transformation, the performance of the street musicians in Mann's novella calls for adaptation. Not only does it lend itself to theatrical, operatic, and even cinematic treatment—if we think of the exchange of looks between Aschenbach and Tadzio—but it also evokes a strong sense of corporeality which gains a new kind of perform-

[48] T.J. Reed, *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 395, 395n79.

[49] Most obviously, Mahler's music hardly embodies the rigorous formalism and lack of sensual quality that Alfred accuses Aschenbach of.

[50] Vaget, "Film and Literature," 172.

[51] Mann, *Death in Venice*, 128–29.

ative presence, whether on stage or the screen. At the heart of the scene lies the idea of contagious laughter as a comical device that is infused with tragic forebodings. The guitarist-singer himself is an ambiguous figure oscillating between the demonic and the Dionysian, between devil and buffo. As such, his laughter is ambiguous, too, turning from comedy to mockery as it takes over the audience, eliciting an altered state of consciousness.

In Britten's opera, the scenario is turned inside out as a staged projection of fears residing within the protagonist who seems to castigate his own desires. The songs performed by the Strolling Players hint with more or less subtle allusions at his hopeless condition. The Leader, though musically connected to the Dionysian principle, also performs the role of a mesmerist dominating the will of the members of the audience by turning them into accomplices of his act of humiliation through laughter. Thereby, the transformative space of the performance is radically altered. The scene's importance rests on the fact that it carves out a space for the inner voice of conscience, closely echoing the morally charged rhetoric and ironic distancing supplied by the narrator of the novella, once Aschenbach begins drifting into the "dangerous" quicksand of erotic obsession. Following his declaration of love as climax of act 1—which, as Christopher Chowrimootoo notes, exhibits stronger visceral charms than critics have generally admitted[52]—Aschenbach himself occasionally pauses with moments of self-accusation. The performance of the Strolling Players, however, provides a more substantial counterbalance in this regard. This is apparent in its gradual shifting from the lighter, ironic humor of the duet "O mio carino" to the darker, menacing tone of the Leader's solo numbers.

Visconti's adaptation initially focuses on the gaze motif that characterizes the disembodied relationship between Aschenbach and Tadzio. In the second part of the scene, however, the music becomes the dominant force as the devilish guitarist walks around the audience and performs his act of mimetic contagion. Here, too, we witness a dissolution of boundaries, when he starts pointing his mocking finger first at Aschenbach and finally at all of the noble guests in their blatant ignorance. While Visconti takes more liberty with the novella as a whole, his treatment of the scene stays quite close to the original setting. By inserting popular Italian songs from

[52] Though I would not necessarily reduce the climaxing gesture of the orchestra to a sounding "evocation of orgasm," I sympathize with Chowrimootoo's defense of the sensually appealing qualities of Britten's musical rhetoric. See "Bourgeois Opera: *Death in Venice* and the Aesthetics of Sublimation," 204–7.

the time, including Cantalamessa's " 'A risa," the acoustic space of the novella is invoked in a way that rings with authenticity. This sense of recovering a bygone time through a plenitude of historical detail in terms of setting, costume, and music, is an underlying tenet of Visconti's period films, allowing the spectator to "savor the sights and sounds of the past."[53] With the use of Cantalamessa's laughing song in particular, the film reaches back behind the source-text, thus uncovering a further layer of the novella's own intertextually as well as intermedially resonant character.

[53] Giorgio Biancorosso, "Ludwig's Wagner and Visconti's *Ludwig*," in *Wagner and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 336.

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Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point a scene from the fifth chapter of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* (1912). While Venice is threatened by an outbreak of cholera, a group of Neapolitan street musicians plays in front of Aschenbach, Tadzio, and the other hotel guests. The leader of the band—a buffonesque guitarist-singer with red hair and a wrinkled, emaciated face—is an ominous figure whose facetious, sexually charged performance eventually turns into blatant mockery of the audience, whom he infects with his contagious laughter. Using the concept of "performance as transformation" (Erika Fischer-Lichte) as a lens through which to investigate the filmic and operatic adaptations of the scene in Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* (1970) and Benjamin Britten's eponymous opera (1973), I focus on the various renditions of the laughing song to trace the particular transformative power it unfolds across media. Both adaptations use music to ironically comment on Aschenbach's infatuation. Yet, their approach to the scene at large is distinct from one another: While the opera turns the performance into an interiorized space of moral interrogation, the film evokes the sound of the past through the insertion of pre-existent popular songs from the time, including Berardo Cantalamessa's Neapolitan laughing song "'A risa." As I argue, the latter served as a model for the uproarious comical number described by Mann which thus constitutes a "phono-graphic" adaptation itself. Finally, I discuss the recurrences of demonic laughter throughout the film as part of Visconti's intertextual strategy to create motivic relationships between *Death in Venice* and *Doctor Faustus* (1947).

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ARTICLES

Rapt/Wrapped Listening: The Aesthetics of "Surround Sound"

James Wierzbicki

This essay is prompted by my personal experience with Dolby 5.1, the sonic results of which have been evident in cinemas since the late 1970s and the encoding for which, on the soundtracks of DVDs, since the turn of the century has been fairly ubiquitous. More to the point, this essay deals with the aesthetic differences (not just perceptual but also affective) between listening closely to environmental sounds in real life and listening to re-creations of more or less those same sounds, via a Dolby system or otherwise, in the privacy and comfort of one's home.

Dimensional hearing

The homophonic adjectives in the essay's title refer to two "conditions" of listening, one of them psychological and the other physical.

In the first case, the condition of "rapt" listening has nothing at all to do with the content or quality of the sonic phenomenon at hand but only with the decidedly unilateral relationship between that phenomenon and its perceiver. Our English word "rapt" of course derives from the past participle of the Latin verb *rapere*, which means "to seize." This Latin root is the source of the term we use for birds such as eagles and hawks that swoop down from the sky and, with sharp talons, suddenly seize their prey; it is also the source of the word we use for the heinous criminal act in which a person is somehow—usually sexually—violated after first having been somehow "seized." On a more positive note, the Latin *rapere*, and more particularly its past participle *raptus*, is the source of the English word we use to describe the state of being so "taken" with something or other—so "seized" by it—that the "enraptured" person is, willing or not, in effect "transported" to a new and perhaps elevated state of feeling or even of existence.

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But our English word "rapt" also means something not nearly so wondrously ecstatic, or so scarily violent. The word "rapt"—and this is how I am using the word here—simply means "attentive," although not just slightly attentive but very much attentive. The person who pays rapt attention to something or other is at least for the moment truly and deeply focused on that stimulus; in the mind of the rapt attender—whether he or she be listening to music or playing chess or doing a crossword puzzle, or knitting or repairing a motorcycle—there is no room for distraction. To use the term in circulation since the mid 1970s when it was introduced into the vocabulary by the Hungarian-American psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the rapt attender is experiencing "flow," or—as Csíkszentmihályi puts it in the subtitle of one his numerous books on the topic—"the psychology of optimal experience";[1] to use a phrase current amongst players of computer games, the rapt attender is "in the zone."

The vast pigeonhole of rapt listeners certainly includes the erudite Wagner idolater who, while indulging in a live or recorded performance of the "Liebestod" from *Tristan und Isolde*, in effect "parses" every single nuance and compares the results with every other performance of this music that he or she has ever heard. But the pigeonhole of rapt listeners also includes the infant who suckles at its mother's breast as she sings a wordless lullaby. As noted, "rapt" listening has nothing at all to do with the content or quality of the music, or the sonic phenomenon, at hand; it has to do only with the intensity with which the listener relates, psychologically, to the sonic stimulation.

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The condition of "wrapped" listening, on the other hand, has to do only with the listening experience's physical circumstances, circumstances that we likely take for granted when we encounter them in our everyday lives

1 Born in 1934 to a Hungarian family living in Rijeka (Croatia)—a city that at the time was known as Fiume, part of the Kingdom of Italy—and since 1969 a professor of psychology at the University of Chicago, Csíkszentmihályi first used the term "flow" in his *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: The Experience of Play in Work and Games* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975). The widespread popularity of the term doubtless owes to its appearance as the one-word main title of Csíkszentmihályi's first mass-market book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990). Capitalizing on the popularity not just of the term but of its underlying concept, in 2000 the publishers of the earlier book retitled it *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play*.

but which we tend to celebrate when they are artificially re-created by stereophonic audio systems.

Human beings have just two ears, yet most of the time we listen *three*-dimensionally; the exceptions to that generalization, contrary to nature but increasingly common since the invention of the Sony Walkman portable cassette player in 1979, involve instances when, for a multitude of reasons that surely include psychic self-protection, by means of headphones or "earbuds" we make a conscious choice to limit our intake of sound.[2] Except in such instances, with our two ears we listen three-dimensionally. And we do this because we are living creatures.

Were we robots, with our heads fitted on either side with microphones, we could sit motionless and have our electronic brains compare the differences in amplitude of a single sound whose vibrations are taken in simultaneously by both of our mechanical "ears"; by noting which of the two signals seems to be louder, we could determine the extent to which the source of the sound in question exists to the right or to the left of our robotic heads. But the electronic brain between the microphonic "ears" would be able to determine only that the sound source is located within one or the other of those two broadly defined areas. The robot's electronic brain would easily know that the sound comes from the left or from the right; it would not be able to determine the extent to which the sound comes from in front

2 Defenders of the cassette-based Walkman and its digital successors typically argue that the devices' prime value lies in its allowing the "average person"—like the nursery rhyme's "fine lady" from Banbury Cross who sported "rings on her fingers and bells on her toes"—to "have music wherever she (or he) goes." But numerous critics, vociferous especially in the 1990s, have labeled the Walkman (and other players) as devices whose main purpose is to insulate their users from the world around them. For pioneering commentary on the Walkman, see Shuhei Hosokawa, "Considérations sur la musique mass-médiatisée," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 12, no. 1 (1981): 21–50, and "The Walkman Effect," *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 165–80, partially derived from Hosokawa's *Walkman no Shûjigaku* (*The Rhetoric of Walkman*) (Tokyo: Asahi Shuppan, 1981), which remains untranslated into English but is available in German as *Der Walkman-Effect*, trans. Birger Ollrogge (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1987). For later commentary, see, for example, Iain Chambers, "A Miniature History of the Walkman," *New Formations* 11 (1990): 1–4; Theodore Gracyk, "Listening to Music: Performances and Recordings," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 2 (1997): 139–50; and Michael Bull, "The World According to Sound: Investigating the World of Walkman Users," *New Media & Society* 3, no. 2 (2001): 179–97. For extended overviews, see, for example, Paul du Gay et al., eds., *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), and Andrew Williams, *Portable Music & Its Functions* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

of or behind its head, or from above or below it. This is because our robotic heads and ears would not move.

In contrast, our human heads and ears, like the heads and ears of all warm-blooded creatures, *do* move, and constantly. No matter how hard we try, we cannot—as a robot might—sit motionless. Our mere breathing causes our hearing apparatus to move; even if we held our breaths, the apparatus would still move because of the percussions of our heartbeats. And with each ever-so-slight movement comes, automatically, a shift in the relationships between various binary (i.e., left and right) fields of aural in-take. Whereas a robot's brain can compare the volume levels registered by a pair of immobile mechanical "ears" and calculate that the source of a particular sound exists *somewhere* within the left or right halves of a 360-degree sonic plane, the human brain—inside a head that not only moves on a rotational axis but also is "cocked" this way and that—can make comparable determinations in regard to an almost infinite number of sonic planes and thus determine, in an instant, the precise *direction* from which a sound seems to come.[3] Simply because we live and breathe, we are always "wrapped" in sound, with our sound-perceiving human selves located at the very centers of listening spaces that are not circular but spherical.

Dolby

The latest incarnations of consumer-oriented "surround sound" audio systems capitalize on the idea that people apparently enjoy being reminded that they naturally inhabit spherical listening spaces. But full-blown theatrical installations of the so-called Dolby Atmos system, with speakers located not just at the auditorium's front and rear but also embedded in the ceiling and floor, are to date few and far between.[4] And the at-home system

3 Anyone who doubts the natural human capacity for determining the directionality of sound need only attend briefly to the environment with only one ear. This experiment will not succeed if a person merely holds a hand over an ear or uses an earplug, for such efforts will decrease but not entirely eliminate an ear's in-take; for the experiment to work one needs to place a finger on the tragus (the bit of cartilage located at the front of the outer ear) and *firmly* press so that the cartilage in effect seals the ear canal. Just a few seconds of one-eared listening should be enough to convince participants that the perception of sonic directionality depends crucially on the ability to hear with not just one ear but two.

4 The Dolby Atmos system was demonstrated for the first time in 2012; its "breakthrough" film was Alfonso Cuarón's 2013 *Gravity*, which won Academy Awards for both "sound editing" and "sound mixing," but the system is currently installed in fewer than 5,000 cinemas

that is sometimes marketed as Dolby Atmos, but which is more accurately described as Dolby 7.2, is an only slightly expanded version of the older and more familiar Dolby 5.1 technology.[5]

My personal relationship with at-home Dolby 5.1 began just three years ago, when it became clear to me that I could not possibly write a promised monograph on sonic style in the films of Terrence Malick without engaging fully with this particular filmmaker's crafty use of "surround sound." Before this I had been content to hear the soundtracks of Malick's films, and the soundtracks of films by countless other directors, through a simple two-channel stereo setup; I confess to not even noticing that most of the DVDs I had acquired since the turn of the century feature on their back covers tiny icons that indicate the stereophonic extent—accessible, of course, only to those with the requisite playback equipment—of their soundtracks.[6]

Having at long last installed in my apartment the "surround sound" amplifier and six speakers, it was obviously with fresh ears that, early in 2017, I listened again to Malick's *Days of Heaven*. By this time *Days of Heaven* was hardly new to me. I had indeed encountered the film in the cinema when it was first released in 1978, and it was my vivid memory of a linked pair of scenes near the film's start (when more than a minute of very loud noise from within a steel mill immediately follows a few seconds of very quiet

worldwide. For details, see, for example, Benjamin Wright, "Atmos Now: Dolby Laboratories, Mixing Ideology and Hollywood Sound Production," in *Living Stereo: Histories and Cultures of Multichannel Sound*, ed. Paul Théberge, Kyle Devine, and Tom Everrett (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 227–46; Dong Liang, "Sound, Space, *Gravity*: A Kaleidoscopic Hearing (Part I)," *The New Soundtrack* 6, no. 1 (2016): 1–15; and "Dolby Surpasses 4,000 Dolby Atmos Screens Worldwide," *Boxoffice*, October 4, 2018, https://www.boxofficepro.com/dolby-surpasses-4000-dolby-atmos-screens-worldwide/. For a critical discussion of how *Gravity*'s dimensional sound, especially in its opening scenes, relates to the narrative, see Alison Walker, "Sonic Space and Echoes of the Flesh: Textual and Phenomenal Readings of *Gravity*," *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 14, no. 2 (2020): 119–39.

5 5.1 and 7.2 are not decimal fractions but indicators of an at-home audio system's array of speakers. 5.1 indicates five "surround" speakers—three in the front and two at the rear—and a subwoofer to which low-frequency sounds are assigned; 7.2 indicates seven "surround" speakers—the five just mentioned plus an additional pair located on either side of the listening space—and two subwoofers.

6 The icons take the form of squares embellished with dots. A monophonic soundtrack is indicated by a single dot located at the midpoint of the square's topmost side; a two-channel stereo soundtrack is indicated by a pair of dots on either end of the topmost side; Dolby 5.1 is indicated by three dots on the square's topmost side and two in the lower corners, plus an additional dot (representing the subwoofer) in the square's middle.

stream-side sounds) that prompted me to respond, more than twenty years later, to a "call" for contributions to an edited volume devoted to Malick's work. But my 2003 chapter dealt mostly with the formalistic and arguably "musical" qualities of that sequence and comparable sequences that I had observed elsewhere in *Days of Heaven* and in two other Malick films (*Badlands*, from 1973, and *The Thin Red Line*, from 1998). In this chapter I discussed the patterns of Malick's sounds, not the possible "meanings" of those sounds or their acoustical properties, and for the purposes of my analyses I could just as well have listened to all three films—albeit carefully and repeatedly—by means of a monaural speaker hung from one of the front windows of a car at a drive-in.[7]

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The French sound theorist Michel Chion, paraphrasing ideas first formulated by his teacher, Pierre Schaeffer, noted that for most of us there are "at least" three modes of listening, which he termed *causal listening*, *semantic listening*, and *reduced listening*.[8] Spread over a period of almost forty years, my relationship with the sounds of the above-mentioned pair of scenes near the beginning of Malick's *Days of Heaven* cycled through all three of these listening modes.

When I first experienced the film, as a paying customer at the cinema, I was interested primarily in the scenes' narrative content, and thus almost all that I really noticed was that the tiny percussion noises in the stream-side scene seemed to be caused by bits of scrap metal being tossed by gleaners into buckets, and that the tremendous din of the steel mill scene seemed to be caused by furnaces and heavy industrial equipment. When I re-en-

7 The results of my formalistic analyses appear in James Wierzbicki, "Sound as Music in the Films of Terrence Malick," in *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, ed. Hannah Patterson (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 110–22.

8 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 25. Orig. *L'Audio-Vision* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1990). In a revised edition (Paris: Armand Colin, 2017), Chion changed the second of the three terms from "écoute sémantique" to "écoute codale," and it appears as "codal listening" in Gorbman's new translation (2019) for Columbia University Press. In both editions, Chion acknowledges that the concepts of different modes of listening, and especially the ideas of "semantic listening" and "reduced listening," had earlier been explored by Pierre Schaeffer in his 1966 *Traité des objets musicaux*. Schaeffer's book, translated by Christine North and John Dack, was published in 2017 as *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay across Disciplines* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press).

gaged with *Days of Heaven* for the sake of the aforementioned book chapter, my concern was with these scenes' quasi-musical semantic properties, by which I mean the way in which the nine-second episode of *pianissimo*, holding to a model perfected by such theatrical-minded symphonic composers as Beethoven and Mahler, in effect forces listeners to "dilate" their ears so that they might be impacted all the more powerfully by the ensuing eighty-two seconds of *fortissimo*. By the time I re-engaged again with *Days of Heaven* for the purposes of the monograph,[9] I was so familiar with the purely sonic content of these two scenes that I could transcribe it into more or less conventional musical notation,[10] but what was new to me—and what was strikingly "brought home" to me as I listened to the film for the first time with my just-installed Dolby 5.1 system—was the idea of these scenes' sounds as tangible "objects"; during the stream-side scene I *felt*, almost literally, as though I were being enveloped in a mist of metallic droplets, and during the scene in the mill's interior I comparably *felt* as though I were being physically assaulted, the relentless barrage discomforting to the extreme not just because the various thuds and crashes were in themselves so forceful but also because each of them hit me from a direction I could not anticipate.

Having been thus "wrapped" (and soundly "rapped") by the opening sounds of a film I thought I knew, I listened with "rapt" attention, again and again, to the entirety of Malick's by this time much-expanded oeuvre.[11] More relevant to my current contemplation of the aesthetics of "surround sound," I re-listened as well to most of the other films that, along with *Days of Heaven*, constituted the first wave of "the Dolby era" that in the late 1970s "exploded in all its novelty and excitement."[12] These early Dolby-encoded

9 James Wierzbicki, *Terrence Malick: Sonic Style* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

10 A transcription of the noises in the steel mill scene is included in my "Zvukovoy ryad kak muzyka: o novykh putyakh v izuchenii kinoiskusstva" [Hearing Sound as Music: On New Directions in Film Studies], *Nauchnyy vestnik Moskovskoy konservatorii* [Journal of Moscow Conservatory] 3 (2013): 120–35.

11 Malick's work by this time included not just the three already mentioned films but also *The New World* (2005), *The Tree of Life* (2011), *To the Wonder* (2012), *Knight of Cups* (2015), and *Song to Song* (2017). Malick released a ninth film, *A Hidden Life*, in 2019.

12 Gianluca Sergi, *The Dolby Era: Film Sound in Contemporary Hollywood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 3. Throughout his book Sergi suggests, although not always convincingly, that "the Dolby era … has its roots in the cultural and political movements of the 1960s" (3). He makes his strongest case, arguing for a linkage between "changes in cinema architecture" and "the rise of a 'new' audience" for film, in his final chapter ("The Politics of Sound").

films of course included George Lucas's 1977 *Star Wars*, which almost overnight made Dolby "surround sound" the norm because the director's unusual arrangement with his distributor, Twentieth Century-Fox, specified that this much-anticipated film could *only* be exhibited in cinemas equipped with potent subwoofers and speakers located not just at the front of the house but also at the rear; these films also included Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978), Philip Kaufman's re-make of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Jerzy Skolimowski's *The Shout* (1978), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), Ken Russell's *Altered States* (1980), Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980), Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), and Steven Lisberger's *Tron* (1982).[13]

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Even before my listening binge was over, I realized that these early Dolby films fell into two basic categories. In the smaller group were films that I found, and still find, to be genuinely interesting; in the larger group were films that for me, back when I first experienced them in the cinema and when I experienced them again for the sake of my research project, have been entertaining but never much more than that. The interesting films explored human situations; their ear-catching instances of "surround sound" were few and far between, and usually brief, and more often than not they involved the relatively quiet noises of natural environments. In marked contrast, the merely entertaining films celebrated adventure; they teemed with "surround sound," most of it involving the relatively loud noises of violent action and/or sophisticated—indeed, sometimes futuristic—technology.

Lest I seem self-contradictory here, I grant straightaway that the steel mill incident that occurs early in *Days of Heaven* indeed features both the noise of technology and a depiction of violence, and that the opening scenes of both *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* indeed revel in environmental sounds. But *Days of Heaven*, once set in motion, settles

13 Paraphrasing work by Jay Beck, Mark Kerins reports that "less than three years after *Star Wars* premiered, the Dolby Stereo format had already been used on 85 feature films, and decoding equipment had been installed in over 1,200 theaters." Mark Kerins, *Beyond Dolby (Stereo): Cinema in the Digital Sound Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 32. The figures come from Jay Beck, "A Quiet Revolution: Changes in American Film Sound Practices, 1967–1979" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2003), 171.

quickly into a conventional mode of storytelling built for the most part on front-and-center verbal content, the linear flow of its plot interrupted only occasionally by taciturn moments of "enveloping" naturalistic sounds. After a brief toot of extra-diegetic music, *Close Encounters* begins with the prolonged and almost deafening roar of a desert sandstorm, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* begins with an extended scene whose sparse underscore is a pale backdrop for the rich cacophony of a South American jungle; in both of these Spielberg-directed films, however, the slow-paced and sonically immersive opening scenes are preludes to fast-unfolding narratives whose sequences of episodes consistently ratchet up suspense even as they provide audience members with a veritable crescendo of audio-visual spectacle.

That the soundtracks of so many of the first-wave Dolby films were *obviously* spectacular has not escaped the notice of critics who, like me, prefer cinematic experiences of a more subtle sort. Apparently drawn to meteorologic imagery, Charles Schreger early in the Dolby era wrote that upon first hearing the eponymous vocal utterance in Skolimowski's *The Shout* "the audience is suddenly inundated with a multitrack, all-enveloping, hurricane-force sound," and he went on to argue, as I argue, that the new Dolby technology *was* capable of much more than just "making the moviegoer think he has a typhoon between his ears."[14] Other writers described the standard Dolby gesture in biological terms, noting that the subwoofers especially provoked in listeners "a pure gut, … straight-to-the-brainstem physical response"[15] and that "big" sound soon became central to the potential blockbuster's "visceral aesthetic."[16] Still others likened the "vulgar extreme[s]"[17] of the early Dolby films—the spaceship flyovers, the wham-bang vehicle chases, the shoot-'em-up fight scenes—to the thrills offered by amusement parks; with Dolby technology, the interior of the cinema became for patrons "a kind of sonic playground,"[18]

14 Charles Schreger, "The Second Coming of Sound," *Film Comment*, September/October 1978, 36.

15 Hudson Miller, quoted in Kerins, *Beyond Dolby (Stereo)*, 134. The comment from sound editor Hudson comes from an interview that Kerins conducted on 20 July 2004.

16 Paul Grainge, "Selling Spectacular Sound: Dolby and the Unheard History of Technical Trademarks," in *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound*, ed. Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 252–53.

17 Ioan Allen, quoted in Sergi, *The Dolby Era*, 102. As a sound engineer, Allen worked closely with Ray Dolby on the development of the "surround system"; throughout the 1970s he liaised significantly between the Dolby company and various film studios.

18 Gianluca Sergi, "The Dolby Era: Sound in Hollywood Cinema 1970–1995" (PhD diss., Sheffield Hallam University, 2002), 125.

the sound designs in many cases "allow[ing] the filmgoer to *ride* the film rather than simply view it,"[19] its sonic attractions comparable to "mere fairground phenomena."[20]

Stereo

In fact, it was the recorded noise of a *real* fairground phenomenon—the "Atom Smasher" roller coaster at the Rockaways' Playland amusement park in Queens, New York City—that introduced listeners around the Western world to "surround sound."

This Is Cinerama, to be sure, was not the first film to lure audiences by offering them special content that was not just visual but also aural. In 1940 the Walt Disney Studios' *Fantasia* famously pioneered the use of multiple soundtracks whose mostly musical content emanated from loudspeakers located at the rear as well as at the front of auditorium. But *Fantasia* with its complex "Fantasound" setup[21] played to a limited audience before lingering pressures from the Great Depression and new economic pressures from the war in Europe all but forced Disney to close down the film's planned "road show"; despite *Fantasia* having been booked into almost ninety theaters, it was displayed in only thirteen,[22] and as early as April 1941—eight months before the United States entered World War II—the "Fantasound" amplification systems had been dismantled and rights to the film had been sold to RKO Radio Pictures. RKO reduced by a third *Fantasia*'s running time

19 William Whittington, *Sound Design & Science Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 108. Emphasis added.

20 Michel Chion, "Quiet Revolution … and Rigid Stagnation," trans. Ben Brewster, *October* 58 (1991), 79.

21 The workings of Fantasound are explained, in highly technical and richly illustrated detail, by its two principal designers—William E. Garity and John N.A. Hawkins—in "Fantasound," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 37, no. 8 (1941): 127–46. Reader-friendly explanations of the system are offered by Jesse Klapholz in "Fantasia: Innovations in Sound," *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society* 39, no. 1/2 (1991): 66–70, and by Kristina M. Griffin in "Fantasound: A Retrospective of the Groundbreaking Sound System of Disney" (master's thesis, University of Colorado at Denver, 2015).

22 *Fantasia* opened on November 13, 1940, at New York's Broadway Theatre—not a cinema but a playhouse—and played there for forty-nine weeks. Its other venues, likewise playhouses whose relatively flexible schedules accommodated shutting down for at least a week so that Disney technicians could properly install the sound equipment, were in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Buffalo, Minneapolis, Baltimore, and Washington, DC.

and released it with a *monophonic* soundtrack; in 1946 RKO re-issued *Fantasia* with its deleted segments for the most part restored,[23] but it was not until February 1956, after distribution of the film had been signed over to Disney's recently established Buena Vista company, that *Fantasia* became available with a soundtrack in two-channel stereo.

By this time, the term "stereo" (from the Greek στερεός, *stereós*, meaning "full" or "solid") had become something of a buzzword in the entertainment industry. At least since the 1850s the adjective had been applied to a visual device called the stereoscope that had its users viewing simultaneously a pair of photographs whose cameras had been located at least a few inches apart; the peepholes of the stereoscope's viewing apparatus guaranteed that each of the user's eyes saw only one of the photographs, and it was left to the user's brain to combine the two similar but slightly different images into a single image that—comparable to what a person commonly perceives when looking with both eyes at anything, focusing alternately on what seems to be close and on what seems to be distant—offered at least the *illusion* of depth. Applied to sound, the prefix "stereo" had been regularly used since the early 1930s to describe experiments in "binaural" sound—which offered an illusion not of three-dimensional depth but of two-dimensional spatiality—of the sort that Alan Blumlein and other engineers had been conducting under the auspices of various British record companies.[24] But in a sonic context the prefix circulated for the most part in the scientific community, and likely it

23 The cut and then restored segments had mostly to do with explanatory commentaries by music critic Deems Taylor, but they included as well *Fantasia*'s original opening segment, which featured a visually "abstract" interpretation of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565.

24 An article from 1941, contemporaneous with the Walt Disney Studios' *Fantasia*, indeed uses in its title the adjective "stereo*phonic*" to describe what Blumlein had been working on; see Harvey Fletcher, "The Stereophonic Sound-Film System—General Theory," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 37, no. 10 (1941): 331–52. Most of the many patents filed during the period of Blumlein's experiments with "binaural" sound, however, used the never popular adjective "stereo*sonic*"; see, for example, the applications for the patents granted to Lloyd Espenschied (Sound Recording and Reproducing, US patent US1661793A, filed July 8, 1920, and granted March 6, 1928), Julius Weinberger (Sound Reproduction, US1850701A, filed November 10, 1928, and granted March 22, 1932), John F. Dreyer Jr. (Sound Reproducing System, US1915926A, filed October 17, 1930, and granted June 27, 1933), George L. Beers (System for Producing Stereosonic Effects, US2098561A, filed February 9, 1934, and granted November 9, 1937), and Robert H. Dreisbach (System for Sound Reproducing Apparatus, US2110358A, filed June 6, 1936, and granted March 8, 1938). For a detailed narrative account of Blumlein's work, see Robert Charles Alexander, *The Inventor of Stereo: The Life and Works of Alan Dower Blumlein* (Oxford: Focal Press, 1999).

was not until December 1952 that it entered the vernacular, when veteran broadcaster Lowell Thomas, speaking in the first-person plural, ended his introduction to *This Is Cinerama*'s post-intermission demonstration with the portentous words: "We call it stereophonic sound."

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Audiences at *This Is Cinerama* heard stereophonic sound aplenty, emanating from a quintet of speakers arrayed across the front of the house and a pair of speakers at the back. Only in a few of the film's segments, however, did the "surround" nature of the sonic mix call attention to itself: when the silence of a cathedral's interior is quietly broken by the voices of choristers processing from the rear;[25] when in the episode devoted to the water-skiing show the noise of a motorboat comes first from behind and then from the right and then moves from right to left; when, at the very start of the film, after Thomas's perhaps deliberately pedantic twelve-minute lecture on the history of humankind's relationship with imagery in general, the giant curved screen in effect "opens wide" to offer a full-color rider's-eye (and -ear) encounter with the "Atom Smasher."

But even in its more conventional segments—some of them documentations of musical performances, some of them panoramic flyovers of natural wonders featuring suitably up-lifting accompanimental scores—the stereophonic sound of *This Is Cinerama* was enormously different to what most listeners of recorded audio (except laboratory-based engineers, and those who might have remembered attending the first run of *Fantasia* a dozen years earlier) had ever before heard.

Like most of the early reviewers, the *New York Times*'s Bosley Crowther commented at length on the film's visual features, which were "so overwhelming in sheer physical sweep and size" that audience members "sat back in spellbound wonder" as though they "were seeing motion pictures for the first time." But he dealt as well with the film's sound. "To heighten the immensity of the impact of the images projected from this screen," he

25 Tom Gunning notes that, once the film is underway, only in this episode does *This Is Cinerama* refrain from use of Technicolor cinematography. "I imagine [that here] they wanted to direct the audience's attention to the sound," he writes; in this episode in particular, he suggests, "they wanted to drain the colour so you'd be more tuned to the sound." Tom Gunning, "A Slippery Topic: Colour as Metaphor, Intention or Attraction?," in *Disorderly Order: Colours in Silent Film*, ed. Daan Hertogs and Nico de Klerk, (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1996), 47.

noted a few days after the premiere showing, "*Cinerama* is augmented by a system of multiple sound, which means that the accompanying sounds of the picture—the music, natural sounds and dialogue—are fired at the audience from outlets all around the theatre. This concentration of assault upon the eardrums, added to the saturation of the eye, inevitably produces sensations that are rousing, intoxicating—and unique." Crowther wondered, as would many other reviewers, about the extent to which such effects could be successfully incorporated into a filmic narrative. But he granted that *This Is Cinerama* is "frankly and exclusively 'sensational,' in the literal sense of that word." Everything about this film, he wrote, "is clearly designed to smack the nerves."[26]

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The palpable sensations offered by *This Is Cinerama* did not go unnoticed by an American film industry that throughout the prosperous and technology-focused 1950s struggled desperately to compete with television. Within just a year of *Cinerama*'s premiere audiences around the nation were treated to more than thirty films that, for better or worse, featured stereophonic soundtracks. Some of these, to be sure, were low-budget "B pictures" whose makers hoped to capitalize quickly not just on the novelty of stereophonic sound but also on the novelty of stereoscopic visual effects that by this time went by the moniker "3-D"[27]; others of them "simply" featured stereophonic sound in combination with one form or another of *Cinerama*-inspired wide-screen imagery.[28] By the end of the decade films of the former sort

26 Bosley Crowther, "Looking at Cinerama: An Awed and Quizzical Inspection of a New Film Projection System," *New York Times*, 5 October 1952, X1.

27 The first film to use so-called "3-D," or "three-dimensional," imagery was *House of Wax* (1953), a horror film from Warner Bros. that also featured a soundtrack in four-track stereo; other films from 1953 that featured both 3-D imagery and one form or another of stereophonic sound were Warner Bros.' *The Charge at Feather River*, Universal's *It Came from Outer Space* and *Wings of the Hawk*; Twentieth Century-Fox's *Inferno*; RKO's *Second Chance* and *Devil's Canyon*; Allied Artists' *The Maze*; Scott-Brown Productions' *The Stranger Wore a Gun*; Pine-Thomas Productions' *Those Redheads from Seattle*; Sam Katzman Productions' *Fort Ti;* and Parkland Pictures' *I, the Jury*.

28 The early (i.e., 1953–54) round of wide-screen stereophonic films included Universal's *Thunder Bay* (1953); Columbia's *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T.* (1953); Paramount's *Shane* (1953) and *The War of the Worlds* (1953); Twentieth Century-Fox's *The Robe* (1953) and *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954); MGM's *Julius Caesar* (1953), *Mogambo* (1953), and *Brigadoon* (1954); Horizon Pictures' *Melba* (1953); and Transcona Enterprises' *A Star Is Born* (1954).

had proved to be just the flash-in-the-pan efforts that they only ever were, but films of the latter sort—with large budgets and subject matter that arguably put them on the high end of the culture scale—triggered a wave of "blockbusters"[29] that held their own at the box office in large part because the public regarded their showings as "special events well worth the increased admission price that first-run exhibitors charged to see [them] on a big screen and to hear them in stereo sound."[30]

I remember very well how exciting it was to go, as an impressionable kid in the company of just my older brother and a cousin, to the "prestige" cinemas in downtown Milwaukee and see some of these films. And I remember at least something of hearing them. The angelic voices resonating from the rear speakers during the nativity scene near the start of *Ben-Hur*, and the several seconds of eerie wraparound wind noise that later marks the return home of the title character's leprous mother and sister, are sonic niceties of which I was reminded only upon revisiting the film via my Dolby 5.1 system, but this same recent revisitation triggered genuine feelings of *déjà entendu*, especially during the sea battle scene during which the percussion accents of Miklós Rózsa's score mix three-dimensionally with the crashes and bangs of weaponry, and during the Judean chariot race that for almost nine minutes features nothing but rumbles and roars.[31] When I popped a newly bought copy of *Journey to the Center of the Earth* into the DVD player, the triggered sense was of an almost haptic sort;[32] how could anyone who

29 Employing not just stereophonic soundtracks but such new wide-screen formats as CinemaScope, Super Panavision, Todd-AO, and VistaVision, the "blockbusters" of the period included Cecil B. DeMille production company's *The Ten Commandments* (1956); Twentieth Century-Fox's *Carousel* (1956) and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1959); Michael Todd company's *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956); Rodgers & Hammerstein Productions' *Oklahoma!* (1955) and *South Pacific* (1958); MGM's *Ben-Hur* (1959); Centurion Films' *The Big Fisherman* (1959); Bryna Productions' *Spartacus* (1960); Samuel Bronston Productions' *El Cid* (1961); and the Mirisch Corporation's *West Side Story* (1961).

30 John Belton, "Glorious Technicolor, Breathtaking CinemaScope, and Stereophonic Sound," in *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 189.

31 Released in November 1959, William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* featured six-channel stereophonic sound.

32 The term "haptic" (from the Greek ἁπτικός, *haptikós*, meaning "tactile") is relatively new to the vocabulary of film studies. It appears nowhere in all the five editions (2000–2018) of Susan Hayward's *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge), but it is indeed listed, under "Haptic Visuality (Embodied Spectatorship)", in the 2012 *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, ed. Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press). As defined in the *Dictionary*, the word is meant not literally but only metaphorically; "haptic

once upon a time attended a showing of this film ever forget, I asked myself, how it *felt*—not emotionally but physically—when the professor chips off a rock sample and unwittingly lets loose a near-fatal flood, or when the members of the expedition make their way along a ledge in an underground canyon and are almost lifted off their feet by a powerful updraft?[33]

In truth, the actual memories of these films that I have carried over the past sixty years have been vague, and they have had much less to do with the films' sonic content than with their visual spectacles and their story lines. On the other hand, a sonic memory from back then that is not at all vague—one that remains so clear in my mind that I sometimes wonder if it has turned into a personal "myth" that grows in grandeur with each recollection—has to do with my experience of listening for the first time to stereo at home.

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This must have happened sometime in the second half of 1960. I suggest this approximate date because I know that it was only in July of that year that *This Is Cinerama* at long last arrived in my hometown,[34] and I am pretty sure that it was my father's exposure to that film (in the company, I think,

visuality," write the entry's authors, involves visual imagery whose "close engagement with surface detail and texture" gives viewers "*a sense* of physical touching or [of] being touched" (s.v.; emphasis added). For extended discussions of haptic film imagery in general, see, for example, Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000) and Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). For a discussion of arguably haptic qualities in Alfonso Cuarón's 2013 film *Gravity,* see Walker, "Sonic Space and Echoes of the Flesh".

33 Henry Levin's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, released in December 1959, featured a 4-track stereo soundtrack.

34 By the end of the decade, many film historians suggest, the novelty of *Cinerama* had worn thin, yet "road-show" installations involving *Cinerama*'s special audiovisual setup continued for years to come throughout the United States and in Europe. Various of the widescreen stereo films mentioned in notes 28 and 29 had already by this time been exhibited at such "prestige" Milwaukee venues as the Riverside and the Strand, but it was only on 28 July 1960 that *This Is Cinerama* itself debuted at the city's Palace Cinema. For details on the showings at the Palace not just of *This Is Cinerama* but of all its sequels, see Michael Coate, "Remembering Cinerama (Part 33: Milwaukee)," Cinema Treasures, blog, June 18, 2009, http://cinematreasures.org/blog/2009/6/18/remembering-cinerama-part-33-milwaukee. For extended commentary on the short-lived novelty of not just *Cinerama*-esque sound but also of "3-D" imagery, see Catherine Clepper, "The Rigged House: Gimmickry, Exhibition, and Embodied Spectatorship in Mid-Century American Movie-Going" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2016).

of me and several siblings) that inspired him to surprise the family by one day bringing home a relatively huge Magnavox console and remote speaker.[35] I also suggest this approximate date because I know for a fact (having checked the catalogues) that at least a few of the LPs included in the stereo system's purchase package had only recently been issued. To my twelve-year-old ears the music contained on these LPs seemed all fine and good; indeed, I thought that the recording of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, with all the cannons and bells, was pretty "cool."[36] But what really blew me away, much more than the windy scenes in *Ben-Hur* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* could ever do, was what I heard on the demonstration disc.

There were no nerve-smacks here, just an array of sounds largely of a sort with which I was already quite familiar. Yet these sounds proved to be fascinating—and memorably so—to a degree I still find hard to fathom. By this time in my young life I had been often to the zoo, and to parades; the field where I and my friends regularly played was bordered by a railroad track; in our basement we had, and almost nightly used, a ping-pong table. I knew well the sounds of barking sea lions and marching bands and passing trains and table tennis. But never—until I heard them stereophonically rendered and coming from just a pair of loudspeakers set up in our living room—had I given these sounds more than a passing thought.[37]

35 For commentary on how throughout the 1950s the idea of at-home stereo was marketed to a decidedly male demographic that possibly included my father, see Keir Keightley, "'Turn It Down!' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High-Fidelity, 1948–59," *Popular Music* 15, no. 2 (1996): 149–77.

36 Featuring the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Antal Dorati, along with cannons from the United States Military Academy at West Point and the carillon at New York City's Riverside Church, the Tchaikovsky album (Mercury Living Presence SR90054, 1958) proved to be the decade's best-selling classical LP. For an account of the album's legacy, see John Schauer, "How Hi-Fi Popularized Tchaikovsky's '1812' Overture (with Cannons)," *Ravinia Backstage Blog*, 11 July 2017; available at https://backstage.ravinia.org/posts/2017/7/11/how-hi-fi-popularized-tchaikovskys-1812-overture-with-cannon.html.

37 The demonstration disc that in 1960 my father brought home was Audio Fidelity's 1959 *Demonstration & Sound Effects* (AFSD 5890). Numerous other record labels, and equipment manufacturers, at around the same time released demonstration discs of their own, many of which are readily available on YouTube; see, for example, RCA's *Sounds in Space: A Stereophonic Sound Demonstration Record* (SP-33-13, 1958), London's *A Journey into Stereo Sound* (PS 100, 1958), Bel Canto's *Stereophonic Demonstration Record* (SR 1000, 1958), Packard Bell's *Space Age Stereo* (PB 1, 1962), and Admiral's *Stereophonic Demonstration Record* (PRS-218, 1964). Along with musical examples, these demonstration discs included a wide array of "sound effects"; to the best of my knowledge, however, only the Audio Fidelity disc featured the back-and-forth ping-pong clicks that in my memory remain so permanently fixed.

I did not wonder then but I certainly wonder now: Why is it that mechanical reproductions of certain sounds—at least for me, but I suspect for others as well—tend to be so much more compelling than their real-life equivalents? Why might a person be inclined to pay more attention to stereophonic recordings of certain sounds than to the actual sounds that such recordings represent? Why might someone be more "rapt" in his or her at-home listening to two-dimensional replications of sounds than when he or she, outside the home, encounters the very same sounds and is *three*-dimensionally "wrapped" in them?

Differences

At the risk of seeming tautological to the extreme, I will state here some of the obvious differences between "surround" sounds in real-life situations and their at-home equivalents. Of these, the most obvious, surely, has to do with the simple fact that sounds of the latter type are heard *at home*.

For me or anyone else to experience in real life some of the recorded sounds I have just described might well be thrilling. But for us to be face-to-face with the real-life sounds of, say, an underground deluge or a sandstorm or a steel mill we would have to actually *be* in a flooding cavern, or a wind-swept desert, or a steel mill. In such circumstances we might well have on our minds numerous things other than how "interesting" our environment sounds (we might be concerned, for example, with the dangers of being drowned, or with how it feels, physically, to have the skin on our faces scratched by particles of blowing sand or to be fairly cooked by the heat of blast furnaces). Even if the real-life situations were relatively safe, we would still be thinking, I imagine, about such things as how we happened to be there and how much time we might be spending there. These thoughts would of course be part and parcel of our experience, and they would distract considerably from the act of "pure" listening. In marked contrast, hearing not long stretches of real-life sounds but just recorded bits of them in the comfort of our homes allows us to attend to the sounds with our ears alone. Upon first encountering such recorded bits we are of course likely to be put in mind of the real-life contexts in which such sounds might actually occur. But if the sounds themselves catch our fancy we have the option of forgetting altogether about their real-life contexts. If we so choose, we can fiddle with our devices' "rewind" and "replay" buttons and just listen, again and again.

Another obvious difference between real-life "surround sound" and its mechanical reproduction has to do with the fact that the latter, regardless of its sophistication, and regardless of its sonic content, is in essence a fiction.

In Disney's 1940 Fantasound setup, the relatively low-volume sounds that came from the rear speakers were indeed the actual sounds of the orchestra whose recorded performances issued primarily from the auditorium's left- and right-hand speakers; in the 1952 *This Is Cinerama*, the "surround" sounds of the roller coaster, the motorboat, and the processing choir were indeed documentary recordings of the real thing, and even in the many stereo demonstration discs from later in the 1950s most of the sounds that purportedly represented sonic "realism so true to life you have to hear it to believe it" were, in fact, true to life.[38] Stereophonic sounds in narrative cinema, on the other hand, have almost always been artificial. The quiet chirps of crickets that lend such a feeling of intimacy to the lovers' late-night snuggle in Malick's *Days of Heaven*, like the barely audible snaps of dry twigs in the autumnal mountain scene near the start of Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* and the faint buzzes of swamp insects heard so clearly near the end of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, are no more "real" than are the roars of the dinosaurs in Merian C. Cooper's decidedly monophonic 1933 *King Kong* or Steven Spielberg's spectacularly stereophonic 1993 *Jurassic Park*. Yet in all these films the sounds, stereophonic or not, have by means of careful editing been made to *seem* real, and the audience accepts them as such. In a section of his *Audio-Vision* book headed "Sound Truth and Sound Verisimilitude," Michel Chion notes that audiences have long assessed "the truth" of cinematic sound not by how the sound relates to what they know from their "hypothetical lived experience" but by how it conforms to the "codes established by cinema itself, as well as by television and narrative-representational arts in general";[39] exploring this same theme, film historian John Belton argues that one of the problems encountered by makers of the late-1950s "blockbusters" entailed an over-reliance on stereophonic sound as an element of the spectacles they sought to sell, the result being that "stereo sound became associated for audiences not so much with greater realism as with greater artifice."[40]

38 The quoted words are spoken by announcer Howard Viken on the Admiral disc mentioned in the previous footnote.

39 Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 107.

40 John Belton, "1950s Magnetic Sound: The Frozen Revolution," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 158. In Chapter 9 ("Spectator and Screen") of his *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992),

Still another obvious but often overlooked difference between real-life "surround sounds" and their recorded counterparts has to do with how these sounds are organized; whereas the former simply "come" together, paratactically or accidentally, the latter are almost always "put" together, deliberately, and thus it remains—whether their artifice is audible or not—that they are *artifacts*.

When I step out onto my third-floor balcony and pay attention to the sounds of my urban environment, I have expectations of what I might hear but no control over what I actually do hear, and it is the unpredictable combination of the expected norm with the occasional surprise that makes this real-life three-dimensional sonic experience at least potentially interesting. Were I to make a narrative film that included a nocturnal scene in which someone for a moment or two stood on a balcony and did nothing but listen, my Dolby 5.1 soundtrack might well feature noises of the sort that I, in similar circumstances, regularly encounter: the squawks of nightbirds, for example, or the distant thrum of a passing helicopter, or the constant but usually quiet din of vehicles moving this way and that. But this soundtrack most probably would be something constructed, something designed—with care and craft—so that, for example, the squawks are heard only in those brief instants when the noise of the traffic has ebbed, or that the sound of the helicopter is heard only when the film's tacit narrative suggests that the scene's protagonist is thinking about something, say, police- or hospital-related. In real-life situations, the sounds of birds and helicopters and traffic would by definition be juxtaposed or superimposed; in re-creations of comparable situations, mixes of these very same sounds—perhaps merely for the sake of making them seem credible, but also perhaps for the sake of serving some narrative purpose—would surely be *com*posed.[41]

Belton deals at length with the issue of the "perception of stereo as artifice" (207) and its effect on filmmaking in the 1960s.

41 A variation on this generalization applies even to the recorded sounds of documentary films and of television newscasts, the episodes of which typically are presented for public consumption only after several "takes" have been made, and often the decisions as to which "take" to use has very much to do with the recorded sounds' communicability. For commentary on sounds in news footage and documentaries, see, for example, Richard J. Schaefer, "Editing Strategies in Television News Documentaries," *Journal of Communication* 47, no. 4 (1997): 69–88; B. William Silcock, "Every Edit Tells a Story—Sound and the Visual Frame: A Comparative Analysis of Videotape Editor Routines in Global Newsrooms," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (2007): 3–15; and Karen Collins, "Calls of the Wild? 'Fake' Sound Effects and Cinematic Realism in BBC David Attenborough Nature Documentaries," *The Soundtrack* 10, no. 1 (2017): 59–77.

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This essay has not dealt with "surround sound" compositions *per se*, that is, works of music intended by their creators to be heard in situations where the sounds come not from a conventional stage located in front of the listeners but, rather, from places more or less all around the listeners.

The long history and rich repertoire of three-dimensional music in Western culture ranges from the aptly named antiphons of medieval chant to the sixteenth-century *cori spezzati* pieces designed for the echoey interior of St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, from the grandiose nineteenth-century operas and symphonic works that featured offstage brass ensembles to the insouciant *musique d'ameublement* with which Erik Satie during World War I decorated Parisian theater lobbies, from the *Poème électronique* of Edgard Varèse that coursed through more than 350 loudspeakers inside the Philips Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair to the handful of recordings by Pink Floyd and other art-rock groups that tried to exploit the short-lived fad for "quadraphonic sound" in the early 1970s, from the 1959 String Quartet No. 2 of Elliott Carter that required its players to sit on the same platform but as far apart as possible to the 1995 *Helikopter-Streichquartett* of Karlheinz Stockhausen that had the four players perform from positions within airships that flew a choreographed pattern high above the listening space.

Much of this music is available on commercial recordings, but mostly in two-channel stereo formats.[42] It would be puritanical priggery to declare that one misses the point entirely when employing "mere" two-channel stereo to listen to music along the lines of Thomas Tallis's ca. 1570 *Spem in alium* (written for eight five-voice choirs and supposedly first performed not just from the cardinal points on the floor but also from the high-up balconies in the dining hall of the Earl of Arundel's Nonsuch Palace in Surrey) or John Cage's 1951–53 *Williams Mix* (created by aleatoric methods

42 There do exist commercial recordings of music that use the so-called SACD (Super Audio CD) format, and in 2005 the National Academy of Recording Arts and Science started to include in its annual Grammy Awards a prize for "Best Surround Sound Album." But these recordings (available on such labels as Audite, Chandos, Coro, Mode, and Telarc) are still few in number, likely because, as Justin Colletti notes, "consumers are slow to adopt systems that require a [special] setup and are hampered by competing delivery standards." "Music in 5.1 Dimensions: How the Best Surround Mixers Approach the Soundstage," *SonicScoop*, January 21, 2014, https://sonicscoop.com/2014/01/21/music-in-5-1-dimensions-how-the-best-surround-mixers-approach-the-soundstage/.

and consisting of snippets of recorded sounds contained on eight separate reels of monophonic tape). It is fair to say, however, that to hear such music emerge from just a pair of loudspeakers is to miss at least *something* of what the composers had in mind; such listening is not without value, but it is arguably akin to viewing the paintings of Rembrandt and Vermeer in black-and-white textbook reproductions, or taking in architectural wonders by means of photographs alone.

The debate about the relative merits of hearing music performed "live" and hearing it via one form or another of stereophonic recording, in any case, is one that can be saved for another day. In this essay I have simply explored the aesthetic/experiential differences between listening to real-life "surround" sounds and listening to at-home replications of more or less those same sounds, and I have regularly raised the question as to why over the years at least some listeners—certainly including myself—seem to have been more intrigued by the latter than by the former. Again at the risk of seeming tautological, let me conclude by reminding readers that most examples of real-life "surround sound"—ranging from the perhaps awe-inspiring noise of a thunderstorm to the quotidian noise of traffic—are, by definition, ordinary. In contrast, "surround sound" recordings, including recordings of traffic and thunderstorms, are quite *extra*ordinary, at least in comparison with what we normally hear within the confines of our homes. Whereas real-life "surround sound" *exists* in space, crafted equivalents are examples of what the announcer for one of the early stereo demonstration discs aptly called "sound *sculptured* in space."[43] No matter how expert has been the sculpting, we cannot help but be aware, by virtue of the physical circumstances of the listening experience, that at-home "surround sound" results from human agency. Even the most natural-sounding examples, we *know*, are man-made, and perhaps that is why—almost rapaciously—they grab our attention.

43 The words are spoken by the British actor Geoffrey Sumner near the end of the London label's *A Journey into Stereo Sound* disc that is mentioned in note 37.

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Abstract

This essay is prompted by "surround sound," the sonic results of which have been evident in cinemas since the late 1970s and the encoding for which, in the form of Dolby 5.1 on the soundtracks of DVDs, since the turn of the century has been fairly ubiquitous. By way of background, the essay deals in turn with the physical nature of three-dimensional listening and with the history of stereophonic sound as manifest both in the cinema and on LP recordings. More to the point, the essay deals with the aesthetic differences (not just perceptual but also affective) between listening to three-dimensional sounds in real life situations and listening to re-creations of those sounds, via a Dolby system or otherwise, in the privacy and comfort of one's home. Playing on the homophonic adjectives in its title, the essay reflects on why sometimes we give more rapt attention to artificial versions of "surround sound" than to the genuine stereophonic sound in which we are literally wrapped almost on a daily basis.

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FORUM

Sound Theaters of the 21st Century: Material Functions and Voltaic Performativities

edited by Gail Priest

Madeleine Flynn, Georgina Darvidis, Erkki Veltheim, performance of *Diaspora* by Robin Fox (Chamber Made production, 2019) - Photo credit: Pia Johnson.

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It could be argued that the practices discussed in this Forum under the suggested term "sound theater" could just as easily be called music theater. Whether a work is considered sound theater or music theater will of course depend on where you stand in the debate on sonic art as a form different to music. While there is a significant overlap, I also believe that the practice of sonic art revolves around sounding and listening as critical and reflexive activities,[1] whereas music is concerned with structural elements of harmony, melody and metric rhythm and the calibration of these within established, predominantly historical structures.[2] Put simply, it is the intention, both in terms of the sounding and listening, that differs between sonic art and music. The works that I am keen to explore here grow out of the culture and practice of sonic art, rather than that of music (or the culture of theater with its emphasis on performative gesture for that matter). If this work may be allowed an alternative categorization, I am proposing *sound theater* as an overarching notion—and *electronic sound theater* for works critically engaging technology, which is mainly the focus here.

In 2019, in what now seems like a mythical time of uninterrupted artistic activity and unfettered mobility, I had the good fortune to travel to several festivals, and also experienced a generous (by Sydney standards) selection of touring international artists. This exposed me to a range of works that started me thinking about how electronic sound was manifesting differently in the second and third decade of the twenty-first century. I also had the honor of being commissioned to make my own large-scale performance work that developed in a way unlike any I had made previously.[3]

1 In this I am guided by Brandon LaBelle's proposal that "sound art as a practice harnesses, describes, analyzes, performs, and interrogates the condition of sound and the processes by which it operates." Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2006), ix.

2 Of course, there has been a consistent effort, especially since John Cage, to allow the extra-musical into music, however I would argue that discussion and analysis of the historical structures of "music" still dominate music discourse. Rather than being considered a marginal aspect of music, I prefer to consider sonic art as related yet having concerns that extend beyond these structures—philosophical concerns with ontologies and epistemologies, subject-object relations, speculative realisms etc.; and psychological and scientific concerns with perception, cognition, and consciousness. These concerns can be applied to music, but they are not at the forefront of the discourse.

3 Created in collaboration with designer/artisan Thomas Burless, *A Continuous Self-Vibrating Region of Intensities* (retitled in 2021 as *We Are Oscillators*) is a performance installation environment featuring eight bespoke kinetic objects that explore the vibrations of the voice through cymatics (the morphogenetic effects of sound waves). Excerpts can be viewed here: https://youtu.be/iDQ6cR9onbU.

I was struck by how these performances, rooted in experimental electronic sound practices, are becoming more performative via their materials, and their digital-mechanical hybrid methods of activation. These activations provide the "sonoturgical" arcs that drive the theatricality, without additional or imposed performative constructs. The introduction to this Forum will survey some of these intriguing performances providing a context for the following invited contributions that explore a number of projects and practices in more depth.

Ironically, much of my current academic argument is against taxonomic mapping, so the purpose of grouping together the practices discussed here is not so much out of a desire to pin down and define, to corral these artists in a paddock of my own fencing. Rather, it is my intention here to explore a range of practices that engage sonic material performativities in a way that has an intriguing lineage and opens new possibilities for further exploration, particularly as mediating technologies become more mobile and malleable. However, the influence of avant-garde music performances—e.g., Fluxus events, or the music theater of Heiner Goebbels—will not be ignored, rather reconsidered through this focus on sounding, listening, and materials.

Attempting not to impose an externally manufactured category, the essays that comprise this Forum for the most part feature "accounts" in which the artists discuss their own practices. Their intentions and preoccupations, expressed in their own words, create resonances and dissonances that may reinforce or dispute the Forum's themes. This focus on experience and practice enacts my commitment to what I have termed a "tomographic approach," in which the embodied, embedded experience of a sonic art event, expressed through "slices" from the inside, informs and enriches the commentary.[4] In this I am influenced by the epistemological approach of situated and partial knowledges as proposed by Donna Haraway in which the embodied, sited, and experiential is transparently acknowledged in the discussion, rather than writing from a pretense of unlocatable objectivity.[5] This knowledge is inevitably incomplete and partial, which should not be seen as a problem rather an opening—an invitation—an opportunity for

4 Gail Priest, "The Now of History: Tomographic and Ficto-Critical Approaches to Writing About Sonic Art" (RE:SOUND 2019, 8th International Conference on Media Art, Science, and Technology, Aalborg, Denmark, 20–23 August, 2019), https://www.doi.org/10.14236/ewic/RESOUND19.9.

5 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

connection with other specific and partial knowledges. It is in this spirit of offering partial knowledges for connection with others that this Forum also has a distinctly Australian flavor.

Then and Now

My sound practice began in the early 2000s, when, in Sydney at least, what marked the live experimental audio scene was its indifference (often to the point of disdain) towards performativity. Populated by people using small electrical devices, mixing boards, and laptops, any gesture that shifted beyond a flick of a finger seemed quite extreme. I entered this culture after ten years in the contemporary performance scene that had been riding high on postmodern waves of parody and camp, with a preference for physical over textual forms. The fact that there was an audience for the quiet, contemplative, and visually minimal came as a shock and relief to me. It is in this respect that I refer not just to a practice of experimental electronic sonic art but to a culture as well. There were a handful of wildly and willfully performative artists, often in the noise genre growing out of post-punk and industrial scenes (see the description of Lucas Abela's performance below), but still the performative language was predominantly drawn from the gestures of playing and an energetic summoning from the sound rather than an additional aesthetically calculated language.

As the next two decades of the century have come and gone, so too have the participants of this scene. Interestingly, this move towards material performativities appears within the practices of both the handful of remaining mature artists, and the next generation. Caleb Kelly, one of the key curators, event producers, and academic commentators within the early 2000s suggests that this shift is a response to "digital fatigue." He explains that there is:

> a longing, from the artists, for a physical connection with the materials of their work. In the 2000s, the prevalence of digital production technologies, especially within the digital studio, led to a schism between artists and their materials, one that has only been further widened through developments in the complexity of digital processes. … Thus, makers have become estranged from the means of their practices.[6]

6 Caleb Kelly, "Materials of Sound: Sound As (More Than) Sound," *Journal of Sonic Studies* 16 (2018), https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/456784/456785/0/0.

Sound and materials—particularly in relation to gallery arts, but also associated live performances—is very clearly the area of expertise of Kelly. He founded the Sound and Materials research group at the University of New South Wales, now known as Sound, Energies and Environments.[7] For the purposes of this Forum I will differentiate my interests by focusing specifically on how the "material turn" within sonic art manifests firstly in audio performances—gigs and concerts—and secondly, how some of these presentations are moving decidedly into the theatrical context, challenging what constitutes "performance" in this milieu.

Sonic Actions

Peter Blamey is a leading Australian artist, active since the 1990s. While the presence of performative materials has become more explicit over the years, it is not so much a change in modus operandi but the result of the development and refinement of conceptual preoccupations and creative motivations. Blamey began his engagement with music in the 1980s and 1990s as a drummer in bands. The shift towards sound happened through a keen interest in guitar and microphone feedback.[8] Since then Blamey's work has maintained a focus on flows of energies manifested as sound. There is a certain respect and agency given to these energies so that he does not tame them, rather he creates conditions and situations that encourage them into existence and transformation. This is evident in his early 2000s experiments with mixing-desk feedback, a minimalist process with the potential of maximal sound, in which a mixing desk's various outputs are fed back into its inputs creating its own feedback loop, modulated through adjustments of volumes and frequencies. Developing from this are his explorations in what he calls "open electronics," feedback systems using discarded motherboards. These manifest as both installations as well as a performance series titled *Forage*. Blamey places clouds of copper wire onto an assortment of scavenged motherboards connected to small battery-powered amplifiers, gently nudging them into different

7 Kelly has edited two issues (16 and 18) on "Materials of Sound" for the *Journal of Sound Studies*. His most recent curatorial ventures include *Materials, Sounds + Black Mountain College* (Asheville, NC, June 7–August 31, 2019) and *Material Sound* touring Australia (2020–23).

8 Peter Blamey, interview with Gail Priest for *Sounding the Future*, July 24, 2015.

configurations, the interaction resulting in fields of fascinating hum and buzz. Blamey describes these works:

> The title relates both to foraging in streets and laneways for the computer components used, and to the way in which the performances involve a "foraging" for the signals coursing chaotically through this lively but unstable electrical environment.[9]

Blamey's work actively engages in reuse and recycling as a critique of capital-driven technological obsolescence. His use of photovoltaic (solar) panels in systems of contingent energy scavenging also attests to his environmental concerns. It is the gestures involved in activating these materials in ways that manifest sound that make Blamey's work uniquely performative. In his *Invisible Residue* performances, Blamey sonifies (via solar panels) the infrared signal of remote controls from long discarded equipment, performing with the signature sounds that each creates.[10] Along with the engaging and strangely rhythmic sounds, the all-too-familiar gesture of pointing the remote control creates a curious choreography that encourages critical reflection on this action, and its reinforcement of sedentary leisure, particular to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Double Partial Eclipse (2014) involves two small photovoltaic panels that Blamey holds in varying proximities to a lightbulb, the resulting current running to ebows placed on an electric guitar.[11] Blamey "plays" the guitar by modulating the flow of energy to the ebow via distance and angle. Blamey's measured and sustained gesture creates a mesmerizing performativity, as he seemingly plays the light and air.[12] In a recent performance configuration, *Rare Earth Orbits*, he uses spinning rare earth magnets and their closeness to electromagnetic coils to create a basic oscillating voltage, which is then amplified.[13] To generate the spinning he uses a hand clamp,

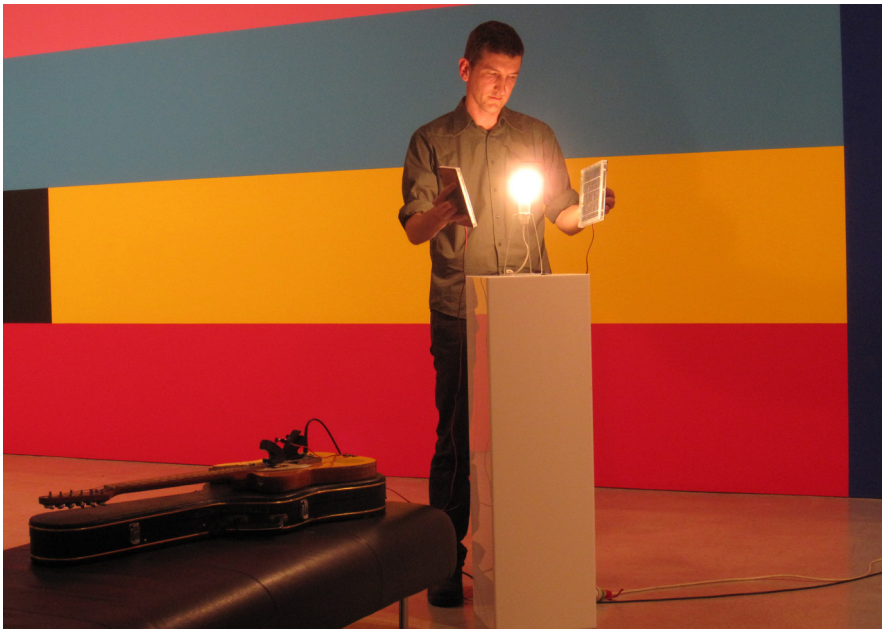
9 Blamey, "Forage," artist website, accessed June 7, 2021, https://peterblamey.net/forage/.

10 Blamey, "Invisible Residue," recorded in Sydney, March–May, 2015, track 1 on *Invisible Residue,* sound recording released May 8, 2020, https://peterblamey.bandcamp.com/track/invisible-residue.

11 An ebow (or E-bow, "electronic bow") is a small device that can be placed on the strings of a guitar that through a magnetic drive field causes the string to vibrate creating continuous tones, amplified by the instrument's pickup.

12 See Blamey, *Double Partial Eclipse*, performance for video presented as part of *Material Sound at Home* (Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, curated by Caleb Kelly), uploaded May 21, 2020, https://vimeo.com/421135001.

13 See Blamey, "Rare Earth Orbits - Hand/Clamp," recorded January–March, 2020, track



Peter Blamey, *Double Partial Eclipse*, MCA Art Bar (2014) - Photo credit: Jenn Brewer.

a fishing reel, and a foot-pump activated air vent. The differently scaled actions are focused and minimal in range, with the intensity required to generate what he calls "'handmade' electrical activity" undeniably rigorous and full of intent that renders them highly performative.[14]

However, Blamey's intention is not to invent innovative performance modes but to find ways in which the processes or flows of relations between materials and sounds can become evident to an audience. He tries to create situations in which sonic transductions and amplifications of materials reveal the interactions of their energetic flows. Blamey's focus on obsolete, discarded technology not only engages with the immediate materiality of these objects, but also with "broader ideas relating to electricity, the history of technological artefacts, ecology and experimental practices in the arts."[15]

2 of *Rare Earth Orbits*, sound recording released May 3, 2020, https://peterblamey.bandcamp.com/track/rare-earth-orbits-hand-clamp.

14 Blamey, "Rare Earth Orbits," artist website, accessed June 7, 2021, https://peterblamey.net/reo/.

15 Blamey, "Selected Motherboard Works (2009–2014)," accessed June 7, 2021, https://peterblamey.net/selected-motherboard-works/.

Kate Carr at Les Instants Chavirés (Paris, October 2019) - Photo credit: David Lantran.

This affirms Kelly's belief that a focus on materials allows for an expansion out from simply the phenomenal experience of sound to allow for more contextual critique.[16]

As a contrasting example, for the last decade or so Lucas Abela (Australia) has played amplified shards of glass. Pressing his mouth to the glass he blows, slurps, and sings, with changes in the "embrasure," in combination with effects pedals, creating dynamic noise assaults. Inevitably the glass breaks, and Abela is not afraid to slice his face and lips as he continues.[17] This is undoubtedly a dramatic performance, but one I would argue still comes from an integrated engagement with materials and their sound potentials and the inherent performativity involved in exploring this.

Elements of material performativity are also finding their way into many artists' practices who were previously more laptop-based. Australian artist now based in the UK, Kate Carr's foundational work is in field recording and minimal sampled instruments. Recently she has been integrating "a scientific rocker, a spinning beaker, wind up birds and suspended tape loops."[18] Working through these material processes, she says, offers a "transparent liveness" explaining that "the risk of failure and malfunction they incorporate and the capacity to physically improvise with things 'at hand'" offer her a spontaneity that she found lacking when only using a laptop and controller. The integration of these live elements is not new and remarkable in itself—this is what instruments offer—but it is the manner in which the exploration of the sonic potentials within materials are defining the scope

16 Kelly, "Materials of Sound".

17 "Lucas 'Granpa' Abela Live," performance of the artist Lucas Abela (also known as Justice Yeldham) recorded live at cave12, Geneva, February 21, 2016, uploaded on June 4, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aMBMbEWc6I. Graphic content warning.

18 Kate Carr, email correspondence with the author, June 10, 2021.

and gesture—and are being allowed their own performativity—that is an interesting development within the experimental audio scene.

I doubt that any of these artists would consider their practices within the conceptual framework of sound theater; however, aspects of their work illustrate the integrated relationship of material and its activation that results in a sounding performativity. It is when this same approach to performative materials is scaled up within theatrical contexts that I believe we approach a mode of sound theater that has different motivations and asks for different listening intentions than music theater, with its origins in notated scores and (often but not always) narrative constructions. Sound theaters, I propose, are developing from the culture and practice of experimental audio in which the performance gestures and modes required to activate the sounding potential of materials, both acoustically and via technological manipulations, are inextricably entwined, providing the structure of the composition and the performance—of the performative composition.

Sonic Theaters

The seeds of this Forum were planted when I saw *Diaspora* (2019), created by Robin Fox with co-collaborators Erkki Veltheim and Tamara Saulwick, a "science fiction revelation" based on the first chapter of Greg Egan's book of the same name.[19] Fox is internationally renowned for his audiovisual work using lasers. These concert pieces are undeniably theatrical, but *Diaspora* marks a significant framing shift to the constructs of theater, working with an overarching (albeit non-textual) narrative. However, the work maintains the conceptual ethos of electronic noise music, and the performative structure and arc of the work are driven by Fox's synesthetic audiovisuality. In *Diaspora*, the performative material is voltage itself. An essay featuring interviews with Fox and dramaturg/performance-maker Saulwick, exploring the motivations and making of *Diaspora*, opens our selection of essays.

Another significant Australian work premiering in 2019 was *Speechless*, a "wordless, animated notation opera" by Cat Hope.[20] Hope's artistic preoccupations revolve around bass frequencies, noise, and graphic notation. In

19 Greg Egan, *Diaspora* (London: Millennium, 1997), 5–36. See "Diaspora," Chamber Made (website), accessed June 14, 2021, https://chambermade.org/works/diaspora/.

20 Cat Hope, "Speechless," artist website, accessed June 14, 2021, https://www.cathope.com/art-work-speechless.

Speechless she uses the *Forgotten Children*: *National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention* report from the Australian Human Rights Commission (2014) as the unspoken "libretto."[21] As well as informing the overall themes and message of the work, Hope used the material elements of the report—colors, infographics, and children's illustrations—as inspiration for the graphic score that is presented in the Decibel ScorePlayer App.[22] The work is scored for an orchestra comprising only bass instruments, and four female vocalists from vastly different genres ranging from death metal to opera, who perform the textless piece. In the second essay of this Forum, Hope describes the intentions and processes of creating this remarkable work, which she herself describes as an opera but may also be productively discussed through the figure of sound theater. Hope's work, while fitting comfortably within the "new music" classification, also embodies an ethos born of noise, pushing way beyond the sonorities and the notation of most contemporary classical music. The expanded sound world released through the scored translation of the materials of this devastating report actively mobilize the greater cultural, contextual, and political resonances, aligning this project with the critical reflexivities of sonic art.

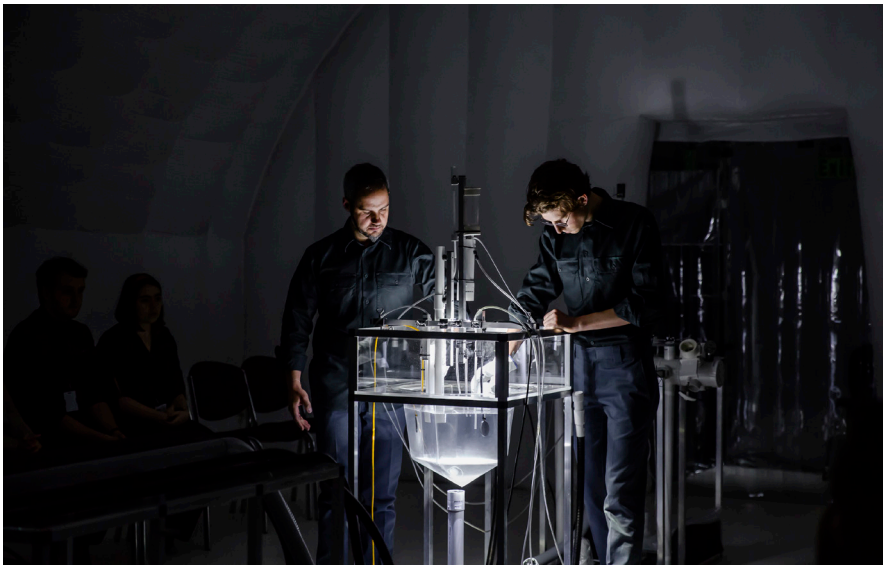
Although it certainly could be argued that Speak Percussion, under the artistic direction of Eugene Ughetti, come from a contemporary classical music lineage, rendering them well-suited to the term music theater, I would argue that their commitment to explorations of sonority, integration of technology, and adventurous collaborations exemplifies electronic sound theater. Ambitious works such as *Transducer* (2013), co-composed by Ughetti and Robin Fox, focusing on the materialities of the microphone and speaker;[23] or *Polar Force* (2018), a collaboration with renowned sound artist/field recordist Philip Samartzis, exploring the sonic potentials of ice,[24] are examples of the kind of material performativities that create sound theater. Also notable are the solo works of Matthias Schack-Arnott (a for-

21 Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014*, https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/forgotten-children-national-inquiry-children.

22 A network-synchronized scrolling score player created by Decibel New Music Ensemble available as an iPad app, https://decibelnewmusic.com/decibel-scoreplayer/. See the section "Animated Graphic Scoring" in Cat Hope's article further ahead for more discussion and examples.

23 Speak Percussion, *Transducer*, video performance presented by Arts Centre, Melbourne, Sydney Myer Music Bowl, August 1–2, 2014, https://vimeo.com/184948815.

24 Speak Percussion, *Polar Force*, video teaser (excerpts) for the world premiere season at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, November 24–December 1, 2018, https://vimeo.com/318170673.



Eugene Ughetti and Matthias Schack-Arnott during a performance of *Polar Force* (Speak Percussion, 2018) - Photo credit: Bryony Jackson.

mer artistic associate of Speak Percussion), such as *Anicca* (2016) and *Everywhen* (2019), that are based on the interaction of the performer and complex kinetic mechanisms.[25] This results in hybrid, embodied event structures in which the action, materials, and soundings are fully integrated.

While I have been concentrating on Australian works, this tendency to explore sound theaters is evident internationally, particularly at Sonica, a biennial festival presented by Cryptic in Glasgow (UK). A highlight of the 2019 edition was *SpaceTime Helix* (2012) by Italian artist Michela Pelusio.[26] Pelusio's "optoacoustic instrument" is a single cable, attached at floor and ceiling, activated to create a spinning standing wave, which with the help of strobe lighting creates a dynamically changing helix. The acoustic sounds of the mechanism, and its electromagnetic signals, are processed to create the tensile escalating soundscape drawn directly from

25 Matthias Schack-Arnott, *Anicca*, video excerpts from the premiere season, Arts House "Season 2," 2016, https://vimeo.com/208074483; and *Everywhen*, video trailer with footage from the premiere season, Melbourne International Arts Festival, 2019, https://youtu.be/kL8ucoPfsLc.

26 Michela Pelusio, *SpaceTime Helix*, video excerpts, uploaded June 16, 2015, https://vimeo.com/130903990; and "Working on SpaceTime Helix 2012," work-in-progress footage, uploaded November 24, 2014, https://vimeo.com/112728517.

this awe-inspiring demonstration of split, bent, and blended light. Another highlight, offering a completely different aesthetic, was Argentinian artist Nicolás Varchausky's *Mesa de Dinero/Money Desk* (2018).[27] Using modified money counters and scanners, he amplifies the actions of counting his artist fee. Working with both the aesthetics of the sound of the machines and the functional clarity of the task-based actions, Varchausky sonifies the materiality of money, and the immateriality of the global currency markets in a way that allows the materials to "become" both performers and activists, again exemplifying Kelly's notion of the political potential of material sound.

Kathy Hinde is a Cryptic Artist, presenting many major works within multiple Sonica festivals. In 2015 I experienced *Tipping Point* (2014), a breathtaking installation that can also be played live, a hybrid format that allows materials to express themselves independently and become performative instruments.[28] In the third essay Hinde talks with Matthew Sergeant about her works *Piano Migrations* (2010), *Tipping Point* and *Twittering Machines* (2019), that exemplify the way in which she approaches the manipulation of materials so as to engage with their non-anthropogenic contingencies. In this Hinde critically connects our material discussions with current theories of object-oriented ontologies and agential realism.

Theatrical Soundings

Branch Nebula (led by co-artistic directors Lee Wilson and Mirabelle Wouters, with visual artist Mickie Quick and sound designer Phil Downing as frequent collaborators) presents physical theater works that openly exploit the material performativity of sound. In Wilson's virtuosic solo performance piece *High Performance Packing Tape* (2018), real-time audio processing sonically elevates the humble materials of office stationery misused as circus apparatus.[29] In *Crush* (2020), the sonic integration intensifies with

27 Nicolás Varchausky, *Mesa de Dinero* [*Money Desk*], video excerpts from the performance at the collective exhibition "El Centro en Movimiento 2. Máquinas e imaginarios" curated by Rodrigo Alonso, Terraza de la Sala Sinfónica, CCK Centro Cultural Kirchner, Buenos Aires, February 24–25, 2018, https://vimeo.com/325933410.

28 Kathy Hinde, *Tipping Point*, video excerpts from the installation at the 10th Sound Festival (Aberdeen, UK), Wooden Barn, Banchory, November 2–8, 2014, https://vimeo.com/113274669.

29 Branch Nebula, *High Performance Packing Tape*, video trailer, uploaded December 18,

several sections driven by audio activations. An enormous sculptural lattice of PVC piping turns into a ructious aeolian organ with the assistance of an industrial vacuum cleaner. A searing dronescape is created when the performers attempt to drag heavy guitar amps by amplified wires, the physical and sonic tension responding in direct relation. Branch Nebula allows the theatrically sonic to be an integral structural and dramaturgical element of their work, thus rendering their practice truly interdisciplinary.

Mirabelle Wouters during a performance of *Crush* (Branch Nebula, Sydney Opera House, 2020) - Photo credit: Prudence Upton.

It is in this context of theater—one which pays exceptional attention to the integration of sound's own theatricality—that this Forum features an essay by composer/sound designer Scott Gibbons, a regular collaborator of Italian theater director Romeo Castellucci and his company Societas. He shares his process notes and musings on developing the sound world for the company's recent project, *BUSTER*. We are privileged to learn of Gibbons's material experimentations and manipulations as well as some new strategies required for collaborating remotely in global pandemic conditions.

2019, https://vimeo.com/380389913.

Sonic Thingness

I can date the initiating spark behind this Forum further back to 1998, when I had the pleasure of seeing Heiner Goebbels's *Black on White* (originally created in 1996 as *Schwarz auf Weiss*) at the Adelaide Festival. I recall the moment when a musician from the Ensemble Modern put on a kettle to make a cup of tea. As they waited, they ignited a tea bag, its flaming convection sending it aloft. This magical flight was accompanied by the kettle's whistle; Goebbels says this is "a C major triad, which first the flute player and finally the whole orchestra play along with."[30] By inserting this simple domestic action (among many others) into the orchestral context, Goebbels intended "to create an un-hierarchical balance in the world of sounds."[31] However, in the process of introducing the sounding functions of objects, he realized that they, in fact, began to exert power over the musicians. Discussing the presence of these material situations in his early works, he says:

> the presence of things might not yet act as a major character of the works in total, but the things rather show up, they capture the space, they conquer more and more the performances and the compositions, they choreograph the words, the movements and actions. The more they insist on their being, the more they call for respect, for their own timing.[32]

In *Stifters Dinge* (2007) Goebbels finally allows the objects full reign with the piece featuring no (visible) human agents, only five pianos, mechanical devices, as well as recreated elements such as rain, fog, and ice. Goebbels describes the effect of the integration of sounding "things" on an audience:

> It demonstrates a different way of experiencing, or even confronting, the way we perceive the sounds of things on a day to day basis. It gives us a bigger freedom for our imagination and also it avoids this enormous reflex we have to upload things with an anthropomorphic center. Those sounds also avoid the reflex to mirror ourselves, to identify ourselves with what we see and hear. Sounds of the things do not allow an easy identification. And that is what I

30 Heiner Goebbels, "The Sounds of Things," in *Sonic Thinking: A Media Philosophical Approach*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 93.

31 Goebbels, "The Sounds of Things," 92.

32 Goebbels, 93.

> basically try to work on: not to work on a direct encounter with somebody we can recognize, but rather on an indirect encounter with alterity.[33]

In a 2011 lecture Goebbels also references this alterity suggesting that his use of objects and processes has the intention to destabilize the audience's sense of self-identity, offering an "insecure confrontation with a mediated third … the other."[34] Once again, we see how an engagement with the material soundings as performative events can lead to contemplations of political and philosophical context, beyond the sensorial pleasures of sonority. While Goebbels's reputation as the master of "music theater" may seem to undermine my argument for sound theater as something apart,[35] I would propose that considering the work of Goebbels through the proposed premise of a sound theater that focuses on material behaviors and their sonic consequences allows for an enhanced appreciation of his practice.

Sonic Flux

The focus on materials, objects, and their activation as functions and tasks also brings Fluxus events (influenced by avant-garde Cagean practices) into focus. Douglas Kahn describes the shift in the way sound is considered in Fluxus:

> The historically earlier question of What sounds? receded in Fluxus and was replaced with questions such as Whether sounds? or Where are sounds in time and space, in relation to the objects and actions that produce them?[36]

Kahn highlights the "incidentalness" in the way in which sounds were, or in fact were not generated. In something like George Brecht's' *Incidental Music* (1961), fulfilling the task takes precedence over generating a sound.[37] Simi-

33 Goebbels, 96.

34 Heiner Goebbels, "The Aesthetics of Absence," European Graduate School Video Lectures, May 1, 2011, 33:56–34:04, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yRjR4aGXRU.

35 Goebbels's work is in the lineage of Mauricio Kagel's stage pieces such as *Staatstheater* (1971). While space does not allow further discussion, Kagel will appear briefly in the following essay "Sounding Digital Consciousness."

36 Douglas Kahn, "The Latest: Fluxus and Music [1993]," in *Sound*, ed. Caleb Kelly (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 33.

37 Kahn, "The Latest: Fluxus and Music," 34.

larly in Shiomi Mieko's *Boundary Music* (1963), the artist calls for the action of making "the faintest possible sound to a boundary condition whether the sound is given birth to as a sound or not."[38] However, ultimately Kahn is critical of how sounds are still musicalized within the Fluxus mode:

> From the standpoint of an artistic practice of sound, in which all the material attributes of a sound, including the materiality of its signification, are taken into account, musicalization is a reductive operation, a limited response to the potential of the material.[39]

Here Kahn provides us with the language with which to argue for a sound theater practice. The practices of material sound performance explored above are not simply musicalizing the sonic consequences of material interactions but are attempting to engage more fully with the cultural contexts this material sounding implies and activates.

The engagement in the event of material sounding was not confined purely to American and European explorations, as evidenced by Japanese artist Shiomi's text score cited above. For this Forum, it is through the collaborative work of artist-composer Kosugi Takehisa and performer Kazakura Shō that this era and aspects of performative sound materials will be further explored. Christophe Charles, a Japanese-based artist and academic, had the privilege of working with Kazakura. His detailed historical research includes excerpts from a personal interview with Kosugi and original translations that allow the artists' significant presences to be felt. What is revealed is a fascinating approach that focuses on how these artists—one from music, one from theater—created a collaborative practice through a shared engagement with the materiality of space, time, and the unseen/unheard flows of energies. The influence of artists such as Kosugi and Kazakura can be experienced in the performative material soundings of contemporary Japanese artists, such as ASUNA and his mesmeric durational drone piece *100 Keyboards* (2014),[40] and the sublime sonic kinetic scrapyard of Umeda

38 Shiomi Mieko, quoted in Kahn, 35. Throughout this Forum the Japanese convention of placing the surname first is adopted.

39 Kahn, 31.

40 ASUNA, *100 Keyboards*, video excerpts from the live installation of "ASUNA: One Day Exhibition" at the Gallery Kapo, Kanazawa, July 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh3H6x1GFn4. See also the full performance at the Full of Noises festival, Barrow-in-Furness, August 17–19, 2018, https://vimeo.com/351364974.

Tetsuya's *Things That Don't Know/Ringo* (2017),[41] which also initiated my thinking around material sound performativities and sound theaters.[42]

Sound-/Music Theaters — Together Apart

Aspects of avant-garde music, Fluxus, and music theater works (such as those by Heiner Goebbels) all potentially exert a "musical" influence on the projects discussed here. However, I also hope to have revealed how these projects engage a performativity that moves beyond and away from the structures of music to that of material sounding. A key part of this is an emphasis on sonorities that arise from gesture as functional task creating an integrated performance-sound structure. Also pertinent is an intention to create contexts in which listening engages with both the phenomenal sound, but also opens up historical, political, and contextual understandings. I am the first to admit that I have not made a watertight defense. However, what I hope I have done, in both this introduction and the selection of invited essays, is to present a number of connected perspectives, drawn from experience, that allow for a productive consideration of the practice of sound theaters. Inevitably, just as no one has yet managed to clearly extract sonic art from music, sound theater also cannot, nor should be, completely extracted. Rather, the two might be considered through Karen Barad's proposal of a cut or separation that is, within one move, both "together-apart," a proposal, based on quantum field theory, that defies binaries and allows for people, thoughts, situations, and things to contain itself and other as separate continuities.[43] I leave you to consider the possibility of "sound-/music theaters," existing, both together and apart, with the specificities to be considered contingently, intentionally, and contextually.

Gail Priest

41 Umeda Tetsuya, *Things That Don't Know/Ringo*, excerpts and interview from the Sapporo International Art Festival 2017, uploaded on December 28, 2017, https://youtu.be/f2zw-WXaJAAc.

42 These are artist who toured Australia thanks to the indefatigable efforts of artist-promoter Lawrence English.

43 Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (2014): 168–87.

Sounding Digital Consciousness: Robin Fox & Chamber Made's *Diaspora*

Robin Fox and Tamara Saulwick interviewed by Gail Priest

Georgina Darvidis, performance of *Diaspora* by Robin Fox (Chamber Made production, 2019) - Photo credit: Pia Johnson.

Robin Fox's *Diaspora* (2019) is a hybrid audiovisual event shaped by a "narrative" of sorts that transforms the live electronic music gig or concert format into that of a theatrical experience in a way that might be described as electronic sound theater.[44] In the following essay, fragments from interviews conducted with the project's lead creator Robin Fox, and co-director/dramaturg Tamara Saulwick, are presented as input and stimuli, in an attempt to grow and develop this notion, or this consciousness, of electronic sound theater, in a manner that is not dissimilar to the coming to consciousness of the entity that is the protagonist in this impressive work.

44 *Diaspora* premiered at The Substation as part of the Melbourne Festival, October 3–6, 2019. Concept, creation, composition, electronics, and lasers: Robin Fox; co-composer and violin: Erkki Veltheim; dramaturg and co-direction: Tamara Saulwick; ondes musicales and Moog synth: Madeleine Flynn; vocals and theremin: Georgina Darvidis; video art and system design: Nick Roux; lighting design: Amelia Lever-Davidson; costume design: Shio Otani.

Origin Stories

It was while experiencing a performance of *Diaspora* in 2019 that I began to develop this impression that there is an evolving practice of electronic sound theater that might be productively considered as not entirely the same as music theater. As discussed in the Forum introduction, the theatrical outcome of these works is surprising due to the composer-creators' practices focusing on digital, and frequently non-gestural forms of experimental electronic music and sound art. Fox's background incorporates both composition (he has a PhD from Monash University) and he has worked as a composer and sound designer for dance; however, considering the nature of his practice, which is intensively electronic, noise-based, and non-figurative, the move to instigating his own complete theater work might seem surprising.

Since the late 1990s, Fox worked extensively on laptop to create live processing systems, including a well-renowned collaboration with Anthony Pateras. He made a significant move towards the visual in the early 2000s via experiments with a cathode-ray oscilloscope,[45] feeding it sculpted noise and projecting the corresponding patterns via live video. This developed into his experiments with lasers. Using a similar process of translating audio voltage to visualized oscillation (and sometimes vice versa), Fox projects the lasers outwards into a smoke-filled auditorium, carving the space into three-dimensional geometric landscapes of tone and noise, in which both sound and image are manifestations of what Fox describes as shared voltage. These projects have become increasingly ambitious, starting with a basic green laser and then moving to the colorful spectacle of RGB. Fox produces works for both standard concert formats and large-scale site-specific performances, such as *Aqua Luma* (2021), taking place in the Cataract Gorge in Launceston, Tasmania; or *Sun Super Night Sky* (2020), a laser installation with streamable soundtrack for the Brisbane city skyline.

While Fox's audiovisual works are presented in electronic music and sound art festivals, he has also worked in theater, particularly as a composer, sound, and lighting designer for contemporary dance works. Very early on in his career he was involved with Chamber Made, then known as Chamber Made Opera.

45 A testing device that graphically displays voltages, allowing for measurement and analysis of waveforms and electromagnetic signal.

> **Fox:** The first large work that I made when I was still at university, studying composition, was with Chamber Made. It was a bizarre revisioning of the Narcissus and Echo myth that I wrote for four turntables, double basses, and operatic voices… [Mauricio] Kagel's *Staatstheater* really had a big impact on me when I was a student and so these early pieces of mine were very much of that nature. They were based in sound and rooted in sound, but the intent was operatic and theatrical in a kind of oblique way.[46]

When Fox was approached by violinist-composer Erkki Veltheim (then an Associate Artist at Chamber Made) to create a work, he decided to attempt a science fiction opera based on the first chapter of Greg Egan's novel *Diaspora*.

> **Fox**: One thing that I'd often joked about with opera is: "Why haven't we ever had a science fiction opera?" … Once it occurred to me that I wanted to make a science fiction opera, I knew exactly what I wanted it to be—a rendering of the first chapter of *Diaspora.* … I just loved the description [it gives] of the birth of a digital consciousness—which I had to go to great pains to distinguish from an artificial intelligence. It has this incredible, quasi-mathematical computer "programmery" but also very DNA-driven description of the birth of this life form … It is incredibly evocative and incredibly musical, actually. … [It] suggested all kinds of musicality.

Tamara Saulwick, the co-director, dramaturg, and current artistic director of Chamber Made, makes performance works that are inextricably entwined with sound and sound technologies.

> **Saulwick**: I came into sound surreptitiously. I was working just with recorded voices … documentary materials or first-hand accounts … So first of all, they became useful in terms of constructing content; then, I became increasingly interested in the materiality of sound, the quality of those recorded things, and the detritus within the recordings—and that became part of the language of the work.
>
> I was working on some solo material, and I'd become very interested in this intersection between live and pre-recorded—video and audio, actually. I was really interested in this slippage between the mediated and the live body and

46 All quotes by Robin Fox are from his Zoom interview with Gail Priest, April 29, 2021.

> voice. Working between recording and liveness is a really fertile space that continues to fascinate me. … I've [also] been living with a musician [Peter Knight, currently Artistic Director of the Australian Art Orchestra] for the last twenty years—surrounded by a lot of music, sounds, doing a lot of listening and a lot of talking [about sound].[47]

Saulwick and Knight have collaborated on several of her solo performance projects, including *Pin Drop* (2010–14), which uses recorded interviews and foley techniques to explore the role of listening within fear;[48] and *Endings* (2015–18), with songwriter Paddy Mann, using mobile record players and reel-to-reel devices to create the sound character of the work.[49] Given Fox's established audiovisual language, Saulwick saw that her role in *Diaspora* "was to facilitate the work coming into being … trying to support Robin, but also the whole group to make [the work] the most 'itself.'"

It is also interesting to note the origins and progression of the company Chamber Made. It was formed in 1988 by stage director Douglas Horton to create original chamber opera works. Composer David Young became artistic director in 2009, and grew the reputation of the company by creating intriguing, opera-in-miniature works, often in private houses, site-specific locations, and expanding into new media and digital realms. Tim Stitz took over in 2013 and moved the company to a model that drew on creative input from associate artists, of which Saulwick was one. Saulwick moved into the artistic director role in 2018. In 2017, the "Opera" part of the title was retired to reflect the contemporary focus on interdisciplinary works that explore the relationship between performance, sound, and music.

47 All quotes by Tamara Saulwick are from her Zoom interview with Gail Priest, May 13, 2021.

48 A radio adaptation of *Pin Drop* made by Tamara Saulwick and Peter Knight for ABC Radio National (2013) can be listened to at https://soundcloud.com/tamara-saulwick/pin-drop-radio-adaptation.

49 A radio adaption of *Endings* by Tamara Saulwick and Peter Knight, in consultation with Miyuki Jokiranta, made for ABC Radio National (2017) can be listened to at http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/soundproof/endings/8188440. Saulwick's most recent project, *SYSTEM_ERROR* (premiered on July 7, 2021 at Arts House, Melbourne), is a collaboration with sound artist/dancer Alisdair Macindoe, who has created a bespoke instrument from conductive electrical tape in which the performers' bodies close the circuits to create audio. This, I would suggest, is a perfect candidate for electronic sound theater.

Composing Consciousness

The sound, structure, and scenography of *Diaspora* comes from the *audio-visual* compositional interpretation of the birth of the digital consciousness as described in Egan's text, but with no narrative-based dialogue. (Several of the pieces involve lyrics but these texts operate as part of the sonic fabric rather than as narration.) Saulwick describes the compositional process:

> **Saulwick**: Erkki and Robin quite literally translated what they saw as this kind of arc of development within the writing. They had musical motifs that had direct correlations to ideas in the text, and it was done in a series of parts. One of the reasons why I think Robin always thought that it would be a good source, is that in many ways the language translates very readily to a compositional format, because [it] talks about building layers and complications of theme.

Fox explains the choice of instruments and palette of the composition:

Georgina Darvidis, Erkki Veltheim, performance of *Diaspora* by Robin Fox (Chamber Made production, 2019) - Photo credit: Pia Johnson.

Robin Fox, Madeleine Flynn, Erkki Veltheim, Georgina Darvidis, performance of *Diaspora* by Robin Fox (Chamber Made production, 2019) - Photo credit: Pia Johnson.

Fox: I'm fixated with modular synthesizers, so I wanted to make [them] a big [feature of the composition].[50] I also wanted to use the electronic instruments as props so that the machines are part of the ethos of the work. But I also really wanted to work with musicians … Electronic instruments lend themselves to this kind of automated delivery rather than human gestural delivery. I've always had [an] issue with electronic instruments not vibrating. You don't have the appropriate proprioceptive feedback from a vibrating body. It's really the sound system that's your instrument in that sense. It's not the computer or the software, it's the speaker that's the vibrating thing in the room. Working with Erkki, I was going to be working with violin, so I liked the juxtaposition of that. Working with modular synths [but] then also with the most iconic, conservative, orchestral instrument family. The violin is such an iconic reference point for all kinds of music; it encapsulates that high/low culture that we really exploited in the work as well. …

50 In 2016, Fox and Byron Scullin co-founded the Melbourne Electronic Sound Studio (MESS) which houses an astounding array of analogue modular synthesizers (many rare), available for members to use (https://mess.foundation).

I wanted to work with great musicians. Madeleine Flynn is a great musician [pianist] and so the ondes Martenot made really good sense there as an electronic instrument that embodied that theremin like quality.[51] Then the idea of having a voice [Georgie Darvidis] … a human voice that would sit alongside the very inhuman construct of a lot of the other aspects of the work. … It did come from this electronic premise, but there was so much of it that wasn't electronic by design … I wanted performers to be on stage … I didn't want to do a sound design that supported the theatrical action or even a sound design that supported a sort of visual installation. Tamara and I would often have these dramaturgical conversations where my position would be: "this is a gig"—a gig in this kind of bizarre set. …

There were set pieces, but there was a lot of flexibility in the way [*Diaspora*] was played. I wanted to keep that musicality about the work. I think that's part of my problem with some of these other things that I work on, in contemporary dance, where you have to nail everything down. I deliver the soundtrack in this electronic form, design a sound system and then it's cued the same way every night. It's a show and that's a great way to work, but it's also not very musical. So I did very much have in my mind that idea of this music-driven theater; the music, and the way we composed the music, was really at the core of each section of the work. …

Even though it did have theatrical or narrative qualities at times, all of the ideas came from the sound and the generation of the sound, and what we were trying to do with the music, not just sonically, but linguistically … to me music is incredibly linguistic … [I mean in] that kind of punch card way that notation has of turning [sound] into a sentence structure and a grammatical structure. You have a form so that then, in the same way you would construct a sentence, you construct a phrase, and then you construct a paragraph. I'm always interested in the intersection points between that kind of linguistic approach to music and then sound as another thing which doesn't have that linguistic intent.

51 The ondes Martenot is an early electronic instrument, patented in the same year as the theremin, played with keyboard and a ring that moves along a wire to create ethereal quivering tones.

Georgina Darvidis, Erkki Veltheim, performance of *Diaspora* by Robin Fox (Chamber Made production, 2019) - Photo credit: Pia Johnson.

A key instance within the performance that plays with this musical linguistics is the section that sounds like an interbreeding of a Bach partita and Country and Western hoedown featuring virtuosic performances by Veltheim, Darvidis, and Flynn. For Fox and Veltheim, this piece of very strange composition exemplifies the issue that arises around the cultural context of data that is too easily lost in machine learning:

> **Fox:** The idea behind that was trying to make music that an artificial intelligence (even though we weren't looking at AI particularly) might make. What would an artificial intelligence make if it could make music and why? And because artificial intelligence is algorithm-based, based on data input it seemed logical that it would analyze a Bach violin partita and then analyze a hoedown and realize that structurally they were almost identical, then just put those two things together, because it doesn't have any cultural baggage. It doesn't realize that they actually represent two very different paradigms in terms of music and how we appreciate it as human beings, and in our human cultures. So, I like the idea that in a science fiction world there is no delineation between those … those forms.[52]

52 Botnik, a studio that specializes in machine-assisted entertainment remixes, fed a neu-

In another section, Darvidis sings a version of "Somewhere over the Rainbow" that is digitally diced, spliced, and fragmented almost beyond recognition, yet—for a human audience that understands cultural contexts—resonates with the bittersweet longing to be elsewhere and other. These unfamiliar familiarities are even more curious as they emerge from an extended meditative opening sequence (sustained for over twenty minutes) of undulating sine tones and sub frequencies that—along with the accompanying laser light translations carving the smoke-filled air—render the space thick with affective vibration. Fox talks about wanting to play with the balance of these linguistically music and abstract sonic elements:

> **Fox:** It's very difficult to present something that's non-linguistic sonically and have it appreciated without a linguistic lens. I think people still want music and resolution; you know, tonic to dominant resolution—the psychoanalytic safety of all of those structures. … So, I think with this work there are sections where I just wanted it to sit for a while in places that were very strange and not be concerned about where they were going.

For me, this extended opening illustrates how this performance operates on a sonic art sense of time, one that allows for a more ambient and patient extrapolation, rather than musical and theatrical time that often progresses through the accumulation of actions and established moments. I asked Saulwick how she worked with these different time structures:

> **Saulwick:** I think of [*Diaspora*] as an expanded concert. The opening sequence was a long sustain. I felt like my job was going "Okay, how can we shape the unfolding of visuals—stage lighting and video materials—to meet that tempo?" In terms of the audience experience, it was very physical, like you were in a big bath of sound … [with the] massive subs under the seating, the sine tones were kind of actually waving through you physically. I think that places people in time in a different way. They can really settle into it.

ral network a data diet of Country and Western songs resulting in the hilarious classic, "You Can't Take My Door" that can be heard at https://youtu.be/EPs6wdM7S3U.

Visualizing Conception

Perhaps what makes *Diaspora* seem so remarkable as a performance work is the fact that the composition is, from inception, audiovisual. There is never the sense that the visuals are accompanying the sound—they generate each other, converging to activate the space creating the performativity. As well as Fox's lasers that manifest the full-bodied vibrational sound as three-dimensional wave geometries, exquisite video projections, created by Nick Roux, hang suspended in air, the holographic illusion created by an enormous Pepper's Ghost.[53] A meteorite emerges out of the depths of the space, making its way towards us. It almost imperceptibly transforms into a brain, an eye, multiple eyes, limbs. Fragmented body parts grow before us, eventually perfectly transposed over the live body of Darvidis, marking the artificial consciousness finding its form.

Georgina Darvidis, performance of *Diaspora* by Robin Fox (Chamber Made production, 2019) - Photo credit: Pia Johnson.

53 A theatrical device whereby a slanted transparent pane (glass or perspex) reflects an image, the source not seen by the audience, so that the reflection seems to hover in space. It is named after John Henry Pepper, the scientist who popularized it in the nineteenth century, although others also claim its invention.

> **Saulwick:** We had this completely separate development, which was around staging the body in relation to the hologram and what the visual language might start to be. …With the Pepper's Ghost it becomes a set of pragmatic decisions: how to work with the architecture that the holograph projection surface offers you … There was some level of dramaturgy [around the body] being behind that structure and then revealing the live body at a certain point; breaking through to the foreground space and then being sucked back into the nether space … The live body, the digitized body, and the interrelationship between them.

It could be seen as potentially disappointing that the final digital consciousness takes a human form—is this the anthropocentric limit of our imagination? Will we always try to make our technology in our image? However, this is true to Egan's text, in which the artificial consciousness has a choice of avatars but is eventually drawn to a human shape gleaned from its library of images. The work's visual narrative guides us through this process of becoming, making us aware that what is being created is porous, contingent, and includes the potential of so much more.

In the same way that the composition shifts from linguistically musical to sonic, the visual language also shifts between figurative to abstract. The piece concludes with a spectacular explosion of light and sound (referencing the carving of a meteor in Egan's text), in which Fox's stadium concert pieces create the template, celebrating the bursting into sentience of this new consciousness. It's an unabashedly, uncritical, and joyous celebration of a new digital, post-human life. While there may be causes for concern over the consequences of our increased transformation into digital life forms, they are left for others to argue. In *Diaspora*, the integration of the body within the digital entity attempts a hopeful trajectory that the notion of the corporeal will remain a component of an expanded consciousness. One of the burning issues of digital consciousness construction and substrate mind independence is around how a brain in a vat can sense its environment and replicate the kinesthetic knowledge this generates. In *Diaspora*, there seems to be the suggestion that corporeality remains significant (even if in some emulated form).

Conclusion: Linguistic Slippage

Evident in the artists' own words and histories is the slippage between considerations of music and sound. As proposed in the Forum's introduction, it

is naive to think that sound theater is a completely separate activity to music theater. There is no damage done in thinking *Diaspora* a work of music theater, framed by music's attendant "linguistic" qualities, as Fox terms it. However, it is also interesting and productive to consider the work's origins in the non-musical, non-linguistic pursuits of sound and audiovisuality, and how this changes the compositional process; how audiovisual affect becomes narrative protagonist, suggesting a different form of performativity; and how this may mark a shift in "consciousness," from music theater to electronic sound theater.

Opera Activism: *Speechless*—An Animated Notation Opera for Every Musician

Cat Hope

This article outlines the creative development of the opera *Speechless* (2017–19), composed and directed by Cat Hope.[54] At the conclusion of an evolving process of research, composition, workshopping, technical development design, and directorial concepts, the work was premiered at the Perth Festival in February 2019, performed by four solo vocalists, the Australian Bass Orchestra, and a mix of community choirs. The opera is a personal artistic response to global human refugee issues and is based on the 2014 Australian Human Rights Commission report *The Forgotten Children*.[55] This article explores the connections between the music, score, and production design of the premiere from the creator's perspective.

Karina Utomo, performance of *Speechless* by Cat Hope (Tura New Music production, Perth Festival, 2019) - Photo credit: Rachael Barrett.

54 Short video excerpts with director's commentary are available at https://vimeo.com/345604414. A podcast featuring excerpts from the opera can be found at https://www.abc.net.au/classic/programs/new-waves/cat-hope-speechless-part-2/12024822.

55 Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014*, https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/forgotten-children-national-inquiry-children.

Pluralizing Form

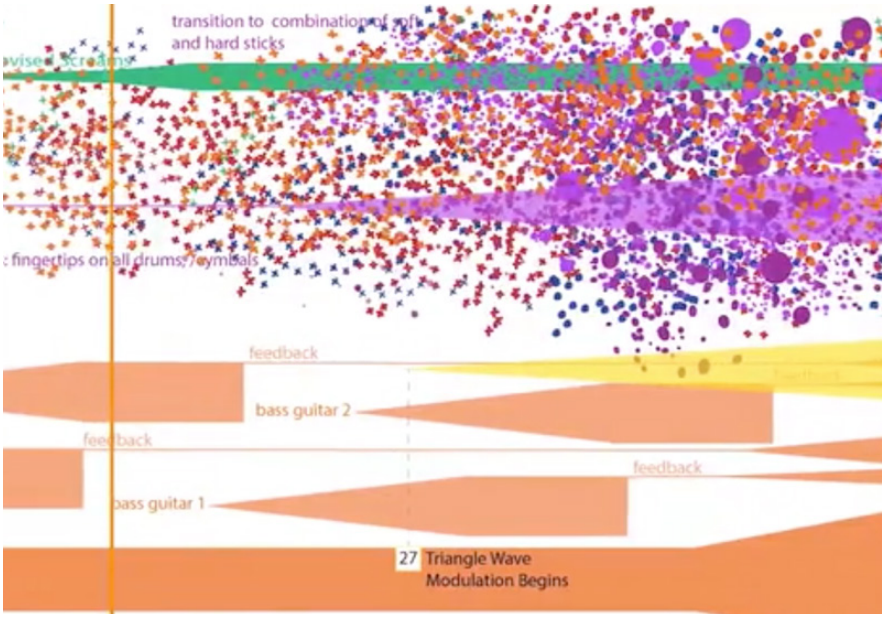
Speechless is undoubtedly an experimental opera in its sound world and presentation realm, yet it is structured quite conventionally as it pertains to the opera genre—it has an overture, three acts, and an interlude. Each act consists of operatic formulas, such as arias, recitatives, and choruses. A range of traditional compositional techniques (such as theme, variation, development, repetition, retrograde, and inversion of material) are used throughout. Binary and ternary structures appear. The range of intensities of the music create the dramatic sound world you expect from the form.

That is where the links to convention cease. While the opera is sung, no words are used. The opera is designed to be performed by musicians from a wide range of music styles, not just classical or rock artists. The orchestra and choir are built from musicians in the city where it is performed and is composed, using color graphic notation that facilitates this polystylistic involvement. The four soloists are also required to be from different musical styles; and in the case of the premiere, there was a death metal singer, Karina Utomo; an exploratory vocalist, Sage Pbbbt; an opera singer, Judith Dodsworth; and opera/cabaret singer Caitlin Cassidy. The chorus was built from several community choirs and a public call, while the orchestra involved musicians from classical, jazz, rock, and folk styles. The Australian Bass Orchestra, for which the opera is written, is in fact a "mythical company" that only exists as a manifesto outlining a group of musicians who only play pitches below C4. Any musician can participate—as long as they can play these notes on the lower end of the spectrum—and the Bass Orchestra is named after the country where it comes together. The score captures this focus by specifying groups of low brass, low winds, low strings, piano, harp, electronics, percussion, and electric bass guitars.

Animated Graphic Scoring

The score uses color graphic notation created digitally to develop image files to be read by performers in motion.[56] The score images outline all the instrumental parts but can be separated out as a series of layers, with each part highlighted for that group. The score is read as a "screen score," presented to musicians in the Decibel ScorePlayer, an iPad application that

56 The animated score can be viewed here: https://vimeo.com/383439576.



Section of graphic score for *Speechless* by Cat Hope.

animates the score image, by moving it across a "playhead" indicating the moment of performance. The application is developed by the Decibel new music ensemble, a group of musicians, composers, and programmers based in Australia. The musical director of the Perth premiere, Aaron Wyatt, is the programmer of this application and performing member of the ensemble, and I am the artistic director of and performer in the ensemble. The Decibel ScorePlayer application coordinates the networked reading of predominately graphically notated scores in rehearsal and performance. It features scrolling and "tracking" modes for score reading, as well as a range of other features such as the ability to annotate the score or change the part view without interrupting the progress of the score in motion. Having the music director so involved with the software ensured that any developments or changes to the application could be made during the development phase to accommodate the scale and unique requirements of the work and the processes around it—and this is what happened. During this project, it became clear that the automated score delivery system did not replace the need for a conductor, who provided reinforcement for the orchestra and gestural memory aids for the soloists and choir, who had memorized the score. The app also enabled the incorporation of the production cues for

stage management, sound, and light. Also, a new way of quickly uploading changes to the score to multiple iPads was developed to facilitate the early workshops where the composer was working with all the musicians. The tablets are connected over a local network, which, when connected to a server, was also used to upload new and corrected versions of the score during the development workshops.

Artistic Activism

Speechless is my personal response to global human refugee issues, it does not at any time attempt to speak on behalf of refugees themselves. I felt very saddened by, and helpless in the face of, Australia's response to refugees arriving in Australia. This is my attempt to respond to this key issue and encourage others to do the same, making the project a kind of artistic activism.[57] The report that the opera is based on, *The Forgotten Children* by the 2014 Australian Human Rights Commission (see *supra*), is a key document in the public learning about the treatment of refugees in Australia, particularly significant because it was rejected in the Australian parliament as "biased" when presented by the head of the AHRC, Gillian Triggs. As a result, people still languish in detention today, seven years after this report was issued.

The opera is very literally based on this report: the graphs in it are used as sources for musical "themes," the color scheme of the report's layout is used to describe parts for the choir, while the color scheme of the children's drawings featured in the report are used to signal parts in the orchestra. The colors were sampled from the digital document and added to a "palette" used for all color decisions in the score. Further, the drawings and graphs in the report are engaged as core score material, manipulated, and transformed into images readable as music. It is almost a reversal of the libretto: the musicians "read" the report, while the singers do not use words: the libretto *is* effectively the score. The opera is designed to create and continue an emotional engagement with the Australian refugee issue and the politics surrounding it, for the musicians that participate and the audiences that experience it. It aims to create empathy for and sympathy with the issue, and hopefully spur people on to action to confront these issues. This was facilitated during the premiere

57 See also Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert, "Why Artistic Activism?" The Center for Artistic Activism, April 9, 2018, https://c4aa.org/2018/04/why-artistic-activism.

Speechless by Cat Hope (Tura New Music production, Perth Festival, 2019) - Photo credit: Frances Andrijich.

season by providing platforms for refugee advocates before and after shows in talks, stalls, collections, and other opportunities.

Direction and Design

I directed the premiere, as I had a clear vision where the score, and thus the report, was clearly linked to all production decisions leading to its theatrical representation. I didn't want a narrative for the opera—that would be a story that wasn't mine to tell. Instead, the work consisted of a range of performance art actions, where the brief for the production team was "installation" and "performance art" rather than "theater" and "opera"—an installation approach to scenography. The themes for the design all link to the compositional processes and concept drawn from information in the report: shelter, connection, severance, joining, commonality, belonging/not belonging, following, isolation, memory, ephemera, long time passing, identity, missing parts, being trapped, and, of course, speechlessness (language and being heard).

I prepared for the direction and blocking of the show by reading film

Sage Pbbbt, performance of *Speechless* by Cat Hope (Tura New Music production, Perth Festival, 2019) - Photo credit: Toni Wilkinson.

theory, Robert Wilson's writing about "silent opera,"[58] and watching Romeo Castellucci's theatrical productions. I particularly enjoyed Werner Herzog's series of books *Scenarios*, which feature the free-flowing narratives he used as the basis of his films.[59] I set about writing my own scenarios for *Speechless*, which I remained quite faithful to in the end production. I plotted the action against the score, letting the music drive the decision-making process at every step of the way, and providing time frames for various settings. The way that my linear approach to graphic notation unfolds through time was very useful for plotting stage "action" through time as well. The music remained the driver for every aspect of the production design, and this helped me avoid didacticism as much as possible, retaining the abstract qualities I appreciate so much in music itself.

I chose to work with Alex McQuire, a young fashion graduate, on designing the set and costume as one, where performers interact with their

58 Robert Wilson, "Robert Wilson's Theatrical Universe," *Limelight*, February 6, 2013, https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/features/robert-wilsons-theatrical-universe/.

59 Werner Herzog, *Scenarios*, trans. Martje Herzog and Alan Greenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Judith Dodsworth, performance of *Speechless* by Cat Hope (Tura New Music production, Perth Festival, 2019) - Photo credit: Frances Andrijich.

surrounds as extensions of their costumes, and vice versa. The stage design featured long reams of fabric hanging from above that the performers would engage with and transform into various objects as the work progressed. Performers would turn these large fabric pieces into costumes of various scales, backpacks, and pillows. These large fabric reams were intended as surreal surrogate flags—symbolic links to nationhood. Their scale and lack of symbols made them a kind of fictional, nondescript flag, but they still held the intention to describe a belonging of the past and of a potential future. The colors of these flags were selected from the children's drawings in the report, according to the same color scheme used for the orchestral parts, as a way to link the set to the score and, thus, the music to the set. Each vocal soloist is ascribed a flag color, but that was not necessarily the color of their part in the score, further complicating this notation of "belonging." The flags were over fifteen meters long, and their bright, solid block colors cascaded down from the roof space onto a black carpeted stage—the carpet being the type found in government offices. Also inspired by the waiting rooms in government offices were the audience seats. These were placed "in the round," on the edge of the carpet that defined the stage area, with the orchestra at one end. The choristers were placed among the audience, dressed simply.

I ascribed directorial approaches for each flag color: formality (blue), surreal occurrences (red), dramatic tendencies (green), and emotional responses (pink). Three of the four flags were made of tent fabric, which made its own sound when handled, resembling some of the extended vocal sounds made by the soloists. The pink fabric was the exception.

It was a sensuous jersey type; soft, stretchy, pliable, and silent. During the performance, the blue, red, and pink fabrics were pulled down from their flag-like hanging position, each in different ways, at a different pace, and for a different purpose. The red was fashioned by the soloists into an extended, oversized backpack the length of one performer, who trailed it around behind them for most of the show. The blue length was folded by the soloist ensemble using formal flag folding techniques, accompanied by a recitative, and attached to that performer in a way resembling a Japanese *obi*, as an extension of her existing costume from the same fabric. The pink flag was dramatically and quickly whipped away at the beginning of a loud, screeching solo, then gathered up into a kind of portable, cushioning backpack. The green flag was different from the others, in that it had the arms of used clothes sewn into it, referencing the 2001 "Children Overboard affair"—a political controversy where Australian government ministers falsely accused seafaring asylum seekers of throwing children into the sea to secure passage. This flag was stored under the conductor's podium until the soloists ritualistically drew it out, collectively fashioning it into a spectacular and elaborate gown, beautifully designed by assistant director Rakini Devi for the only opera singer. This aimed to highlight the extra attention given to the opera art form at the expense of others, whilst linking to the theme of the work. These different engagements with the flags were the focus for the majority of action that took place on stage throughout.

The space was hung with vertical LED lights, referencing the bars found in many of the children's drawings from the report, in association with other top-down lighting that was plotted to unfold as very slowly moving washes that transitioned across the space, bathing it in red, to moments where the light responds to the music and soloists voices (designed by Matthew Adey with Andre Vanderwert). The choir, divided into four musical parts, each aligned with one of the soloists, interacts largely with the soloists both musically and in terms of action. The choir moves as a whole at certain points, en masse, referencing what was known as Donald Trump's caravan "invasion," a group of over four thousand migrants travelling across Mexico toward the United States in 2018. At one point in the opera, the choir and soloists lie on the floor in the dark, as the room sings with feedback scored for the interlude. They lie with nothing for comfort, only to arise and begin their wander again.

Affective Frequencies

The music focuses on very low sound worlds across both high and low volumes. This low sound can create vibrations in the room and listeners themselves, shown to produce more emotional responses. Drones and long, sliding tones are the predominate features that replace melody and tonal harmony, facilitated by my personal notation approach that eschews traditional notation design. The range of pitches (below C4) is decided by the players themselves, but my composition prescribes the way these pitches relate to each other. Each group of instruments (e.g., low brass) forms a microtonal cluster, represented by a singular color. The work features improvisational moments for the soloists and various members of the orchestra, inviting them to strike out from the larger group and showcase their unique style. While the audience cannot see the notation, there is a strong connection between color and sound throughout this production, not in any synesthetic sense, but more as a way to connect and express the material from its source. The diverse range of musical styles creates a unique sound imprint that generates a sound world difficult to categorize, and the critical review and audience surveys demonstrated that the work did elicit emotional responses and a heightened motivation to act in empathy with those seeking better lives through asylum.

The audience and media review responses to the premiere season were overwhelmingly positive, with sold out houses over a six-show season. The scoring technique enabled a more open participation for musicians from a wide range of stylistic backgrounds, but also facilitated the unique qualities of the work, such as the focus on long form, drone like sound, extended glissandi, extended techniques, and sections of free improvisation. It enabled the linking of sound, light, and other stage management cues into the musical score and thus the conductor's involvement, resulting in these aligning very precisely with the musical material. It also drove and enabled the high level of abstraction that is at the core of this composition and its production design.

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Performing Installations: An interview with Kathy Hinde

Matthew Sergeant

Kathy Hinde, performance of *Twittering Machines - Live AV* (2019) - Photo credit: Ashutosh Gupta.

Kathy Hinde was the winner of the Sound Art category at the 2020 Ivors Composer Awards, taking the prize for her live work *Twittering Machines* (2019).[60] Hinde's output is broad. Her work includes gallery installations, public participatory projects, and sound walks, as well as work that fuses all these elements and more. *Twittering Machines — Live AV* is her first self-contained performance work, although for many years she has repurposed her more sculptural installation works as instruments with which she performs. It was this interrelation of installation and performance that I wanted to pick at as I met with Kathy (remotely) during the UK's third national lockdown in Spring 2021.

60 Developed at a Cryptic Cove Park Residency and premiered in August 2019 at MUTEK Montréal, followed by the UK premiere in November 2019 at Sonica Glasgow. An excerpt of the work can be viewed at https://vimeo.com/518250341.

> **Kathy Hinde**: The performance version of *Twittering Machines* grew from an installation of mine of the same name—along with the necessity to respond to an invitation to perform without being able to "ship" an installation. I had been experimenting with various different "tabletop" sound making set-ups for years, and so this performance grew from these previous experiments—so in this case it did evolve substantially from the original installation work.

Hinde's practice of repurposing her instruments began with *Piano Migrations* in 2010, which presents videos of birds projected onto the strings of a physical piano. The videos appear to interact with the strings of the instrument through twangs and strums produced by computer-controlled tappers and exciters, seemingly bringing the instrument to life. A later piece, *Tipping Point* (2014), presents six pairs of connected water jars hung from mechanical arms, controlled by motors to oscillate like seesaws. As the water self-levels across the moving jars, it serves as a mechanism for tuning audio feedback.

> **Hinde**: I first started thinking about my installations as instruments I could perform with live after I'd created *Piano Migrations*. Despite the main body of the piece being a dismantled piano with all the regular "playing" mechanisms removed, it was only when the work was finished that I realized I could still "play" it [through software]. When I later embarked on the creation of *Tipping Point,* I then had the premeditated intent to design an installation that could also be the site for live performance. In fact, *Tipping Point* started a trajectory of work that I feel slips between "sound sculpture" and "invented musical instrument."

There is therefore a clear connecting thread of performativity across Hinde's work. Even when installed, Hinde's works never simply *are*, they *do.* When the artist is not performing, *Tipping Point* sways in a slow dance. And while we are aware of motors whirring under computer control, it also appears as if the water is singing. This dialogue with the performative properties of her materials is something she continually acknowledges in our conversation.

> **Hinde**: *Tipping Point* looks quite "precise" and "designed", but the way it works is actually quite emergent. The work is all about audio feedback. I don't "make" the sound, but instead set up the conditions from which sound can emerge through resonant frequencies. [In performance] I can shift the glass vessels to change the water levels, but I then have to listen closely to wait and

find out what my adjustments have changed, and then respond back. It's a balancing act—a dialogue—and in this way it relates to the physicality of sound and how it behaves in space. I can't control it fully and precisely.

From this perspective, I was keen to understand more about Hinde's relationship with her materials. Given that sound always seems to lie within the core of her audiovisual interdisciplinarity, it was perhaps unsurprising that, when the topic of materiality is broached, she is first keen to talk of the materiality of sound itself.

Hinde: One vivid listening experience was on a residency in Bavaria in 2014. I was exchanging "quiet environmental sound recordings" with sound artist Tony Whitehead. Tony sent me a beautiful recording of a leaf, gently, and only slightly, moving in the wind. It was very quiet, yet evocative. I was listening on headphones whilst reading indoors. The window was slightly open and when I listened to the leaf moving in the wind, I became aware of a slight cool breeze on my cheek. I listened to the recording for a second time … and, yet again, I became aware of the breeze on my cheek. It was somehow spontaneous and intuitive; which got me thinking. Through listening, I seem to have started to have more of a multisensory experience—and engaged in "touch."

Tipping Point by Kathy Hinde (2014) - Photo credit: Kathy Hinde.

The sense of tactility with which Hinde describes materials permeates our conversation. When Hinde mentions the materials with which she is working, it is never far abstracted from her sense of physical contact with them.

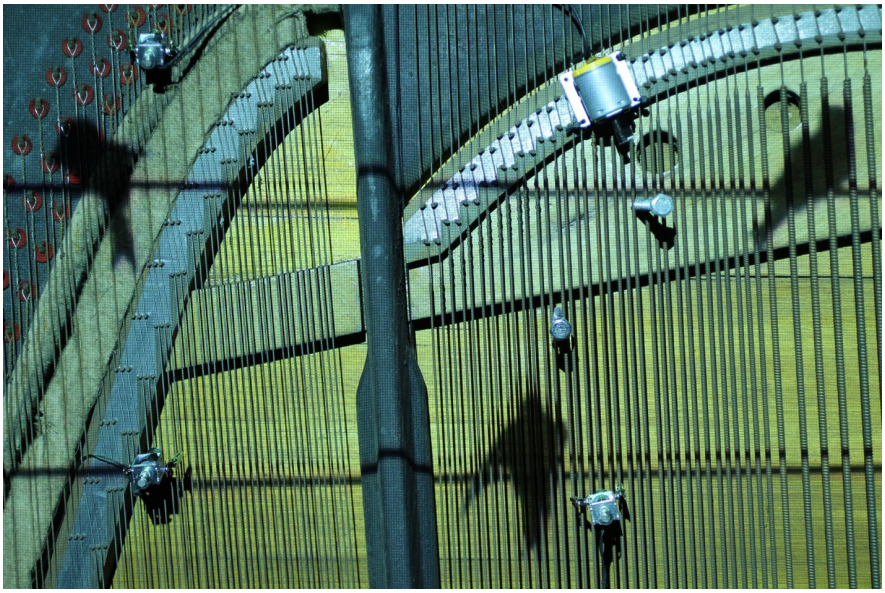
At this point my mind wanders back to the whirring motors that lie behind the slow liquid dances of *Tipping Point*. A digital/technological presence permeates much of Hinde's work. Her live performances frequently combine live digital manipulation, analog records, and objects motor-manipulated via a computer. Her installations are often controlled through Max patches. I wondered how this tactility might apply to these domains.

> **Hinde**: I perform live with *Piano Migrations*, as a duo with Matt [Olden]. I do this by choosing different videos of birds to project onto the piano—and this can produce surprising responses. Through the Max patch, I can control the sensitivity of the translation into physical "twangs"— and I can also control the speed of the movie and the "repeat rate" of the "twang". So, I place the video on the piano and then respond and shape how it responds by listening and observing. So, again, it's something I don't have complete control over—even more so than *Tipping Point* perhaps.

Hinde has collaborated with Olden for over a decade, beginning with *Piano Migrations* in 2010.

> **Hinde**: I work on the overall "system" for a piece and what part the Max patch plays within it, but collaborator Matt Olden actually programs the Max patches and I'm not as intimately involved in this. The fact I don't make the Max patches myself probably does make a difference conceptually for me, especially in comparison to my soldered circuit boards and machined, mechanical parts
>
> It's interesting that I don't make my own software in this respect. I suppose it's quite hard for me to consider how a Max patch might have [the same] material qualities as my soldered circuits. I'm quite attached to my laptop. I don't like being without it. But I'd say that Matt Olden's computer is an extension of his mind and body in quite a different way. In that way, the Max patch doesn't present the same kind of discursive materiality for me—but that is different for Matt, he is his machine.

Hinde's description of Olden's laptop as a quasi-prosthesis to his body (in a way hers is not) is beguiling. It seems Hinde identifies the same tactility in Olden's relationship to code as her own relationship with, say, welded



Piano Migrations by Kathy Hinde (2010) - Photo credit: Kathy Hinde.

steel. In this creative partnership tactility still seems to function as a form of common currency.

Such conversation reveals an underlying dialogic quality to the performative aspects of her work in this regard, with words like "listening" and "responding" frequently reappearing. I was interested as to whether she saw her materials as a form of collaborative co-author or co-agent in this regard, to which she responded by discussing her recent audiovisual piece *River Traces 1* (2020), her first work with 16mm film.[61]

> **Hinde**: I spent a lot of time recording and listening to the river—running my hands in the water, exploring the textures of the plant life, mosses, and rocks through touch. I started to make photogram 16mm films with river materials—(my first photogram film)—and I found it so very tactile. This film-making process felt like a very intimate encounter with both the material qualities of the river and with the process of making an analogue film in this way. What I discovered through these experiments is that film is sensitive. It col-

61 An excerpt of the work can be viewed at https://vimeo.com/446566785.

laborates. It responds back and improvises. There is a high possibility that what you set out to do will come out "differently."

"So, your materials are a collaborator in this sense?" I asked her outright. Her answer surprised me.

Hinde: Actually, I'm not sure that "collaboration" is the right word in this context. The reason I'm not one hundred percent comfortable with it, is that … how can the river actively take part? And how can this be an equitable collaboration? I think that the term "collaboration" was a useful conceptual tool when approaching my creative processes with the river. I enjoy thinking about it as a collaboration, which gave rise to subtle shifts in my approach and perception. But my reservations are to do with the fact that the river does not actively give me permission. My premeditated approach—that I intend to consciously leave space for the river to "do its own thing"—gives some agency to the river, but I am not able to sense the "intention" of the river or find a way to hand the same amount of agency that I have over to the river.

I asked her to elaborate further.

Hinde: In working on *Piano Migrations*, I filmed the birds in situ. It is their movements that play the piano, so maybe I am in some kind of collaboration with them. I'd like to place myself in that situation, but then, I haven't asked them. I'm uncomfortable with saying the birds are (or any other materials/nonhuman others) authors—not because I want to "claim the credit," but it seems somehow wrong to bring these beautiful creatures into our systems of "ownership" and "authorship." For me, both of these terms lead to notions of "hierarchy" and "capital." This is where I struggle and problematize this idea of assigning nonhuman others as "authors" or "collaborators."

While aspects of Hinde's thought do engage with the kind of active agential materialities so popular amongst artists and critical theorists at the present time,[62] Hinde's perspective forces us to question the transmissibility of terms in these fluidic domains. Given that birds—or indeed rivers—have no means to express a permission to participate, there are implicit hierarchies of power activated here, a potential "cashing in" of an agency that has not itself been freely granted.

62 For example, Jane Bennett, Graham Harman, Karen Barad, Tim Ingold.

Kathy Hinde, Still from *River Traces (1)* (2020).

> **Hinde**: I'm aware of some rivers being granted "human status" in order for them to "deserve" more protection from human damage than others, which seems so anthropocentric. Of course I want these rivers to be protected, but the fact that it seems to be necessary to anthropomorphize them in order for this to happen doesn't make any attempt to dismantle hierarchies between humans and non-humans.

Instead of collaboration, then, Hinde—through her work discussed here—is creating non-hierarchical meeting points between herself, the nonhuman world, and her audience. With such thoughts in mind, I was interested in returning to her live work in *Twittering Machines – Live AV*.

> **Hinde**: My performances within installations are like a cross-fade between installation into live-ness, and back again. It has soft edges. *Twittering Machines* performance is a departure from this, it is a staged audiovisual performance lasting 30 minutes with a PA and an audience facing the stage. I enter the stage at a specific time to perform… then leave. It's a gig with "hard edges."

> This context puts me in quite a different state of mind, and I do get immensely nervous at the point just before I go on stage, because [the context] feels so different to performing within my own installations. My aim is to reach a state of "immersion" on stage and to find a way I can lose myself in it and become part of it. There is a lot happening "live" in *Twittering Machines*—enough that I can only just about manage, without it collapsing. Again, there is the situation of not having full control over the whole thing, but initiating processes that create conditions for results to emerge.

Hinde's central operands are still very much present here. There is indeterminacy and performativity, of course, but there is also that sense of touch—a meeting with her materials on equal terms. Through *Twittering Machines - Live AV* we see an offering of this non-hierarchical perspective outwards to her audience.

> **Hinde**: Ultimately this is why I make work—I want to create experiences for others that somehow embody and share these perspectives, and I would then hope that these subtle shifts in perspective can also be felt—and seep into other aspects of people's lives. It's a quiet and subtle form of activism.

Throughout our conversation, what becomes apparent to me is the extent to which Hinde is perpetually facilitating equal points of meeting and contact between herself, her audience, and her materials. Another form of touch, perhaps. And, maybe most importantly, her work renders visceral the permissibility of such equality within this encounter, all without retort to grand utopian idealism. That, maybe, is the ultimate doing that emerges here.

Elements of Performativity in the Works of Kosugi Takehisa and Kazakura Shō

Christophe Charles

Presentation

Kosugi Takehisa and Kazakura Shō in front of Kasuga Villa, Tsukahara Pension, Yufuin Town, Ōita Prefecture, "Music Landscape (twelve-hours performance)," August 10–11, 1985. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Okamoto Takako, The Estate of Takehisa Kosugi / HEAR.

Kosugi Takehisa (1938–2018) was a pioneer of free improvised music and sound art in Japan. He mainly used acoustic and electric violins, voice, homemade acoustic and electronic instruments, and light. He writes in 2014:

> The incidental or indeterminate nature of sounds has been one of the major characteristics of my music through improvisational performances and sound installations. In an attempt to transcend conventional musical concepts, I have been introducing electronic territory to my music including both audio frequency waves and non-audio frequency ones such as infrasonic, radio frequency, and light waves.[63]

63 Kosugi Takehisa, "Artist Statement (2014)," Foundation for Contemporary Arts, https://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/recipients/takehisa-kosugi/.

Kazakura Shō (1936–2007) was a Japanese artist pioneering performance, or happening, as an art medium. Having read works by Luigi Pirandello and Anton Chekhov, he began to do non-theatrical actions in a theatrical context in 1957. Kazakura then became a member of the Neo-Dada Organizers (1960–1963). Nam June Paik wrote that he "embodied the essence of Dadaism."[64] From that point on he produced objects, paintings, and films, while pursuing his performance work. Kosugi says of Kazakura, "While most artists have since withdrawn from performance, only Kazakura continues to perform. This is very important when considering his art. His constant awareness of 'time' and 'space' makes it possible for him to create various forms of expression."[65]

Kazakura and Kosugi met in 1959. They became friends and continuously collaborated until the passing of Kazakura in 2007. They have close ideas about art and music, space and time, and seem to share a particular interest in how the abandonment of conventional art and music habits are linked to the Dadaist and Buddhist idea of "dismantling the ego."

(Zero) Time

From the end of the 1950s, the concepts of *informel*, *futeikei* (indeterminate form) or *fukakutei* (indefinite), implying that the form of the artwork continuously changes, were widely explored in visual and plastic arts. Meanwhile, music was mostly conceived as a composition of self-consciously fixed sonic elements. Kosugi and his peers thought that approaching music as "sound" could lead to freeing oneself from conventional musical ideas, and even freeing oneself from one's ego.

From around 1948, John Cage had also been thinking about freeing music composition from the ego. However, Kosugi was already interested in "moving toward a place where the ego could be released freely" before en-

64 Nam June Paik, "Sekai de mottomo mumei na yūmeijin" [The World's Most Obscure Celebrity], in *Tokei no furiko, Kazakura Shō* [Clock Pendulum, Kazakura Shō] (Kagawa: Sano Garō, 1996), 8–9. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted. See also Akira Suga, "Nichijō no Minaoshi" [Reconsideration of the Everyday), in *Neo Dada Japan 1958-1998 - Arata Isozaki and the Artists of the 'White House'* (Ōita City Board of Education, 1998), 150–59. The other members of Neo-Dada Organizers agree that Kazakura was their main source of information about Dada and Surrealism.

65 Kosugi Takehisa, "Chikyū no oto wo kiku" [Listen to the Sound of the Earth], in *Kazakura shō ten* [Shō Kazakura Exhibition], ed. Kenji Ogami (Ōita: Ōita Art Museum, 2002), 8–10.

countering Cage's music in 1962.[66] During his studies at Tokyo University of the Arts, he focused on improvisational music, and began to experiment with "accidental collisions of sounds, as well as the inclusion of everyday sounds."[67] He would perform *objets sonores*—that is, improvised clusters of (non)simultaneous sounds:

> We wanted to produce spontaneous sounds, and our music was influenced by the changes in the movement of our own body or in the environment. … In fact, I was more interested in things that were constantly changing, than in something that was recorded and already finished.[68]

In the process of including everyday sounds, Kosugi and his Group Ongaku (1958–1961) began to use recorded sounds on tape as well.[69] However, Kosugi was unhappy with the fact that once the sounds are recorded on tape, they are fixed and no longer allow for real-time creativity.[70]

Improvisation implies "automatism, like the action painting of Jackson Pollock … At the moment of creating a sound the performer gets a very instantaneous approach at the same occurrence/events of sound." The music is "coming from somewhere, not from me, but from outside myself."[71] From a time perspective, Kosugi further explains that he doesn't need to make choices, because the music just appears as

> a very instantaneous event … This is not like measuring time, in the ordinary time scale, or conscious scale. … Sometimes time stays there, doesn't continue. This is strange to say, but in my consciousness, when I play, music sometimes stops and I just play spatially or timelessly. The performer does not feel time. The performer can stay at this stage, without time consciousness.[72]

66 Kosugi Takehisa, interview by Christophe Charles, Hear Office, Ōsaka, November 26, 2015.

67 Kosugi, interview.

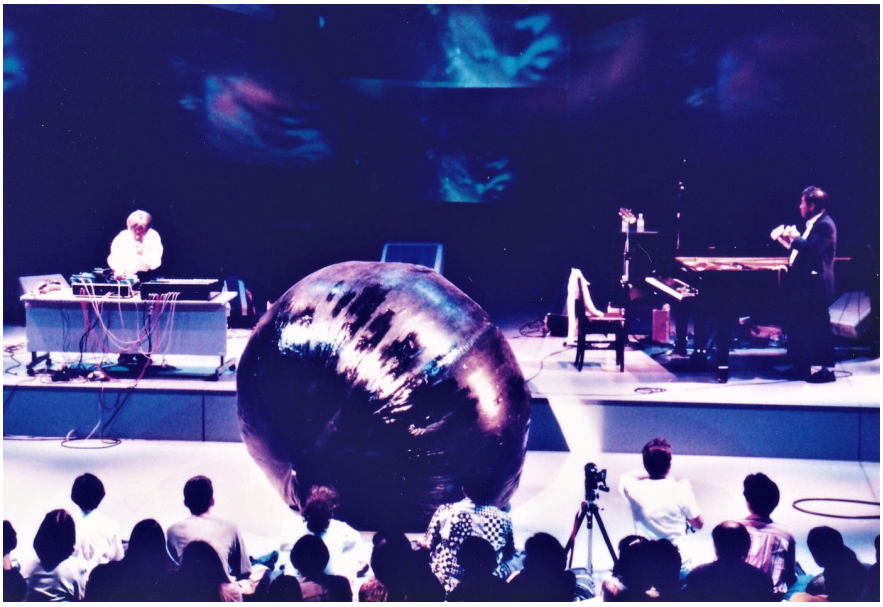
68 Kosugi, interview.

69 *Ongaku* can be written using different characters so that it does not only mean music; see Miki Kaneda and Tone Yasunao, "The 'John Cage Shock' Is a Fiction! Interview with Tone Yasunao, 1" *Post. Notes on Art in a Global Context*, March 8, 2013, https://post.moma.org/the-john-cage-shock-is-a-fiction-interview-with-tone-yasunao-1.

70 See Kawasaki Kōji, "Takehisa Kosugi no ongaku" [The Music of Kosugi Takehisa], in *Ongaku no pikunikku* [Music Picnic] (Ashiya City: Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, 2017), 201–14.

71 John Hudak, "Fishing for Sound: An Interview with Takehisa Kosugi (1990)," in *Takehisa Kosugi: Interspersions*, ed. René Block (Berlin: daadgalerie, 1992), 7–12.

72 Hudak, "Fishing for Sound," 8.



Nam June Paik Fukuoka Prize Performance, *Kikyorai* [Return Home], NHK Fukuoka Broadcasting Station TV Hall, 30 September, 1995, From right to left: Nam June Paik, Kazakura Shō (in the balloon), Kosugi Takehisa. Photo Ishimatsu Takeo. © Fukuoka Prize Committee. Courtesy Okamoto Takako, The Estate of Takehisa Kosugi / HEAR.

A close idea has been formulated by Christian Wolff about "zero time": "The zero I take to mean no time at all, that is, no measurable time, that is, any time at all, which the performer takes as he will at each performance."[73] John Cage would explain it this way: "'Zero time' exists when we don't notice the passage of time, when we don't measure it." Talking about *o'oo*" (1962), Cage added: "I mean when I work on the piece … or 'in' that piece, I am indeed 'in' zero time. … I am no longer working towards an envisaged end, in line with the economy."[74] And Daniel Charles explains:

> Silence or absence prevents time from being taken as something already present or already there. Time has to spring. In so far as it springs, it disappears into its own withdrawal. Because of this withdrawal (or "withholding," or "denial") its very granting prevents us from basing our understanding

73 Christian Wolff, "On Form," in *Form—Space*, Die Reihe 7 (Bryn Mawr: Theodore Presser, 1965), 26–31.

74 John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), 209.

> of musical signification on any "constant presence," or any "now-moment" which would require some calculus or measurement concerning a "temporal interval."[75]

Music as Space Art

Playing "spatially or timelessly" implies that music is conceived not only as a time art, but also a space art. Kosugi founded the Taj Mahal Travellers group in 1969 and was a member until 1975. Talking about their experiments, Kosugi noticed that there were also conventions concerning the space where music happens, and those conventions needed to be questioned.

> A standardized hall may be designed to produce sound properly, but I feel that this standardization also binds the expression in a standardized way. … When the place changes, the experience changes … I had a concept called "Picnic Band," where you go to a place, make sounds there, and stay in that space. … It's like enjoying the space there, so I guess you could call it music in that sense, music in space.[76]

This more physical point of view defines Kosugi's central idea of his *Catch Wave*. When he began to use an electric violin and a wireless transmitter for performances, he noticed that there was radio interference depending on where he was in the space. Every subtle move of the devices would immediately become audible.

> This is a way to make people aware of the fact that they cannot hear. … This is a kind of "communication of dis-communication" … Up until now, I've been emphasizing the positive, visible and audible parts, but I want to bring in the opposite, the inaudible and invisible parts. To put it simply, for example, John Cage introduced the concept of "silence." In that case, there is no sound, which means silence. If you think of sound as a positive, it is in a negative dimension, and the positive is utilized in contrast to the negative. In contrast,

75 Daniel Charles, "Music and Antimetaphor," in *Musical Signification: Essays in the Semiotic Theory and Analysis of Music*, ed. Eero Tarasti (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1995), 27–42.

76 Yamamoto Atsuo, "Interview with Kosugi Takehisa," in *Takehisa Kosugi: World of Sound, New Summer* (Ashiya City: Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, 1996), 2–27.

> the positive is utilized, and the negative is implied. If we don't open up our perceptions to that level, I don't think we will be able to create a true inter-media or multi-media form of expression. Nowadays, we talk about computers and multimedia, but that is actually the key point. If we don't make use of the information that we can't hear and can't see, if we don't make use of that information, I think the balance will collapse. I think there is a very basic balance between yin and yang. When you're doing electronic music, the waveform goes back and forth between positive and negative. We receive the positive part, but there is also the negative support. I think that's the key to dealing with things as art.[77]

Simplicity and Multiplicity

Kazakura was born in Ōita (Kyushu) and came to study at Musashino Art University (Tokyo) from 1956 to 1958. Kosugi first met Kazakura at the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition in 1959. Kosugi remembers that many young artists were unsatisfied with the conventions of painting and were looking for new forms. However,

> rather than taking a roundabout way of removing frames and opening up paintings, Kazakura took "direct action" by directly attacking the contents of the tableau. In a venue littered with jumbled works of art, the empty frames left on the wall were somewhat symbolic, and Kazakura's Dadaistic spirit of directly hitting the paintings themselves with an air gun was refreshing.[78]

While Kosugi was stimulated by visual and plastic arts, Kazakura began to attend concerts by Kosugi's Group Ongaku. He thought that "there was a Dada spirit in Group Ongaku, because they were betting on 'time.' … 'Time' has become a theme for me since I started getting involved in Group Ongaku."[79] Invited by Sakurai Takami and his Kyūshū-ha group, they travelled together to Hakata, and Kosugi witnessed there one of the first performances with a big advertising balloon ("ad-balloon") during

77 Atsuo, "Interview with Kosugi Takehisa," 16–17.

78 Kosugi, "Chikyū no oto wo kiku," 9.

79 Kikuhata Mokuma, "Kazakura Shō Taidan - Hapunā no kiseki" [A Conversation with Kazakura Shō - The Locus of a Happener], *Kikan* 12 (1981): 5–32.

the "Grand Meeting of Heroes":[80] "the balloon and the performer, which had been separated until then, became one space in an instant. This subtraction of space is the quintessence of his performance of disappearing." Kosugi recalls: "Rather than sound expression, I was more interested in art as a one-time event in space, connected with action and coincidence. I think Kazakura probably started his event-like performance with the same idea."[81]

In 1956, Kazakura began a series of performances which shine because of their simplicity, insisting on the fact that "it was important to do something that anyone could do":[82] falling from a chair, or from a ladder, walking, dropping light bulbs on a canvas, etc.[83] He also staged more dangerous actions that not anyone could do: standing on his head, burning his chest with an iron (and almost fainting), entering a trunk (and almost dying by asphyxia), etc. His signature performance, which he did until the 2000s, uses, as mentioned, a large ad-balloon. He would, in most cases, inflate the balloon and enter it, sometimes taking with him sound devices like a harmonica, or a stick as an extension of his arms, and then move around not seeing but hearing the environment, until there was no air in the balloon anymore, getting out in time to avoid asphyxia.

Kazakura did a joint performance with Kosugi in a large bright room of the Pompidou Center (Paris) in 1986.[84] Kazakura's ad-balloon was first covered with newspaper. The balloon was then inflated with air, growing from under those newspapers. Kazakura then entered the balloon and began to move around the space. The audience was sitting on the floor near the walls around the performance space. Kosugi was using his electric violin with a wireless system, and moving through the middle of the space, while Kazakura would move everywhere, including where the audience was sitting, most often with a comical effect.

Once the balloon was full of air, the newspapers had been dispersed on the floor. While playing the violin, Kosugi would walk on the newspapers, and make all kinds of sounds. He believed objects can be used in a variety

80 The event was held on November 15–16, 1962, at Momoji beach, Fukuoka.

81 Kosugi, "Chikyū no oto wo kiku," 9.

82 Kikuhata, "Kazakura Shō Taidan - Hapunā no kiseki," 18.

83 Instead of walking forward, Kazakura walked backward during an *Instruction Piece* by Kosugi: *Theatre Music—Keep walking intently*, at the performance-event *Sweet 16*, 1963, Sōgetsu Hall, Tokyo.

84 The performance took place on December 12 and 19, 1986, during the exhibition *Japon des avant-gardes 1910–1970* (December 11, 1986—March 2, 1987).

Kazakura Shō and Christophe Charles, closing performance of *Taikan-on* [Sound Experience], Neo Dada "Ichidanmen" (One Section) Exhibition, Ōita, Japan/Compal Hall, October 15, 1995. Top left - the black ad-balloon suspended from the ceiling; top right - "Portrait": Kazakura Shō after the performance; below - Kazakura Shō performing in the balloon. Photo credit: Endō Ritsuko.

of manners: "If [an object] doesn't have sound that's ok too. … This is not only sound nor action oriented, it's a combination of sound and action together."[85] In other words, the sound is resulting from each action on each object. Sound and action are both conceived as equally important.

Moreover, objects can have several functions at once. Formerly, newspapers were not used as a sound device or a symbolic element, their use came from much more practical needs. Kazakura said about his performances in the 1960s: "I often lay out newspapers on the floor. If the floor gets dirty, it's no trouble to clean it up afterwards: you just rake up the newspaper and you're done."[86] Similarly, instruments have several functions, too. Kosugi remembers seeing a wounded piano when he visited Kazakura's home in 1985:

> This legless piano was used for a performance, and then as the parts were gradually used for other works, it was finally used up and disappeared. By using a piano which was made for music (a temporal art form) in an art context (a spatial art form), the medium of the piano itself crosses the boundaries of genres. Like his balloon, the piano is used as a multidirectional potential.[87]

Improvisation and Consciousness

Kazakura and Kosugi also shared ideas about the "liveliness" of everyday life, and its "invisible essence." Kazakura says:

> I think that creativity is rooted in our daily lives, or rather, it is something that is taken out of our daily lives. That's why I thought happenings would be closer to the essence of creativity, to extract the invisible essence of everyday life. … I had a clear idea that I wanted to bring out the essence of it, and it became clear to me that this creation could only be said if there was life. If there is no life, there is no creation, nothing at all. So I thought that the most accurate way to create was to be on the edge of life. That's why challenging life is almost like committing suicide. … I don't mean abandonment, I mean getting as close as possible.[88]

85 Hudak, "Fishing for Sound," 9.
86 Kikuhata, "Kazakura Shō Taidan - Hapunā no kiseki," 13.
87 Kosugi, "Chikyū no oto wo kiku," 10.
88 Kikuhata, "Kazakura Shō Taidan - Hapunā no kiseki," 24.

Nam June Paik Fukuoka Prize Performance, *Kikyorai* [Return Home], NHK Fukuoka Broadcasting Station TV Hall, 30 September, 1995. From right to left: Kosugi Takehisa, Kazakura Shō, Nam June Paik, Kuni Chiya. Photo Ishimatsu Takeo. © Fukuoka Prize Committee. Courtesy Okamoto Takako, The Estate of Takehisa Kosugi / HEAR.

For Kosugi, "being on the edge" perhaps means constantly adapting to an environment that changes incessantly. In my 2015 interview with him in Osaka, Kosugi said:

> Improvising is a means to catch what is appearing, to catch the vibrations of the universe, and to adapt to the changing environment. … In other words, when "I" am performing, it is not only "me" who is performing. The performance is not only my own, because I am catching the environment. Because I am playing together with that environment, I am not just myself. …
> The idea of "dismantling the ego" is influenced by the specific concept of [the South Indian improvised music] *Manodharma*, which implies that the ego exists as a cosmic existence beyond oneself, and a musician becomes a receiver that catches that cosmic existence. Improvisation reflects changes in time, or changes in season. Music comes out through the connections between the immediate environment and what transcends the ego. It is not "my" music, but the music of a receiver that catches some presence in the universe, like a

> radio or a television. In short, a performance is something that catches the radio waves so that we can absorb them.[89]

Performing is not about what comes out from inside, but about catching it from outside and becoming oneself a filter, as transparent as possible. To what extent can one become selfless? Tom Johnson translates this idea as: "Kosugi continues playing his violin, or perhaps allowing the violin to play him."[90] Even before John Cage was attracted to Eastern thought in the 1940s, some artists in the West were working in that direction: "Dada was about deconstructing, or dismantling the self, and that is also what Buddhism is all about, becoming selfless."[91]

The Sound of the Earth

The economy of means implies that there is room for much to happen; *4'33"* can be considered as minimal because there is minimal action, but at the same time it is maximal because of its inclusiveness of all sounds. In their performances and happenings, Kosugi and Kazakura reveal the vibrations and changes of the environment. We might also say that they make the environment vibrate by listening to it. Kosugi remembers words by Kazakura:

> "Listen to the sound of the earth." This could be taken to mean actually putting one's ear to the ground and listening, but I think this means listening to sound not as an art created by human aesthetics and purpose, such as Bach or the cello, but as a phenomenon in an unspecified and indeterminate world. It seems to me that Kazakura is saying that performance and art are about catching the phenomena that exist on the earth, that is, in everyday space, while opening our perception in all directions.[92]

Kazakura, wrote a poetic text about "vision" and "time" for his retrospective exhibition at the Ōita Museum in 2002, which relates closely to the remarks by Kosugi and is a fitting conclusion to this essay:

89 Kosugi, interview by Charles.

90 Tom Johnson, "Takehisa Kosugi and Akio Suzuki: Stunning by Coincidence," *Village Voice*, April 23, 1979, 25.

91 Kosugi, interview by Charles.

92 Kosugi, "Chikyū no oto wo kiku," 10.

Time to know,
tools and paths to know.
The path is developed,
time shrinks.
The shrunken variant of time
is negative time.
Tools left
in space,
forgotten paths and ditches.
Falling into the trenches of past cultures,
digging holes, forgetting time.
Surveying,
taking out
only the intangible,
the invisible.[93]

93 Kazakura, "Mirukoto no oboegaki" [Memorandum of Seeing], in *Kazakura shō ten* [Shō Kazakura Exhibition], ed. Kenji Ogami (Ōita: Ōita Art Museum, 2002), 12–13.

From Notes and Correspondences Regarding *BUSTER, Initiating Bros* (A Practice-Based Account of Work with Romeo Castellucci and Societas)

Scott Gibbons

The first notes from Romeo [Castellucci, director of Societas] arrive regarding the place where the premier will be. We have been talking about a piece entitled *Bros*, and Romeo conducted a workshop on some of the themes just before the pandemic struck. I review videos of the workshop and am struck by how things have changed. The room was full of people working closely together, and not a mask in sight. It's still too early for the normal venues to open safely, but there's an outdoor space in Brussels that is cleared for use by a limited number of spectators. A rather broad plaza in the open air. The city will be clearly visible all around, but at a distance. While we continue to develop *Bros*, we will stage the work-in-progress as *BUSTER*.[94]

The piece calls for fifty local participants who will respond to orders given uniquely to each individual via in-ear monitors. They are not actors and will not know the commands beforehand. They are dressed like old-fashioned American police, as you would see in old black-and-white silent movies.

Workshop, Cesena, March 2020. Courtesy of Societas.

94 *BUSTER, initiating Bros* premiered May 20–24, 2021, at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels.

The city is female in character; however, the space where we will perform is male. (Quite literally, as we will be directly in front of the federal police headquarters with a cathedral beside!)

Two machines, seemingly military tools, ominously scan the city. A kind of sonar or radar. A small wooden statue moves its arms, raises and lowers its head, and opens its mouth wide (like a scream). A god who commands. It is placed in front of the policemen who—with their backs to the public—are in adoration of the totem.

Romeo distributes a video demonstrating the actions of the Idol; I will use this to create the sound while Istvan [Zimmermann, of Plastikart Studio] and Paolo [Cavagnolo] create the robotics.

Idol reference (video still). Courtesy of Societas.

Having just cleared the woods behind my house of some pernicious and invasive holly trees, I had quite a lot of wood to rub and scrape together to create a library of sounds for the statue. Brought branches and sticks into the studio. These made good textures but were a bit too crisp. Too snappy. Went back out to collect some rotting branches that had fallen from an old oak tree. Nice and spongey, sounds like wood but a little squishy. Fleshy. After recording, had to clear the studio floor of worms and spiders. Realized the Idol's neck needed a sound that was more stiff, though. Pulled some anise from the refrigerator and tried bending a few stalks at a time—this was much more convincing.

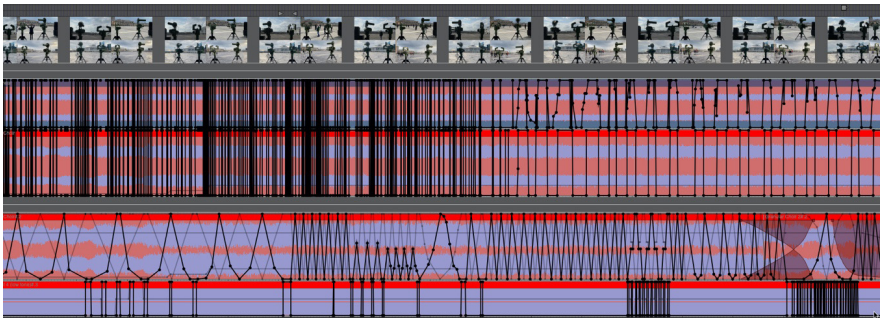
Idol reference (video still). Courtesy of Societas.

> For the Idol's mouth, it needs a voice… I multi-tracked clacking wooden sticks in a sort of random percussion. Strange. Tried a deep demonic voice (layers of Latin chant in reverse), vocoded with noise to remove the tonality, but the effect was… maybe a little obvious. Tried time-stretching an infant's voice from the library. Crying, screaming. Perfect! A little voice for a little body. Granularly re-synthesized this to make it more abstract. Now it seems to be the idea of a voice, not a specific voice. The other sounds will have to be carefully placed with EQ, because this voice will be presented full-spectrum like a wall of noise.

As the Idol raises and lowers its arms, there should be a reaction from the space. Tremolo of strings, deep male voices, a precise cacophony. Each angle of the arms defined by its own narrow bandwidth (low to high).

A video of the final machine going through its choreography matches up almost perfectly with the original reference video. I have to make only a few small adjustments. I can't see the mouth when its head is hanging low, so I have to ask for another video just to verify the timing of that.

I'm not certain yet what sound(s) will work best for the two machines that scan the city, so I plan to work primarily with automation of the effects and mixer, so I can test different sounds just by dropping them into the session. The automation will force everything to sync. Romeo sends a video of the prototypes, and the effect is quite imposing. One machine has a long barrel on top, the other has a light that flashes. Both rotate independently at different rates and directions. I try close-miking some drone motors, and fine-tune the pitch and frequencies so that there are musical harmonies between the two. It's beautiful and even a little haunting, but the sound of



Radar project automation. Courtesy of Scott Gibbons and Societas.

the motors is too mechanical and not really organic. I tried synchronizing vocals (simple open vowels) with the light. For the other machine, the one that looks like a gun, I closely follow the video… When the barrel is scanning where the public will be, a deep scraping and grinding sound. When it points away from the public, reading the city, a sound reminiscent of sonar from a U-boat. Alternately menacing and lonely. To mark the moments when the barrel starts and stops, I look for short bursts of animal sounds in my library: a panther hissing, a rattlesnake warning… sounds that bypass the brain and register directly into the spine.

It's hard for me to see some details in the video though—I can't tell if the light is flashing when the rotating arms are oriented sideways, for example. I can sense that the rotational speed ramps up and slows down, but it's not clear where those exact moments of de/acceleration are. I ask the programmer Paolo if he can give me some details, and he soon responds with a set of text files that capture the data at 29.97 Hz (the sampling rate of the reference video) with an offer to interpolate the data to any rate I need. The files are a series of values, one per line, one file for each motor. I import the data to a spreadsheet and set up a new column to calculate the precise time for each change. It is impractically long; over seventeen thousand lines of data! Since the tempo in my Digital Performer project is 120bpm for this scene, 8 Hz would be a more practical sampling rate. Paolo quickly sends me a new data set at that rate, and now I can reference that for accuracy to the nearest eighth note.

I have to define the backdrop to all of these sound events. There will be the real din of the city, which is quite vital and essential, so I have to work with that without conflicting with it. I collect sirens, trains, buses, horns, pedestrians. There is a particular siren which is specific to Belgium, so I make sure

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	MOTOR ONE	MOTOR TWO	LIGHT	FRAME	TIME	MOTOR ONE~	MOTOR TWO~	LIGHT~
9245	161	83	0	9244	5:08	160	80	0
9246	165	83	0	9245	5:08	160	80	0
9247	157	85	0	9246	5:08	150	80	0
9248	151	83	0	9247	5:08	150	80	0
9249	147	83	0	9248	5:08	140	80	0
9250	143	83	0	9249	5:08	140	80	0
9251	137	85	0	9250	5:08	130	80	0
9252	129	83	0	9251	5:08	120	80	0
9253	127	85	0	9252	5:08	120	80	0
9254	121	83	255	9253	5:08	120	80	250
9255	117	83	255	9254	5:08	110	80	250
9256	115	85	255	9255	5:08	110	80	250
9257	111	85	255	9256	5:08	110	80	250
9258	107	83	255	9257	5:08	100	80	250
9259	103	85	0	9258	5:08	100	80	0
9260	101	83	0	9259	5:08	100	80	0
9261	99	85	0	9260	5:08	90	80	0
9262	97	87	0	9261	5:09	90	80	0
9263	95	85	255	9262	5:09	90	80	250
9264	91	83	255	9263	5:09	90	80	250
9265	91	83	255	9264	5:09	90	80	250
9266	91	85	255	9265	5:09	90	80	250
9267	85	83	255	9266	5:09	80	80	250
9268	87	83	255	9267	5:09	80	80	250
9269	87	83	255	9268	5:09	80	80	250
9270	85	85	255	9269	5:09	80	80	250
9271	85	85	255	9270	5:09	80	80	250
9272	81	85	255	9271	5:09	80	80	250
9273	81	83	255	9272	5:09	80	80	250
9274	89	85	255	9273	5:09	80	80	250
9275	79	85	255	9274	5:09	70	80	250
9276	79	83	255	9275	5:09	70	80	250
9277	75	83	255	9276	5:09	70	80	250
9278	79	87	255	9277	5:09	70	80	250
9279	77	83	255	9278	5:09	70	80	250
9280	77	79	255	9279	5:09	70	70	250
9281	75	85	255	9280	5:09	70	80	250
9282	77	83	0	9281	5:09	70	80	0
9283	75	83	0	9282	5:09	70	80	0
9284	71	83	0	9283	5:09	70	80	0
9285	75	83	0	9284	5:09	70	80	0
9286	75	85	0	9285	5:09	70	80	0
9287	75	83	0	9286	5:09	70	80	0
9288	75	83	0	9287	5:09	70	80	0
9289	75	85	0	9288	5:09	70	80	0
9290	77	85	0	9289	5:09	70	80	0
9291	73	83	0	9290	5:09	70	80	0
9292	75	89	0	9291	5:10	70	80	0
9293	73	83	0	9292	5:10	70	80	0
9294	73	85	0	9293	5:10	70	80	0
9295	73	85	0	9294	5:10	70	80	0
9296	71	85	0	9295	5:10	70	80	0

29.97hz 8hz

	A	B	C	D
1	LINE#	TIME	MOTOR1	MOTOR2
4251	4250	8:51	1	255
4252	4251	8:51	1	255
4253	4252	8:51	1	255
4254	4253	8:51	1	255
4255	4254	8:51	1	255
4256	4255	8:51	13	255
4257	4256	8:52	99	255
4258	4257	8:52	177	255
4259	4258	8:52	213	255
4260	4259	8:52	229	255
4261	4260	8:52	243	255
4262	4261	8:52	247	255
4263	4262	8:52	243	255
4264	4263	8:52	241	255
4265	4264	8:53	189	255
4266	4265	8:53	111	255
4267	4266	8:53	51	255
4268	4267	8:53	3	255
4269	4268	8:53	1	255
4270	4269	8:53	1	255
4271	4270	8:53	1	255
4272	4271	8:53	1	255
4273	4272	8:54	1	255
4274	4273	8:54	1	255
4275	4274	8:54	1	255
4276	4275	8:54	1	255
4277	4276	8:54	51	255
4278	4277	8:54	135	255
4279	4278	8:54	199	255
4280	4279	8:54	151	255
4281	4280	8:55	71	255
4282	4281	8:55	1	255
4283	4282	8:55	1	255
4284	4283	8:55	1	255
4285	4284	8:55	1	255
4286	4285	8:55	1	255
4287	4286	8:55	1	255
4288	4287	8:55	1	255
4289	4288	8:56	1	255
4290	4289	8:56	1	255
4291	4290	8:56	1	255
4292	4291	8:56	33	255
4293	4292	8:56	107	255
4294	4293	8:56	195	255
4295	4294	8:56	255	255
4296	4295	8:56	225	255
4297	4296	8:57	75	255
4298	4297	8:57	1	255
4299	4298	8:57	1	255
4300	4299	8:57	1	255
4301	4300	8:57	1	255
4302	4301	8:57	1	255

29.97hz 8hz

Left: Radar motors data at 29.97hz. Right: Radar motors data at 8hz. Courtesy of Scott Gibbons and Societas.

Montage of radars. Courtesy of Societas.

to use that. I discover that layering many, many, many car/truck/bus horns in harmony gives an effect like a giant organ. I make a quick demo of a crescendo with this effect and put that in reserve. It takes a while to assemble, but I want the sirens to turn into the voices of a woman crying, sobbing. The occasional honking horn makes a nice connection to the image of the gun, I think, which can perhaps be a tuba, or some kind of military shofar from the 1950s. A little tremolo and delay to give it some shimmer and musicality.

Many small details require some simple foley. Shortwave radio, an old telephone, magnesium camera flashbulbs... Claudio [Tortorici] is the sound tech on site, and he will have to experiment with the placement of these sounds in the actual space. I give him sound files that are as dry and neutral as possible. Romeo sends some recordings from the site that need a little restoration work, these are nice little tasks that are welcome when I need a break from working on the heavier scenes.

The company arrives in Brussels to begin rehearsals. COVID restrictions mean I'm not able to be present on-site, but we all have strong internet connections to share materials. I'm happy at least to be able to use the hardware and space in my studio to record, instead of being restricted to my laptop in a hotel room.

Romeo reports that the urban soundscape I had prepared sounds too authentic in the space. I prepare and send some variations using band-passed delays and time stretching to impart a more dream-like sensation of a memory of the city.

I receive more videos of the machines once they're installed on site and discover—with dismay—that the position of the radar gun varies enough to make my earlier approach inutile. Even though the machines may begin from the exact same orientation, there is a gradual drift over time, and even halfway through the sequence they may all be pointing in completely different directions. I confirm with Paolo that the commands sent to the motors only regulate the rotational speed. The machines would need to have positional sensors to follow the same path each time. This is possible in the future but not now. The premiere is only a few days away at this point, so I need to create something quickly that follows the movement, but not the direction. Hmm. The sounds I used before won't be effective anymore, so I need a fresh new palette. I want to tie back to the soundscape of the city, so maybe this radar machine can have a voice not unlike the car horns. Tuba, alpenhorn, didgeridoo.

In Final Cut I've created a montage of the machines going through their sequences simultaneously. While watching that, I record several passes of

performances using horn patches. I identify and comp my favorite voices and moments, and then go back to automate the finer details. I really miss the threatening sensation when the machine's "eye" looks across me, but this new approach has a cinematic quality which I think will be quite useful outside in the open, under the night sky. Anyway, there's no more time so it has to work for now.

Romeo reports that the Idol sequence is generally working very well on site, except that it wants a climax. I remember the sound of the "organ crescendo" constructed with horns. That might work here… It was only sixty seconds long, though. I don't feel that I have a proper sense of the passing of time from watching disjointed videos on my monitor, so I re-create longer and shorter variations and send them for testing in rehearsals.

The evening of the debut arrives. By late morning on the West Coast, I start to see some text messages coming in from Brussels, all very happy and relieved. There is a sync problem with the radar machines, but otherwise everything is working well. Despite the enthusiasm, I take this as very mixed news. I wonder if the Arduino is playing back at 48 kHz instead of 44.1 kHz. It must be something simple like that. We have some time before the next phase—*Bros*—to address the problem. Anyway, much will assuredly need to change as we consider how to migrate from a large outdoor space back to an indoor space. I change the title of my To-Do list, from "*BUSTER* | to do" to "*Bros* | to do."

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Christophe Charles born 1964 in Marseille (France), has been living in Japan since 1987. He participated in a performance workshop by Kosugi Takehisa at Les Fêtes musicales de la Sainte-Baume (France) in 1979, and attended a joint performance by Kosugi and Kazakura Shō at Pompidou Center (Paris) in 1986. He has performed electronic music with Kazakura eight times between 1992 and 1995 in Europe and Japan. Charles wrote a PhD dissertation about Video Art in Japan (Tsukuba University, 1996; INALCO Paris, 1997) and is now professor at the Department of Imaging Arts and Sciences, Musashino Art University, Tokyo.

Scott Gibbons is an American-born composer and performer of electroacoustic music. His work is notable for its rigorous use of single and unexpected objects as sole instrumentation. For example, *Unheard: Sonic arrangements from the microcosmos*, which uses only sounds recorded at the molecular level; and music for the 120th anniversary of the Eiffel Tower which incorporated sounds of the tower itself played as percussion. His work with Romeo Castellucci and Societas (*Genesi: From the Museum of Sleep*, *Tragedia Endogonidia, Inferno*) demonstrates an acute balance between delicacy and physicality, often focusing on frequencies that are at the outermost limits of human hearing.

Cat Hope is a composer, sound artist, performer, songwriter, and noise artist. She is a classically trained flautist, self-taught vocalist, experimental bassist, and is the director of Decibel new music ensemble. Her music is conceptually driven, using animated graphic scores, acoustic/electronic combinations and score reading technologies. Her music has been discussed in books such as *Hidden Alliances* (Schimana, 2019), *Sonic Writing* (Magnusson, 2019), *Loading the Silence* (Kouvaras, 2013), *Women of Note* (Appleby, 2012), *Sounding Post-*

modernism (Bennett, 2008) as well as periodicals such as *Gramophone*, *The Wire*, *Limelight*, and *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. In 2011 and 2014 she won the Award for Excellence in Experimental Music at the Australian Art Music Awards, and her opera *Speechless* won the Best New Dramatic Work category in 2020. Her music has been played around the world, and she is a Professor of Music at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.

Gail Priest lives on the land of the Darug and Gundungurra people now known as Katoomba (Australia). Her practice encompasses performance, recording, installation, curation, and writing. She has performed and exhibited nationally and internationally presenting work in the UK, Iceland, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Norway, Hong Kong, and Japan. Originally trained in theater, she has worked as a sound designer/composer collaborating with independent directors and choreographers. Also instigating her own sound theater work she has created *One thing follows another*, in collaboration with choreographer Jane McKernan, an exploration of Fluxus strategies in the twenty-first century; and *We are Oscillators*, in collaboration with designer Thomas Burless, exploring vocal cymatics, both works presented by Performance Space, Sydney. She has written extensively about sound and media art and was Associate Editor/Online Producer for the Australian arts magazine *RealTime* (2003–2015). She was also the editor of the book *Experimental Music: Audio Explorations in Australia* (UNSW Press, 2009). She is nearing completion of a PhD at the University of Technology, Sydney, exploring ficto-critical writing strategies in digital sound studies.

Matthew Sergeant is a composer/researcher whose work is currently exploring ideas surrounding materials, materiality, and the relationships between human and nonhuman things. His creative work is frequently performed internationally, both throughout the Europe, North, Central, and South America, Asia, and Australasia. His music has been commissioned and/or performed by internationally acclaimed ensembles, including the London Symphony Orchestra (UK), the BBC Concert Orchestra (UK), the BBC Singers (UK), CEPROMusic (Mexico), The House of Bedlam (UK), BCMG (UK), Divertimento Ensemble (Italy), ELISION Ensemble (Australia), ensemble 10/10 (UK), ensemble plus-minus (UK), EXAUDI (UK) and the Nieuw Ensemble (Netherlands), as well as numerous ongoing creative partnerships with emerging and established soloists. Matthew's research is widely published, and he is currently working on edited collections for Boydell & Brewer and Cambridge Scholars Publishing. He is currently Reader in Music at Bath Spa University.

INTERVIEW

The Curatorial Turn and Opera: On the Singing Deaths of Maria Callas.

A Conversation with Marina Abramović and Marko Nikodijević*

Jelena Novak

Marina Abramović is a conceptual and performance artist with a particular interest in the relationship between the artist and the audience. She is especially interested in exploring the extreme limits of her (the artist's) body. In recent years, she has nurtured these interests by restaging some of her earlier works of performance art. To chart some of the more important stages of her career I single out a few key works. In *Rhythm 0* (1974) Abramović stood silent and motionless for six hours in a gallery in Naples, while members of the audience were allowed to do to her whatever they wanted, having at their disposal seventy-two objects. *The Great Wall Walk* (1988) was performed with her then partner Ulay; they walked for ninety days from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China, and when they finally met, they ended their relationship and said goodbye to each other. *Balkan Baroque* (1997) reflected on the horrors and tragedies unfolding in post-Yugoslavia. In *The Artist is Present* (2010) Marina sat motionless in a chair at the MOMA (New York) for ninety days, eight to ten hours per day, gazing into the eyes of members of the audience who took turns sitting in front of her one by one. In 2011 Abramović collaborated with Robert Wilson on

* The conversation transcribed here took place via Zoom on October 15, 2020, as the first talk in the Resvés Ópera Series of Conversations organized by CESEM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. For more information about this initiative see: https://cesem.fcsh.unl.pt/resves-opera/.

The talk was moderated by Jelena Novak. Some questions were taken from the members of the audience and that is further indicated in the footnotes. The author would like to thank Katarina Kostić for her help with transcribing the interview. The article was made with the support of CESEM – Research Center for Sociology and Aesthetics of Music, NOVA Lisbon University, FCSH, UID/EAT/00693/2019, with the financial support of FCT through National funds, under the Norma Transitória – DL 57/2016/CP1453/CT0054.

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the music theater piece *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*. Although some people already considered that piece an opera, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* (2020) is actually Abramović's first opera project.

In *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* Abramović used operatic music by five historical composers of the Western canon: Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Georges Bizet. One living composer, Marko Nikodijević, was invited to assemble all these separate strands into a single fabric. Nikodijević wrote the Introduction, then a kind of epilogue "The Eighth Death," and also some interludes conceived as "cloud musics," as he calls them, which were incorporated between the arias.

Like Marina Abramović, Nikodijević was born in Yugoslavia, where he completed his composition studies at the Belgrade Faculty of Music. He then moved to Germany, where he built a successful international career. Nikodijević has been influenced by techno music and by developments in advanced technology, including fractal procedures and computer music. His music is often freighted with a kind of melancholy that is somehow filtered through carefully calculated structural procedures.[1] Nikodijević has himself composed an opera: *VIVIER. Ein Nachtprotokoll* (2013–14), a chamber opera in 6 scenes dealing with the Canadian queer icon of new music Claude Vivier. The opera is related to Vivier's life, but also to his unusual death.

The basic form of *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* is simple. Seven arias were selected from the mainstream operatic repertoire, arias that have been performed by soprano Maria Callas in an unforgettable manner. Seven sopranos were engaged, each taking one of the leading roles from the following operas: *La Traviata*, *Otello* (Verdi), *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly* (Puccini), *Carmen* (Bizet), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Donizetti), *Norma* (Bellini). The arias are separated by electronic interludes (Nikodijević, with sound design by Luka Kozlovački). While the singer is performing an aria on stage, a short silent film (directed by Nabil Elderkin) is projected on stage as a kind of music video. In those videos Abramović and the actor Willem Dafoe comment on operatic deaths in surreal, fantastical, and sometimes absurd scenes. Unexpectedly, the arias are heard as a film music sequence.

1 For further details about Marko Nikodijević's music, see Jelena Novak, "Music as an Aggregate of Colours: A Conversation with Marko Nikodijević," *New Sound International Journal of Music* 57, n. 1 (2021): 1–17, http://ojs.newsound.org.rs/index.php/NS/article/view/77/117.

Fig. 1 Marina Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019. Photo credit: Marco Anelli, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives.

It might seem that the focus of the opera *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* is the life, voice, and career of Maria Callas, but first and foremost this piece is autobiographical. Abramović tells us that she has been fascinated by the character and work of Callas since childhood, when as a young girl in Belgrade she discovered her voice and fell in love with her interpretations. As time went on, the relationship between Marina and Maria became more complex. Marina realized that they both have a lot in common, that they even look alike, and that their lives were marked by an unhappy love. It might be claimed that this opera is primarily about Marina Abramović, depicting her art, her status as a diva, her rise on the international art scene, her ego, her pain, her suffocation, her motionless waiting, her undressing, her youthful looks, her unhappy relationships.

Against the background of electronic Ligetian "clouds" in the interludes, Abramović as the narrator speaks of her texts inspired by operatic heroines and their deaths. Here, the disquieting, almost frightening music of Nikodijević and Kozlovački seems to "squeeze" through itself the transformed vocals. Then, towards the end of the opera in "The Eighth Death," Abramović is on stage as Callas is shown dying in her Paris apartment. In

the final moments, Abramović is seen in a glittering golden dress, enacting slow, deliberate movements. The singing voice of Maria Callas is eventually heard, and the live, golden figure of Marina becomes like a doll. Abramović pays homage to Callas with this opera, celebrating her unique capacity to connect body and voice into a single, extraordinary whole.[2]

The opera *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* is also a kind of didactic musical spectacle through which Abramović masterfully displays to Callas and to everyone how she herself has struggled with deaths, lives, ups, downs, and unhappy loves in different worlds, and how she has re-channeled these eternal themes in her art.

JELENA NOVAK: *Why did you choose to create an opera today? What makes it different from a theater piece with music? And what is so intriguing about the genre of opera today that more and more artists, including those from the visual arts, take it as a source of inspiration or as a material to work with in their pieces?*

MARKO NIKODIJEVIĆ: Opera provides an opportunity to bring different artistic media together. When successful, it can produce the kind of artistic effect and emotional impact that a purely musical work or a piece of video art, for example, cannot achieve. So, when all these different media come into a perfect union, then a type of theater magic happens, and that magic has been intriguing artists for more than four hundred years now.

JN: *Marina, I know about your fascination with Maria Callas. What is it about opera that fascinates you? What exactly draws you to it?*

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: Maria Callas is one thing. But opera is a different matter for me. I never liked opera, I think it is so boring and so long, it is like a dinosaur in art. There was a very traditional way for people to approach opera. Any kind of change, any different point of view, would be disturbing for the public. The public really likes it done in the traditional way, as it was always done, and they want to continue with the genre in that form. It is so interesting for an artist to depart from tradition, to break the

2 These remarks on the opera *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* draw on my critique written for the weekly *Vreme* following the world première of the piece by the Bavarian State Opera. The audience was subject to COVID pandemic restrictions, and the piece was also available for online streaming for a restricted period (this is how I watched it myself). The article is in Serbian and is available on the news magazine's website: Jelena Novak, "Operski agregat uživo," *Vreme*, September 10, 2020, https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1819592.

rules, to re-conceive the genre, and to make something new. To me, opera is one of those art forms that has never been touched, so that was reason enough for me to touch it and to put in it something really different, creating a much more complex work than opera as it has been conceived up to now. There is a video, an installation, a "situation," a performance; there are opera singers, novel musical combinations, and so many other ingredients all working to create something fresh. Normally, an opera lasts four hours, or even five hours, a very long duration for a work. This piece lasts only one hour and thirty minutes, because the act of dying takes less time than telling the story of an opera. With Marko working with me, it was really a dream to create something that stands on its own in a very original way, a way that has not been attempted before.

JN: *When I look back at some of your pieces I find a fascination with the voice, and especially with the screaming voice. Some of the early pieces, like* AAA-AAA *(1978) that you did with Ulay, feature the screaming voice. There you screamed at each other's mouths. And there was another piece,* Freeing the Voice *(1975–76), performed in the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade, where you were lying down and screaming for a long time. More recently, there was the piece* The Scream *(2013–14) that referred to the famous canvas of Edvard Munch, in Oslo, where members of the audience were invited to scream through the frame that you constructed on the spot where Munch supposedly executed that painting. What is the relationship between the screaming and the singing?*

MA: It is so very different for me, because screaming really emerges from my way of being as a performance artist, trying to find my own physical and mental limits. I wanted to scream until I couldn't scream anymore. And when you scream for such a long period of time, the voice becomes a kind of independent element, so that you start listening to things that you have never heard in your own voice: the voice of a child, the voice of a bird, the voice of anger, of fear, the voice of love. There are so many elements in the voice when you actually get to the point where you reach the limit of possibilities, where you actually scream until you lose your voice, which is what happened to me. For three months I lost my voice completely and so this was an investigation, an investigation of the body, and really had nothing to do with singing. But I worked with sounds, even before I got to performances. Sound to me is interesting, the sound itself. As for the singing, I used it in some video works, and I even sang in Bob Wilson's piece myself,

as a technically excellent singer, but she did so with exceptional vehemence, and in a society where, of course, women were certainly not seen as equal to men. She barged in with such force and decided to impose her artistic vision. A lot of people thought that her voice, especially from the early 1960s, when the registers acquired an even more extreme coloring between her chest voice and her head voice, had such an emotional impact because she had such a relentless need to communicate through music. She wasn't just a canary that was twittering around and making nice melodies… It was really life and death to her, she died constantly on stage, day after day, night after night, and she sort of traumatized herself with this endless dying, because she had died so many times. I don't know if there were many roles where she was actually alive at the end. She was either a broken woman or (usually) a dead woman. She lived through this, and it was a sort of a real-life performance. She brought herself to a state of expressing such extreme emotion with her voice and with her body that she was completely exhausted at the end. Her marvelous career ended, and she left the operatic stage at just the age of forty-three which is incredibly young.

JN: *We can see that today opera more and more often becomes, so to speak, "curated" by the director. This opera project moves in this direction. In earlier times the main creator was the composer, or even before that, the librettist. But today there is a tendency in some pieces, notably with directors such as Pierre Audi or Michal Grover-Friedlander in Tel Aviv, to piece together various pieces from musical history or arias from historical operas and sort of "curate" them into the new piece. How do you see this tendency?*

MA: I don't have much opinion about this. I think opera can't be made the same way it has always been made, so there can be very different approaches. The opera sets are not anymore made in a traditional way: the setting can be in a parkway, or a garage, or a hospital. The settings change, and the directors have many different ideas about how to give a new point to opera. I think it's a kind of a normal evolution.

JN: *Did you have in mind any reference from the world of what we might call new opera, like Einstein on the Beach, for example?*

MA: No. *Einstein on the Beach*, of course, I know, but I was trying not to look at anything for inspiration. I was trying to make something that is my own and original, though my original idea is more than forty years old now; I mean the idea that in every opera a woman dies in the end, so why

not show only the deaths and nothing else? I don't think that anybody had this idea before. So, I'm showing only dying scenes through the prism of Callas. And then, there is also the eighth death. That is the death of Callas herself and we don't talk about that. We know that in the end there is a voice that comes out of the old tape recorder, and that is Callas. Marko Nikodijević did an ingenious thing: he stopped the voice *in medias res*, so that the voice actually continues in our heads, even if you can't even hear it. And then you understand that—yes, she can die, but her voice is immortal, her voice will never die. And that's what I would like to leave the audience with.

JN: *I heard in some parts of the electronic music some transformation of the voice, even maybe the screaming voice…*

MA: Marko went to such amazing lengths, he wanted to even record the sounds of the street where I was born in Belgrade.

MN: That was Luka [Kozlovački]'s recording of the street corner where Marina was born, which is very beautiful, because she says: "It is only Paris" and opens the windows and we hear the sounds of the Stari Grad (Old Town) from Belgrade. We had children screaming, and we were adapting the electronic part as we went along. I'm opened to revisiting and redoing some things or making them somewhat different. I don't think I have to be a living museum, so that there is just a statue and you cannot touch it and it has to be like that. I'm much more open to a sort of a live concept of music.

JN: *The male voice can be heard at some point towards the end of the opera, in "The Eighth Death"?*

MN: Yes, that is Willem Dafoe recycling certain sentences from operas like *Carmen*, *Traviata*, *Lucia* and so on, both in the original language and in English translation. In the National Theatre Munich [the Bayerische Staatsoper's main venue] it probably didn't sound the same as in the stereo mixdown for the video stream on television. It is a large opera house and has a very complete cupola so that these sounds literally go from the bottom to the top and then spin around, so that they sort of move around the whole opera house, including the audience and stage, so that you imagine you're in the midst of a storm created by this voice.

JN: 7 Deaths of Maria Callas *begins with what I would call the amazing "music of bells." Listening to it, I started to ask myself if this music stands for church bells, or some other kind of bells, and I think it's extremely exciting*

but this is totally different. I don't actually see a connection between releasing the voice, where I am exploring the limits of the voice, and singing.

JN: *Marko, what is your reference point for the voice, and especially the operatic voice, both the conventional operatic voice and those non-conventional voices that are sometimes used in opera today?*

MN: The voice is a very limited instrument and has a very narrow range compared to most traditional instruments. But, as we communicate through the voice, we are used to registering even very small differences within it. The voice can transmit so much emotion and meaning in the smallest possible way. It is an instrument that is sitting inside our throat, and it is also somewhat fragile. We know that from opera singers who are constantly protecting their voices. At the same time, it is capable of communicating in a manner that does not exist in any other medium.

JN: *What is so special about Maria Callas's voice? I was thinking about that when watching* 7 Deaths. *At the Munich performance we heard seven extraordinarily good singers, and it almost seemed at one point like a kind of an audition for Maria Callas, so to speak. You hear all of them, and then at the end you hear this recorded fragment of Maria Callas singing "Casta diva." At that point I realized that Callas's voice, when compared to all the other beautiful voices that we heard, exists in some kind of separate, and very special, dimension. Why do you think she has this special dimension to her voice? What is that special there?*

MA: I only remember having breakfast in my grandmother's kitchen when I was fourteen years old. We had an old Bakelite radio, and I remember I heard this voice coming out of the radio. I had no idea it was Callas, and I didn't know what she was singing. I didn't understand the words—it was in Italian—and I remember that I stood up, feeling the electricity going through my body, and with this incredible sensation of emotions passing through me. I started to cry uncontrollably, and it was such an emotional effect that I have never forgotten it. After that I wanted to know whose voice it was, who was this person, and I really wanted to know everything about her. Her voice has such an enormous emotional impact, and it has some kind of electric energy passing through it, a gift that very few people in the world have.

MN: I think there are artists like Maria Callas who seem to break down conventions, the pedigreed ways of doing things. Callas invaded the scene

to enter the opera in this kind of way. To me it was as if the church bells were ringing all the time at the beginning. And the oboe, maybe, represents the voice. If you narrated in this Introduction, how would you describe it?

MN: My starting point for this opening cloud music was actually how the clouds would appear. The first cloud sequence is one of early morning clouds. In the cloud sequences there are always these epigrammatic poetic texts before each of the film deaths, and they sort of explain, or give a poetic introduction to, what kind of a death we are moving towards. And so I looked at the clouds. It started with these morning clouds, so that is why there is so much Italian impressionism. The oboe melody is just a slowed down aria from *Traviata* that the singer is about to sing. "Addio, del passato" is somewhat stretched out and slowed down, but exactly the same notes are used with just a few additional flourishes.

JN: *And how did you select these seven arias? Why these seven and not some others, and why precisely seven of them?*

MA: Seven is my destiny number, and I really like that. Also, seven is such a biblical number, with the seven days in which God made the world… I was looking for all different types of deaths, so I actually chose tuberculosis, a leap, strangulation, burning, radiation, death from madness and knifing. I tried to present every possible way of dying, as far as I could; that was the idea. And then, also, I was looking for the best of the aria performances by Callas.

JN: *It is intriguing to see this opera both through the prism of your art and through Callas's. At times it seemed as though you were Maria, and at other times you were Marina. You managed to entangle the two lives through this piece. Moreover, there are references to some of your other pieces in the videos.*

MA: Definitely, like the snake in the video—I was doing this before in the live performance. But, talking about number seven, I also wanted to present seven types of women, all different types, and all dying for love in the world. We all die for love and we are all different types of women, and I really wanted to show this through the singers. So, we were casting people who actually represented these types. Normally, people cast singers just for their voice, but for me it was also important to see how they looked visually, and also where they came from, from a Nordic country, for example, or from Asia, or Spain—so all these elements really played a role in my deci-

sion. I needed in this piece not just Callas. It is a Callas story, it's my story and it's seven different women's stories, because I wanted these themes to be universal, applying actually to anybody in the world dying from a broken heart, and not just one person. It's not the story of one person, but the story of all of us.

JN: *And what would you say about the question of realism in opera? I think achieving realism in opera is quite an impossible task, because opera always tends to be "larger than life." Even if what we can see in the opera is realistic, the very fact that characters are singing undoes that realism immediately. How do you look at these issues of realism in opera?*

MA: I was looking more into the conceptual part. I was thinking more of the fact that Callas left everything to her maid Bruna, all her possessions and all her jewelry and everything she ever had, because Bruna was the only person who was always with her. So, all of the opera singers are actually different forms of Bruna, the same maid, and they are all dressed in the same "uniform." At the end, when they come to leave the room and clean the broken glass on the floor and cover all the possessions and take away the memorabilia, you understand that, actually, Callas is not there anymore. So, I simplified the work to a point where there is indeed some kind of realism, but of a conceptually different kind. Callas's room on stage is the exact replica of the room where she really died in Paris. We examined every single photograph and reproduced the furniture, the paintings on the wall, and even the sleeping pills next to her telephone. Everything was done to enable that kind of realism. And yet within this realism, there in the bed is Callas, but also me, because of the photographs I'm looking at. I'm not looking at Callas, nor at photographs of Onassis, Zeffirelli, Pasolini, or any of her friends. I'm looking at my own photographs, at the man over whom I really did almost die of broken heart. So, it is a mixture and it is constantly going on through the piece.

[JPC]: 7 deaths of Maria Callas *is truly an intermedia project. I wonder if you could tell us a bit more about its videographic component, namely about your collaboration with Nabil Elderkin and, more broadly, about how you elaborated that interaction between stage and screen.*[3]

MA: I was looking for somebody who was doing great music videos, because this is a music video in many ways. It's not just the decoration in the back

3 This question was posed by João Pedro Cachopo (CESEM).

that you project. I wanted the video to be the integral part of the story. Actually, I stripped the stage to nothing, to just a single singer singing in the middle. But that, in a way, is a part of the video at the same time, visually. So, working with Nabil was great for me because I found he was a great filmmaker himself. I also wanted to have just one person in the video killing me over and over again, and that's Willem Dafoe—because it's basically in the mind of Callas, with Onassis killing her constantly over and over again. So, it was a very conceptual approach. Then we lifted the stage a little bit higher, so that actually the singer became a part of the screen. So, sometimes she's entering the room, and sometimes she's a part of the killing scene, in some ways. And then there is also the bed, which is a replica of Callas's, on the stage itself, where I'm lying for an entire hour before "The Eighth Death" even gets started. So, this bed also becomes a part of the screen. In other words, the singer will go to the bed on the screen, which is on the stage, but at the same time you see the second bed of *Traviata* on the stage, projected on the screen, so it all gets mixed up in a single entangled web. You have to have an image that works for the public. Also, the fact that the orchestra is not in the pit—since for social distancing and coronavirus we had to raise it up—made it a part of this installation, too. It became in effect more opera installation then opera.

MA: I wanted to ask Nikodijević one question myself. How did this change affect you? Seeing the orchestra in that way and not hidden in the pit—how did that change the fabric of the music?

MN: It depends on which hall it is done in, and on how high the parquet is. For me it is mostly an acoustic thing. Being in a pit focuses the orchestral sound much more, so it sort of emerges from the orchestra pit already blended and glued together, much more so than when the orchestra is in the main hall, where there is just much more reverb. I mean, that is why Wagner used the covered orchestra in Bayreuth, to achieve the ultimate magic effect, where you don't see the orchestra at all, it is completely covered and it allows the sound to come from everywhere, so to speak. You feel that you are in the midst of this enormous ocean of sound, but that doesn't have any biting quality. There is always something very mellow produced by this covered orchestra. So, it has both a dramatic effect, and also a purely acoustic one.

JN: *What Marina described worked especially well, I think, in moments when in the video—for example, I think, in the madness scene—you can see Ma-*

rina/Maria screaming, but you cannot hear the scream, you can only see the open mouth screaming and then, at the same time, you can see the singer on the stage, singing. There is a discord or ventriloquism between what we hear and what we see on stage. These moments (and there are a few of them throughout the piece) work extremely well, and they open up all kinds of questions about the continuous discord of body and voice in opera.

Fig. 2 Marina Abramović, *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, 2019. Photo credit: Marco Anelli, courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives.

[FM]: *Are you planning to do different versions of* 7 Deaths *when it will be performed in different spaces in the future? And are there also plans to put it on DVD? How can you preserve this kind of performance?*[4]

MA: Right now, I'd really like to perform it as it is for a while. Our next performances are going to be in Paris and Athens in 2021, and at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples in 2022. We also have plans for Berlin and New York… We would like, at least for the next two or three years, to perform it as it is.

4 This question, by Filipa Magalhães (CESEM), originated from the Zoom chat box during the interview.

As long as I can be on the stage, I will perform this piece. I don't see any reason why we should change it and make another version. Right now, it really works for me as it is and I want to have the pleasure of doing it for a while. Moreover, every theater produces a different experience, and every audience is different. Also, different countries—how will the Italians react to this, for example, given that Callas had her biggest career in Italy; or how will the Greeks react, and what will the French say, or what will happen if we perform it in Asia? I want to experience this as long as I can.

MN: And, of course, one cannot achieve the depth of sound and visual field on a video that you have in the theater. It's just that it's a very deep three-dimensional field and you cannot recreate what you are hearing even with the best hi-fi systems. It is simply impossible to reproduce that kind of sound experience. It cannot be recorded—it's just made to be live.

MA: I have to agree with Marko completely, because, you know, the live stream and the DVD or anything else is only a form of documentation, it's not the real thing and will never be the real thing. You have to be in a theater, you have to feel, you have to smell, you have to touch, you have to be there.

JN: *Marko, I understood that you re-orchestrated the piece because of the pandemic developments, since the number of people in the orchestra needed to be smaller. So, will the next performances of the piece be in this reduced version, or will you return to a bigger orchestra?*

MN: That depends on the coronavirus and not on me. I mean there exists a version for reduced orchestra and a version for full orchestra, and it all depends on how many people we can have in the orchestra, and also in the audience, for which version we will use. I can manage with forty-five musicians, but I find it very hard to perform in an opera house designed for two thousand people with only three hundred people present. I mean, I know that the attention is there, but it is also a very strange situation.

MA: In Munich we gave five performances for five hundred people, which means 2500 people; it's still something, and maybe it's going to be the same in Naples, so let's see…

MN: And we had to fight for five hundred people; we were given that number on the day of the premiere…

MA: Exactly, it was a very nervous moment, but we were lucky. So, every

time it changes, and every time we have to see what the new situation will be; we can't predict it.

[IN]: *If the future is disembodied and even more distanced, physically and otherwise, what if the heartbreak ceases to exist, at least in the form we know it now? What is art going to do about that possible dystopian scenario? Why is it still important to reenact love and longing in this way as in opera?*[5]

MN: Well, I don't think the tragedy of the future will be a matter of unfriending people on Facebook, because I cannot see that platform as any kind of musical tragedy: I mean whether you get unfriended on Facebook, or your Instagram gets spammed. So, I mean, there are potentials in new technology, but obviously virtual reality and a one-dimensional "app society" is no substitute for the one thing that we feel as real.

MA: So, we like to think that loneliness, solitude, alienation, and a broken heart are thousands and thousands of years old and have always been there with us, with or without the epidemic; none of that really changes. The same goes for how art will look. The epidemic comes and goes, and right now we have to wait for a better time. I hate to compromise because of the epidemic. I hate Zoom performances with bad quality and terrible images. I just don't see this is the right way to go. I really think we don't need to compromise. We just have to wait. That's it.

5 This question was posed by Iva Nenić (Faculty of Music, Belgrade).

Since the beginning of her career in Belgrade during the early 1970s, **Marina Abramović** has pioneered performance art, creating some of the form's most important early works. Exploring her physical and mental limits, she has withstood pain, exhaustion, and danger in her quest for emotional and spiritual transformation.
Abramović was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Artist at the 1997 Venice Biennale. In 2010, Abramović had her first major US retrospective and simultaneously performed for over 700 hours in *The Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Abramović founded Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), a platform for immaterial and long durational work to create new possibilities for collaboration among thinkers of all fields.
Her most recent publication is *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir*, published by Crown Archetype on October 25, 2016. Her retrospective *The Cleaner* opened at Moderna Museet, Stockholm in February 2017 and has toured to seven additional European venues, ending at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, Serbia in 2019. In September 2020 the Bayerische Staatsoper presented the world premiere of *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*, which will continue to tour to other venues. In 2023 she will present the solo exhibition *After Life* at the Royal Academy, and become the first female artist in the institution's 250 year history to occupy the entire gallery space with her work.

Jelena Novak is a researcher at CESEM (Center for Study of the Sociology and Aesthetics of Music), FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. Her fields of interests are modern and contemporary music, recent opera and musical theatre, music and new media, capitalist realism, voice studies in the age of posthuman and feminine identities in music. Exploring those fields, she works as a researcher, lecturer, writer, dramaturge, music critic, editor, and curator focused on bringing together critical theory and contemporary art. She has been a founding committee member of the Society for Minimalist Music and a founding member of the editorial collective TkH [Walking Theory]. In 2013 she won the Thurnau Award for Music Theatre Studies from the University of Bayreuth, Germany. Her most recent books are *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body* (Routledge, 2015), *Operofilia* (Orion Art, 2018) and *Einstein on the Beach: Opera beyond Drama* (co-edited with John Richardson, Routledge, 2019). She is currently co-editing (with João Pedro Cachopo) a special issue for *Opera Quarterly* dedicated to operas based on films and preparing the co-edited volume (with Kris Dittel) *Singing beyond Human*.

Marko Nikodijević was born in 1980 in Subotica, Serbia and studied composition in Belgrade with Zoran Erić and Srdjan Hofman between 1995 and 2003. In addition, he attended courses and lectures in nonlinear mathematics and physics. Following his education in the Serbian capital, he undertook advanced training in composition with Marco Stroppa at the Academy of Music and the Performing Arts in Stuttgart in 2003. Nikodijević settled in Stuttgart, from where he received stipends and attended master courses and composition seminars in Apeldoorn, Visby, Weimar, Amsterdam, Salzwedel and Baden-Baden. His compositional production has won prizes and awards at the International Young Composers Meeting in Apeldoorn, the Gaudeamus Music Week in Amsterdam, the 3rd Brandenburg Biennale and the UNESCO Rostrum of Composers.
He resided in Paris from 2012 to 2013 as a scholarship holder at the Cité internationale des Arts. In 2013 Marko Nikodijević received one of the three composition furtherance prizes of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation and in 2014 was awarded the Deutscher Musikautorenpreis (German Composers' Prize) in the category Promotion of New Talent.

Book Reviews

Tereza Havelková. *Opera as Hypermedium: Meaning-Making, Immediacy, and the Politics of Perception*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 186 pp. ISBN 9780190091262 (hardback).

Bianca De Mario

Conceptualizing opera today means not only to engage with a complex texture of arts and media, but also to look into the contributions offered by several approaches to the genre, from those inherited by performance and media theory, to the ones fostered by voice and sound studies, without forgetting contemporary art and film studies. Tereza Havelková's *Opera as Hypermedium* moves exactly in this direction, challenging several theoretical frameworks emerging from the controversial debate around opera and media. Her discussion is driven by the underlying question about the politics of representation and perception, which opera performs within the current audiovisual culture dominated by digital technologies.

Bolter and Grusin's concept of hypermediacy—i.e., the logic that makes us aware of mediation and reminds us "of our desire for immediacy"[1]—is the starting point for an approach to opera as audiovisual event, on both stage and screen. Rather than a text or a work, opera is here considered as a theoretical object which can "'think' or 'theorize' in [its] own right and by [its] own means" (23). In this sense, the aim of this book is "to chart the theoretical terrain of opera as hypermedium" (23), highlighting the effects of immediacy it produces and the political potential of its hypermediacy.

The case studies at the core of Havelková's exploration are two operas by Dutch composer Louis Andriessen and British director and screen-

1 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 34.

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writer Peter Greenaway, works which were both staged for the first time in Amsterdam, "openly hypermedial" and "directly linked to the conception of intermediality in theatre and performance" (18). *Rosa* (1994) is an investigation into the murder of Juan Manuel de Rosa, a fictitious composer of music for Western films whose love for his horse is deeper than the affection for his fiancée Esmeralda. *Writing to Vermeer* (1999) is built around a series of eighteen letters written by three women—the artist's wife, his mother-in-law, and an imaginary model—to the painter (who never appears on stage) during the spring of 1672, also known in Dutch history as the *Rampjaar* (Disaster Year). While *Rosa* thematizes the use of film music on stage through the figure of the Argentinian composer, *Writing to Vermeer* projects, deconstructs, and reenacts Vermeer's art. Both combine stage action and live singing with sound technology—audible amplification in the former case, and electronic inserts by Michel van der Aa in the latter.

Before tackling the core of the discussion, the author clarifies how the issues at stake concern opera and contemporary staging by comparing two productions of Wagner's *Ring*: Robert Lepage's at the Met (2010–12) and La Fura dels Baus's in Valencia (2007–09). In particular, the opening scene of *Das Rheingold* works as a mean to measure the relationship between technology and the human body: in Lepage's production, technology functions as role characterization, beautifying the bodies which are in control of it, while the visual interpretation of Wagner's music is "straightforward" (5) and transparent; conversely, La Fura depicts this relation as "precarious" (5), introducing multiple "layers of signification that may be immediately decipherable to the audience" (5).

These examples outline a solid overview of the theoretical debate which involves, on one hand, Greg Giesekam's notion of "multimedial/intermedial" performances,[2] and on the other hand the relationship between illusionism and media transparency as discussed by Gundula Kreuzer and Nicholas Ridout.[3] In this regard, the audio-viewers' sensory engagement is one of the main characteristics of contemporary audiovisuality, as explained by

2 See Greg Giesekam, *Staging the Screen: The Use of Film and Video in Theatre* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 8–9.

3 See Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018); Nicholas Ridout, "Opera and the Technologies of Theatrical Production," in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 159–76.

John Richardson and Claudia Gorbman.[4] It is in this cultural frame that Havelková's concept of opera as hypermedium acts as part of the performative and material turns in opera studies and their related debates, of which she offers a survey of the major figures and theories. Moreover, feelings usually described as *presence*, *absorption*, *immersion*, and *liveness* are experienced not only through live performances, but also through opera on screen—the hypermedial transpositions that Christopher Morris defines as "'videoistic' productions."[5] The author is here interested in how such effects are produced in a multimedia context, but—due to the importance of a "continuity between contemporary operatic practices and various aspects of the operatic past" (23)—her understanding of opera as hypermedium differs from notions such as "digital opera" and "postopera" (which imply a clear distinction with the previous tradition).[6]

Another reference for Havelková is the work of cultural theorist Mieke Bal, from which she takes the notion of "preposterous history" to elaborate on opera's afterwardness ("how opera as hypermedium is (re)though[t] in and for the present," 24).[7] The use of speech-act theory for the analysis of multimedia—following Bal, but also Maaike Bleeker—represents a turning point in discussing "the role of temporality in shaping the relationship between an audiovisual event and its audio-viewers" (25). Moreover, "at stake in this theorization is the problem of how to formulate theoretical and artistic alternatives to a regime of representation that one is always already entangled in" (29). Thus, reconfiguring the relationship between perceiver and perceived constitutes a challenging part of the study of opera as hypermedium.

Rosa's two subtitles—*A Horse Drama* for the theatrical productions (1994, 1998); *The Death of a Composer* for both the screen version (1999) and the audio recording (2000)—is a glimpse into the issue, highlighted by Greenaway and Andriessen's work, at the core of chapter 1—i.e., the desire

4 John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–35.

5 Christopher Morris, "Digital Diva: Opera on Video," *Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2010): 111.

6 The reference is to Áine Sheil and Craig Vear, "Digital Opera, New Means and New Meanings: An Introduction in Two Voices," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 8, no.1 (2012): 3–9; and Jelena Novak, *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

7 See Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

for knowledge. The reflection around *Rosa* explores two features which hypermedial opera commonly deploys: "Allegory and Excess" (38-68). Albeit at odds with opera's narrative and alleged meanings, the excess of the operatic experience (mainly produced by "the physical, material effects of the singing voice," 35) is approached here as the result of "a dialogic situation of meaning-making" (35). Following Craig Owen's work on allegory and postmodernism, Havelková argues that allegory "complicates the reading of the opera's signs" (39).[8] Shoshana Felman's analysis of J.L. Austin's theory of performativity is then key to understanding the search for knowledge that, in *Rosa*, is pursued in a seductive way through the character of The Investigatrix—a dominatrix/seductress, whom the audio-viewers had already seen, first as Madame de Vries, advocating for the unveiling of the truth, then as The Texan Whore.[9] To shed light on the working of allegory, the study examines the striking scene in which an already-dead Rosa sings in falsetto. Crucified, the protagonist sits on his horse, whose corpse is stuffed with Esmeralda and the money earned by the composer throughout his life. All the visual and aural ambiguities triggered by the scene are an allegory of the opera's "unreadability" (59), and the whole theatrical frame becomes a part of the dramatic illusion. By treating opera allegorically, *Rosa* makes the stage a "crime scene of opera itself" (60): a dead object whose mortification is the condition of possibility for its rebirth, a "rescue from … oblivion," in Owens's words.[10] Participating in the allegorical structure and in the process of meaning-making, voice becomes the vehicle of redemptive power. Its symbolic unity of sign and referent (in contrast to the "body–voice gap" identified by Novak)[11] operates beyond both music and libretto, as an "effect of immediacy" (63).

Rosa proves also useful for an in-depth analysis of the concepts of perspective, focalization, theatricality, and absorption. Chapter 2 draws also on narratology to test how hypermedial opera "positions its audio-viewers toward what there is to be seen and heard on stage or screen" (71). After Bleeker (and Hans-Thies Lehmann), Havelková explains how postdramat-

8 See Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 203–35.

9 The reference is to Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

10 Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 203.

11 Novak, *Postopera*, 7.

ic theater offers a multiplication of perspectives which, while seemingly bringing attention to the act of framing, it paradoxically produces "an effect equal to the absence of frames" (70).[12] Perspective is still at work, though it has become obscured. In *Rosa*, it represents the principle that organizes the physical and virtual space: Madame de Vries, who is named after a Dutch specialist in perspective, is the "internal focalizor" (80) bringing the audio-viewers' attention to the agency behind the multiplicity of media—her Brechtian beginning being "Let me describe the stage." Using Gorbman's notion of "point of experience" to identify the position mediating perceiver and perceived, this section of the book shows how in *Rosa* the positioning acts "may become obscured" (71).[13]

Absorption, following Michael Fried's definition of it as "a strategy to obliterate the relationship between the observer and a work of art" (75),[14] the "supreme fiction" used to "persuade the beholder of its truthfulness" (76), is here also considered as the result of the interaction between a work of art and a specific viewer, both historically and culturally determined. *Rosa* deliberately invites to step inside the drama ("We are to leave the opera house and go to the cinema"): a warning of absorption. Music is the mean that enables "the transition from the theatrical frame to the inner drama" (83): on the one hand, music (primarily derived from Andriessen's previous work, *Hout*) that "run[s] its course" (84) from a small motif into a steady rhythm full of tension and alertness; on the other, the music of the inner drama, vocal and melodic, is mostly made of quotations from classical and film music (especially Hollywood Westerns). This continuous split between the two dimensions threatens the absorption dynamic, while "the open theatricality of the descriptions and enumerations constantly reminds us of our 'desire for immediacy'" (86).[15] The analysis of Rosa's and Esmeralda's arias, the former becoming a soundtrack for the cinematic projections offered to the audience, the latter being traditionally operatic and deeply intimate, demonstrates how the position suggested by the music de-

12 The reference is to Maaike Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006).

13 The reference is to Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

14 See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 66, 71.

15 The reference is to Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 34.

pends on the actual audio-viewer's freedom to choose among a multiplicity of positions.

In chapter 3 ("Liveness and Mediatization. (De)constructing Dichotomies"), Andriessen's and Greenaway's opera *Writing to Vermeer* prompts a discussion on how liveness is constructed "as an effect of immediacy within the overall context of hypermediacy" (31). The scenes from the domestic life of Vermeer's women are visual and sonic theatrical "windows" enlivened by Andriessen's live music and singing; the historical events of the outside world are represented instead by projections and by van der Aa's electronic inserts. By drawing on classic writing on film sound, Havelková demonstrates how oppositions such as original vs. copy, presence vs. representation—allegedly "dismantled in theory" (36)—are instead productive as analytical tools. In this analysis, James Lastra's notion of the effect of sound recording as an "'original' independent of its representation,"[16] and Jonathan Burston's idea of "quasi-live aesthetics" as a symptom of standardization of live theater,[17] contribute to identify liveness with a theatrical experience where a "shared acoustic space" and a "perceived unity of the singing voice and the performing body" (106) coexist:

> It is crucially the singing voice (and the operatic music) that foregrounds the performing bodies. As long as the performers sing and dance, they elicit a theatrical mode of audiovision. The women on stage appear as incarnations of the women from the paintings; they give them both bodies and voices (111).

The relationship between sound and source is here reconfigured with respect to gender. Mary Ann Doane's theorization of the masquerade in narrative cinema—according to which masking allows women to attain distance from their image and to reconfigure the relationship with its female spectator—is key to understanding the relationships among the women on stage and the projections of Vermeer's paintings they represent. In this sense, *Writing to Vermeer* reveals a sense of "nostalgia for the live within the economy of reproduction" (125).

The starting point of the book's fourth and last chapter is a comparison

16 James Lastra, "Reading, Writing, and Representing Sound," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 70.

17 Jonathan Burston, "Theatre Space as Virtual Place: Audio Technology, the Reconfigured Singing Body, and the Megamusical," *Popular Music* 17, no. 2 (1998): 208.

between Bolter and Grusin's critique of hypermediacy and Laura Marks's concept of "haptic visuality" as a mode of perception and fruition that encourages a bodily, intersubjective experience of art.[18] Several scenes in *Rosa*'s screen version (for instance, when Esmeralda is stripped naked) and *Writing to Vermeer* (e.g., the killing of the De Witt brothers marked by evocative sounds) demonstrate how "hypermediacy elicits an embodied, multisensory mode of perception" (36). The author refers here to Susan Buck-Morss's discussion of Walter Benjamin's "Artwork" essay, exploring the twin systems of "(syn)aesthetics and anaesthetics" (133). While the former is a physiological connection between the external sense-perceptions and "the internal images of memory and anticipation" (134), the latter is its technical manipulation of environmental stimuli called phantasmagoria, "anaesthetizing the organism … through flooding the senses" and altering consciousness (135).[19] The social control produced by these dynamics in the second half of the nineteenth century is what prompted Benjamin's famous call for "politicizing art."[20]

Not by chance, the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a common reference both in Bolter and Grusin's notion of hypermediacy and in Buck-Morss's account of phantasmagoria, opened Havelkova's enquiry. This convergence is a signal that "modes of perception … may not be as divergent as they seem" (150); also, as foreseen by Theodor W. Adorno, the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* highlights the immediacy of hypermediacy in a particularly effective way.[21] It is thus significant that the "excess of media and … stimuli" offered by hypermediacy, with its sensory impact, can be compared to the legacy of the Wagnerian model (152). In this sense, music works as a powerful tool for "managing attention" against a general background of distraction (153).

As Havelková argues towards the end of the chapter, "new forms of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* are being devised" (161) in the digital age; still, the tools offered by theorists such as Benjamin or Adorno prove productive in identifying mechanisms of remediation. In the Conclusion, the author focuses on the fact that operas as cultural objects tend to resist theorization "while inviting, illuminating, and modifying others. … Understanding the operas

18 See Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

19 See Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (1992): 3–41.

20 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 242.

21 See Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), esp. ch. 6 "Phantasmagoria."

as being in dialogue with the theorizations of scholarship involves concentrating on what they do rather than what they say" (164).

Though Havelková's full immersion in theory, with its constant chain of references, runs the occasional risk of putting the reader's attention under some strain, the premises and argumentation are explicit and never disorienting. Without labelling contemporary genres and practices, *Opera as Hypermedium* is a book whose strength lies not only in its focus on Northern European scholarship and artistic production—often regrettably overlooked—but also in a constant effort to create continuity between present and past, both in theoretical and practical terms. By questioning important notions commonly accepted in current theories on opera and media, Tereza Havelková suggests a way to analyze contemporary productions through the multiple lenses offered by different research fields, and her meticulous testing and mapping of theory over performance takes stock of a problematic state of the art. How to approach a series of operatic practices that are hard to confine under one suitable category? (Digital opera? Post-opera? Hypermedial opera?) How to overcome the deadlock of trite prejudices and tired preconceptions, while holding them as still essential for the interpretation of such a loaded cultural phenomenon? Understanding opera as a hypermedial object may prove to offer an all-encompassing analysis while at the same time provide a way out of such an impasse. It might be a tortuous path, but one that certainly will be useful to better understand the nature of the genre which, far from being dead and buried, is constantly changing and reinventing itself, challenging all sorts of media to reach its audiences and produce meaning.

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Performance reviews

Jennifer Walshe, *Ireland: A Dataset*
National Concert Hall, Dublin, 26 September 2020, broadcast online (*Imagining Ireland Livestream Series*)

Björn Heile

In a possibly (and pleasingly) apocryphal remark, the Irish novelist John McGahern is supposed to have said that "Ireland skipped the twentieth century—it went straight from the nineteenth into the twenty-first." It is this tension between a mythologized past and a promising but uncertain future that forms the basis of Jennifer Walshe's composition. In few other European countries, the premodern past encounters the postindustrial present, represented in this case by tech giants like Apple, Google, and Facebook who made Ireland their European base for tax reasons, quite so starkly; an experience Ireland shares with other postcolonial countries at the periphery of Western modernity. That, like so many Irish artists and intellectuals before her, Walshe is an emigrant and lives mainly in London and Stuttgart may have additionally sharpened her sensitivity for the contradictions peculiar to her birthplace (I am writing this as a German living in Scotland, so I can claim personal insight into the emigrant perspective, although I have no specific knowledge or understanding of Ireland).

Five performers—the vocal ensemble Tonnta (Robbie Blake, Bláthnaid Conroy Murphy, Elizabeth Hilliard, Simon MacHale) and the saxophonist Nick Roth—complemented by a sparsely used pre-recorded tape—perform what Walshe describes as a "radiophonic play." Generically, the result can best be described as "semi-staged" in a way that is familiar from experimental music theater from the 1960s onwards, and not all that different from classical-modernist precursors such as Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* or Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat* or *Renard* (although there is no hint at

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a continuous narrative or dramatic roles in this case): all performers are miked individually and, with one short exception, remain rooted to their spot. Thus, the delivery is based on concert performance on one level; at the same time, however, the performers enact some of the generic characters, such as present-day American tourists or a gang of Irish criminals targeting the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, who make an appearance through vocal and gestural mimicry ("simple acting" in Michael Kirby's classification of acting types).[1] Instead of scenery or props, a video screen completes the stage. All these elements are used economically: overall, this is a tight concentrated experience, rather than a sensory overload. Tonnta and Roth have to be congratulated on well-judged performances covering all nuances, from neutral through deadpan to full-on (well, almost full-on) panto delivery and back again, all the while executing the music with great precision and aplomb.

Structurally, the work consists of sections focusing on aspects of Irish culture, history, and identity, alternating with interludes composed by artificial intelligence trained on (mostly) Irish musicians—such as Enya, Les Baxter (amusingly transliterated as Leaslaoi Mac A'Bhacstair, although Baxter was born in Detroit), The Dubliners, Riverdance—and on Sean-nós (highly ornamented, unaccompanied traditional Irish song). To what extent the interludes were really composed by AI, and how, remains unclear, but they are very effective parodies of their respective models, faintly reminiscent of Luciano Berio's *Folk Songs* and *Coro*, or, in the more satirical numbers, Mauricio Kagel's *Kantrimiusik*. In particular, the close harmony singing in the Les Baxter number and the clumsy pseudo-folk dancing in the Dubliners parody (the only occasion when the singers move their entire bodies and leave their spot) will stick in the audience's minds. As funny as these sections undoubtedly are, the wider point is the digital simulation, reproduction, and manipulation of ideas of Irishness. Walshe undermines simplistic dualisms between "real" and "fake" or, for that matter, "honest" human craft and digital machine culture, by emphasizing the manufactured and manipulated nature of the models employed. It is worth pointing out that one of Baxter's (or Mac A'Bhacstair's) claims to fame is the invention of the genre of "exotica." Even though the endpoint is Sean-nós (in digitally adulterated form), it would be naïve to assume that the idea is that "authenticity" can be accessed by peeling off the successive layers of representation one by one.

1 Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting," *The Drama Review: TDR* 16, no. 1 (1972): 6–8.

What the AI interludes suggest about music, the other sections argue about wider culture, including visual culture, using variously spoken, recited, and sung language (apparently written by Walshe herself), and the video screen as media. All the sections share a focus on the creation and reproduction of images and myths of Ireland. The first part is a critical essay on *Man of Aran*, a 1934 "documentary" by Robert J. Flaherty on the premodern life on the Aran Islands that has later been revealed as almost wholly fabricated. The second is a parody of a TV show (or possibly YouTube video) on how to look Irish. After a disquisition on AI and datasets, particularly referencing John Hinde, an English photographer who specialized in nostalgic picture postcards of rural Ireland that aestheticized the reality of grinding poverty, we encounter North American tourists on their visit to the Fort of the Kings on the Hill of Tara, followed, after the AI-produced Les Baxter parody, by a "lecture on the picturesque," which ranges from eighteenth-century landscape painting through nineteenth- and twentieth-century picture postcards to present-day tourist snaps on Instagram. The number on the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition takes the form of a stylized comedy sketch routine involving a presumably fictional raid by the historical Valley Gang on the two rival exhibits representing Ireland—part of the self-representation of the British Empire—one featuring a Donegal village and the other Irish industry, with an incommensurate replica of Blarney Castle. One of the jokes concerns the gang's needing to dress up to "look Irish" in the way depicted by the exhibition to blend in, complete with what must be the tallest hat ever to be conceived but almost certainly never worn. The final number is, perhaps unexpectedly, genuinely moving, narrating a car trip around Ireland, which allows an apparently dying child to see real-world sites he or she only knows from films representing fantasy places, such as Westeros (from the TV series *Game of Thrones*, largely shot in Northern Ireland), Middle Earth (from the film series *Lord of the Rings*, shot mostly in New Zealand, although the Hobbits' "Shire" seems to evoke a leprechaun colony) and the planet Ahch-To (from *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*, shot on Skellig Michael, off the southern coast of Ireland). In the end, the child seems to miraculously recover.

As with many of the elements within this complex artwork, there are several possible interpretations of this ending. To me, the break from the ironic detachment and pervasive parody (whether gentle or malicious), predominant throughout the work, suggested a form of acceptance: for the child, it presumably doesn't matter whether the images or the places they depict are real or not; they are just as beautiful.

If androids dream of electric sheep, maybe Facebook's Dublin-based servers simulate the Stone of Destiny on the nearby Hill of Tara in their downtime. And if, as the late historian Eric Hobsbawm has argued, national identity consists of "invented traditions," Irish identity, Jennifer Walshe retorts, is a dataset of billions of images and sounds that are constantly being re-processed. Artificial intelligence is just the latest form of such re-representations. Yet, crucially, as also becomes clear in her work, these myths were mostly created by *others about* Ireland: the association of the picturesque with the Irish countryside is the work of British colonists who proceeded to refashion the very landscape in accordance with their ideas. The idealization of ancient, Celtic, rural Ireland, with all the trappings of Gaeltacht, mythology, and folk music, literally declared "beyond the pale" by the British (the Pale being the line that separated the lands under direct British control from the rest of Ireland during the Late Middle Ages), is unthinkable without the nationalist reaction against colonization—and, notably, against the American construction of Irishness (itself largely driven by the Irish diaspora intent on idealizing their origin). Again, Facebook etc. are only the latest stage of this particular form of domination. As the text states at one point: "datasets are never neutral." Not that the Irish have consistently refused to be complicit in their own exoticization and mythologization. Over time, some began to see their own country through the eyes of others: *Man of Aran* is an excellent example. Not only is it no longer possible to distinguish between authentic or fake, but also between native and foreign—and perhaps it never was.

Ireland: A Dataset was premiered in late September 2020, broadcast online from an empty National Concert Hall as part of their Imagining Ireland Livestream Series. It was a rare highlight of new work for audiences deprived of live performances and subsisting mostly on a diet of canned art consumed through our screens. This too had to be viewed on a computer screen, but at least it was new and performed live. Frankly, almost anything would have made me happy at that moment. Yet the work proved rich and rewarding way beyond this particular context.

It is created for live performance, not online viewing, but, due presumably to the aforementioned economy of means, it works very well on screen. Still, I would love to see the work live, when it is possible to shift one's attention between the individual performers and between the stage action and the video screen according to one's own—not the video director's—preferences (although they did an excellent job). At the time, it seemed as

if the COVID pandemic might be dying down, and there were hopes for a return to concert halls, theaters, and opera houses. These have been well and truly demolished by the second wave, although we are now holding out for a new dawn brought about by vaccination. It is hoped that *Ireland: A Dataset* will benefit from the promised revival and experience a second life in live performance, instead of remaining forever identified with that strange period that we like to think of as a temporary interruption of our cultural and artistic life although it may yet turn out to be a harbinger of coming realities.

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7 Deaths of Maria Callas by Marina Abramović

Antonio Pizzo – Marida Rizzuti

If the event that Marina Abramović presented at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich were an opera piece, we could try to compare the different codes that the artist has put in place, including linguistic offshoots from areas normally less frequented by opera houses. If that hour and a half of music, song, action, and video were decipherable through an aesthetics of production or reception, it would be fascinating to reconstruct the story narrated by the dramaturgy. If the elegance of the scenography could be part of a refined stage writing, we might evaluate the specific effectiveness of a personal approach to the intermediality of the performance.

The hypotheticals are necessary considering that the overall creator is an artist who has established herself in the field of performance art so far from the operatic canon. Yet, all these "ifs" constitute the most interesting and richest elements in Abramović's project, because they succeed to get to the core of the very notion of opera theater, to the idea of cultural heritage that guides many European productions, and to the traditional audience contract which links spectators with the stage. And Abramović dives into this nucleus with grace and sincere participation, far from iconoclastic or violent rage. The work is constructed in such a way as to seduce the audience with the elements of opera, but at the same time it instills, in those who watch and listen, queries that erode the spectatorial experience itself.

In other words, Abramović fashions an event in real time whose raw material comes entirely from the tradition of opera, but she molds this material in such a way that the final result does not coincide with the horizon of expectation. Back in 2018, the artist had a first experience with musical theater at the Opera Vlaanderen in Antwerp, where she created the visual and conceptual apparatus for *Pelléas et Mélisande*, whose staging was intended as an *opéra-ballet* by choreographers Damien Jalet and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Three years later, the show had a revival at the Grand Théâtre de Genève. It is almost as if someone were using a canvas, colors, brushes, and even the painted subjects or the exhibition space typical of a figurative painting to obtain something that is not a figurative painting, but rather the *enactment* of thoughts on the essence of the painting.

In any case, these metadiscursive reflections can be considered just the seeds that the work plants in the audience and in the history of opera itself. They may be regarded as the effects that this live event produces and therefore it is possible to review the mechanisms it puts in place for such pur-

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pose. So, let's proceed step by step and begin with the material organization of the space in which the actions take place.

The orchestra is in the traditional pit, except for the choir which is distributed on two boxes facing the stage. The scenography is articulated in two main scenes: the first sees the entire proscenium covered by a veil (on which various projections of increasingly dark and disturbing clouds appear); placed right behind a platform, it covers the entire length of the stage from one wing to the other, hosting (on the left) an elegant bed—on which Abramović lies motionless—and, from time to time, the singers. Behind it, an equally large rear-projection screen on which various short films appear and illustrate the famous arias performed. At little more than half into the show, and after seven singers have taken turns, the screens and the platform retreat to reveal a luxurious room where, still on the right, we find the bed and Abramović lying down. At the end of the show, the curtain falls to reveal the protagonist on the proscenium for the last, brief scene.

The action has a very clear direction. During an orchestral prelude, clouds appear on the veil while a light frames Abramović, whose recorded voice introduces the theme of the aria that is about to be performed. Meanwhile, the singer who is placed at the center makes her entrance. When the orchestra begins to play the aria, a lighting effect allows the veil to become transparent, while a few videos are projected on the back screen; there, Abramović (for five of them with Willem Dafoe) stages personal reinterpretations of the character portrayed. Within this dramaturgical structure, seven singers alternate on stage to interpret just as many heroines and their respective arias: Violetta Valery, "Addio, del passato" (*La traviata*); Tosca, "Vissi d'arte" (*Tosca*); Desdemona, "Ave Maria" (*Otello*); Cio-Cio-san, "Un bel dì vedremo" (*Madama Butterfly*); Carmen, "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" (*Carmen*); Lucia, "Il dolce suono" (*Lucia di Lammermoor*); Norma, "Casta diva" (*Norma*). Immediately afterwards the scene darkens and an interlude, in which electronic music is followed by an original composition, favors a change of scene. After a few minutes, the raising of the curtain reveals her apartment's room; this time, the orchestra accompanies Abramović's stage action: her recorded voice marks her awakening, the getting out of bed, the wandering around the room, until she leaves for the boudoir. The singers reenter as a group, armed with various cleaning tools, and start tidying up; at this point, the costumes worn during the arias acquire meaning because they clearly present them as the maids of the house where Maria Callas died. The cleaning ends as they cover the furnishings with black sheets, until one of the maids switches a turntable on. As the orchestra approaches the final

sections of the score, the curtain falls, and from the left enters Ambramović wrapped in the same golden lamé dress that Defoe had worn in the video dedicated to *Norma*. As the performer reaches the center of the stage, and we hear a recording of "Casta diva" by Callas, Abramović's grave gestures reenact Callas's own ones, avoiding any outward sign of emotion—but darkness cuts off the aria right before the end.

Therefore, much of the staging relies on the video's narrative quality, both when dark clouds seem to foresee the heroines' tragic destinies, and also when their most famous arias act as a background to the cinematic staging of what Abramović considers their main themes. Violetta is motionless on her raw deathbed while Alfredo regrets his choices; Tosca falls from a skyscraper and crashes onto a car; Desdemona is strangled by Otello/Jago with pythons; Butterfly gives up her son and lets herself die in a nuclear disaster setting; Carmen, depicted as a bullfighter, is roped by Don José; Lucia rages against the mirrors reflecting her dressed as a bride; Norma and Pollione (en travesti) approach a blazing fire in an ecstasy of flames.

These slow-motion videos—whose formal beauty is reminiscent of Bill Viola's installations—are integrated on the stage in a way that is by now widely accepted and understood in the context of multimedia performances: here, the arias are performed at the front of the stage, coupled with a few actions and marked by the motionless presence of Abramović, while the background video elaborates on the arias' themes. It matters little whether this is Abramović's personal critical interpretation of those characters, or Callas's dreams as she sleeps in her bed; the whole system works as a continuous restaging of the same content, which thus enters a loop of narrative references between Abramović, Callas, and the tragic heroines. The hierarchy of these three elements is constantly and wittingly put into question: Which one is first? Callas's hypothetical dreams? Abramović's homage to a much-admired artist? the heroines' tragic love haunting the lives of both? The conceptual scheme is made even more effective by the technical solution of having the platform and the lighting slightly raising from the floor the bodies of the individual singers and of Abramović, leaving them almost afloat in front of the projections.

The second part comments on these conceptual networks by highlighting the overlapping of performer and singer. We do not know if the actions on stage are part of a performance by Abramović or the depiction of Callas's last hours—it could be both. The codes used are the ones we can recognize both in Abramović's artistic career and in the history of performance art (i.e., actions performed according to a predetermined, carefully ordered set

of instructions; the exposure of the body for a closer connection with the audience; the artist's own life on stage (a photo of Ulay and Abramović emerges among those kept in a drawer). The language in which these codes are set, however, is that of representation, opera, narration, and so on—until the end, when Abramović seems to take on herself Maria Callas's persona, embodying the recorded voice through a series of carefully measured gestures.

It reads, therefore, as a dramaturgy which aims to fill the gap between the two women but also, interestingly, to juxtapose performance and representation to unveil the gaze towards a different status of opera and its present-day status.

The music by Marko Nikodijević also moves in this direction; it is necessary to distinguish Nikodijević's original interventions from the use of the famous arias. Therefore it is legitimate to argue that the use of pre-existing operatic pieces in *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* strongly recalls the universe of the compilation, of the *greatest hits* of the author. In any case, the composer creates a space for himself within the transitions from one aria to another, and most importantly in the introduction and in the second part (Callas' death). He treats them almost as a live DJ-set. For the transitions, Nikodijević has created fluid and undaunted musical spaces that sound like the opposite of arias—just listen to their register: the arias, here, sound like they are lingering mostly on the middle register, whereas the instrumental interludes open up to the high and low extremes. By contrast, for the introduction and the second part, the composer ties together small motifs from each aria and blends them to create new ones. Here, he is re-arranging the operatic repertoire by combining musical motives and creating a modern texture where memories of the past can resurface. This technique is easily discernible in the opening overture with the curtain closed, when the incipit of "Addio, del passato" (*La traviata*) emerges from the orchestra. The transition between the first part (the seven arias performances) and the second (Callas's death) is accompanied by an orchestral interlude with electronic music inserts and remixed voices from the choir.

What is interesting is precisely that for this show we can identify a more traditional dramaturgy, that is to say a specific arrangement of the stage movements according to a narrative project. The production strategies can be traced back to the design of a meaning identifiable through the codes of theatrical language. Such reading would be more of a stretch—if not downright untenable—for the celebrated performances of *Lips of Thomas* (1975) or *Imponderabilia* of 1977, in which the aesthetics were completely performative and centered around the feedback loop with the audience.

Thus, once the representational component (even partially mimetic) of the live event has been established, it remains to be seen whether the narrative project—the story told—can be traced back to the making of (some) sense.

If the meta-narration, as we have seen, aims to construct a framework of juxtapositions (between celebrated women, or performance codes), the story that emerges from the staged dramaturgy narrates the "divinity" of Maria Callas. Indeed, it seems peculiar that the heroines are also the maids who cold-bloodedly rearrange the dead artist's room. Without her, their only purpose is cleaning; their existence is entirely dependent on the greatness of the performer, not the other way around. In such a context exuding autobiographical flavor, Abramović creates an opera where the artist (herself, but also Callas) is the true dramatic protagonist, and where she can tell without hesitation that the performer comes before the character.

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