Le Fleur Pleure L'Azure:

a meditation on the Ideal, the Absurd, and Artistic engagement

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Introduction

"People still ask for definitions, but
it's quite clear now that nothing
can be defined. Let alone art, its
purpose etc. We're not even sure of
carrots (whether they're what we think
they are, how poisonous they are, who
grew them and under what circumstances)."
-John Cage, Diary of How to Improve the World (14)

When I started this project, I knew what Art was. Art was a means of expression that built community and conversation through shared experience. This expression was almost always subjective and the Artwork always a static product; something on a wall or on a stage or screen. This conception of Art was always separate from Life; a way to react to life and reinterpret it. Like the separation of work and home life, church and state, there was a line between a Life experience and an Art experience. Art is beautiful and special; Life is dirty and full of chaos. My favorite composers and artists were concerned with making beauty from Life. They expressed truth in the most perfect way through their craft. As I consider what I want my Art to look like, this perspective seems untenable. Why should I continue to create Art if it has already been done and done better? What makes me and my experiences so worthy of display? Perhaps Art can be something more than subjectivity.

As in most scholarship, questions lead to research. In my journey for new knowledge, two ideological camps have emerged: the Idealists and the Absurdists. Idealists see the Absurdity of Life and reject it. They seek to create beauty from the chaos in efficient and comprehensible ways. This perspective comes largely from Modernism, the cultural era spanning from the Enlightenment to World War One. It is characterized by the pursuit of knowledge, black and white thinking, and positivism. Despite its varied manifestations, Modernists "shared the belief that developments in the arts and sciences could lead to a just society, and above all, to universal

human freedom."[1] For the Absurdists, they agree that Life is Absurd but they choose not to fight it. As the philosopher and novelist Albert Camus posits, the only way to cope with such a world is to become the Absurd Man: one who derives joy from things themselves rather than the implication of some higher pursuit.[2] Following World War One, Modernism began to come under fire. This conflict between the Ideal and the Absurd has not only provided me a framework to track the development of Postmodernism and its offshoots, but it has also allowed me to question and evaluate my own Artistic lineage.

I did not initially set out to write a piece of music examining this tension between the Ideal and the Absurd. But certain aspects of my life and work aligned in such a way that a piece presented itself to me. In the spring semester of my junior year, I took a creative writing poetry workshop and gained new friends and collaborators. Specifically, I asked Izzy Stitchick if I could set their poem *Musings from Honfleur* to music (See Appendix A). I did not know how or when I would set this poem to music, but the tone, structure, and its mention of Erik Satie struck me as something on which I needed to speak. After some time, I connected the line "The whispering eaves of the crumbling church…" to a set of pieces by Erik Satie called *Ogives* (translated as "church column" from the French). Finally having a musical connection to the text, I solidified my desire to use these pieces as the basis for a larger work.

It would be a physical collage in the *Intimacies* exhibition by Elle Pérez, that would open the door to my exploration of a new compositional process. I took a trip to the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) and it was during this trip that I saw the piece by Pérez. *Intimacies* is a constellation of queerness and intimacy through violence; physical, natural,

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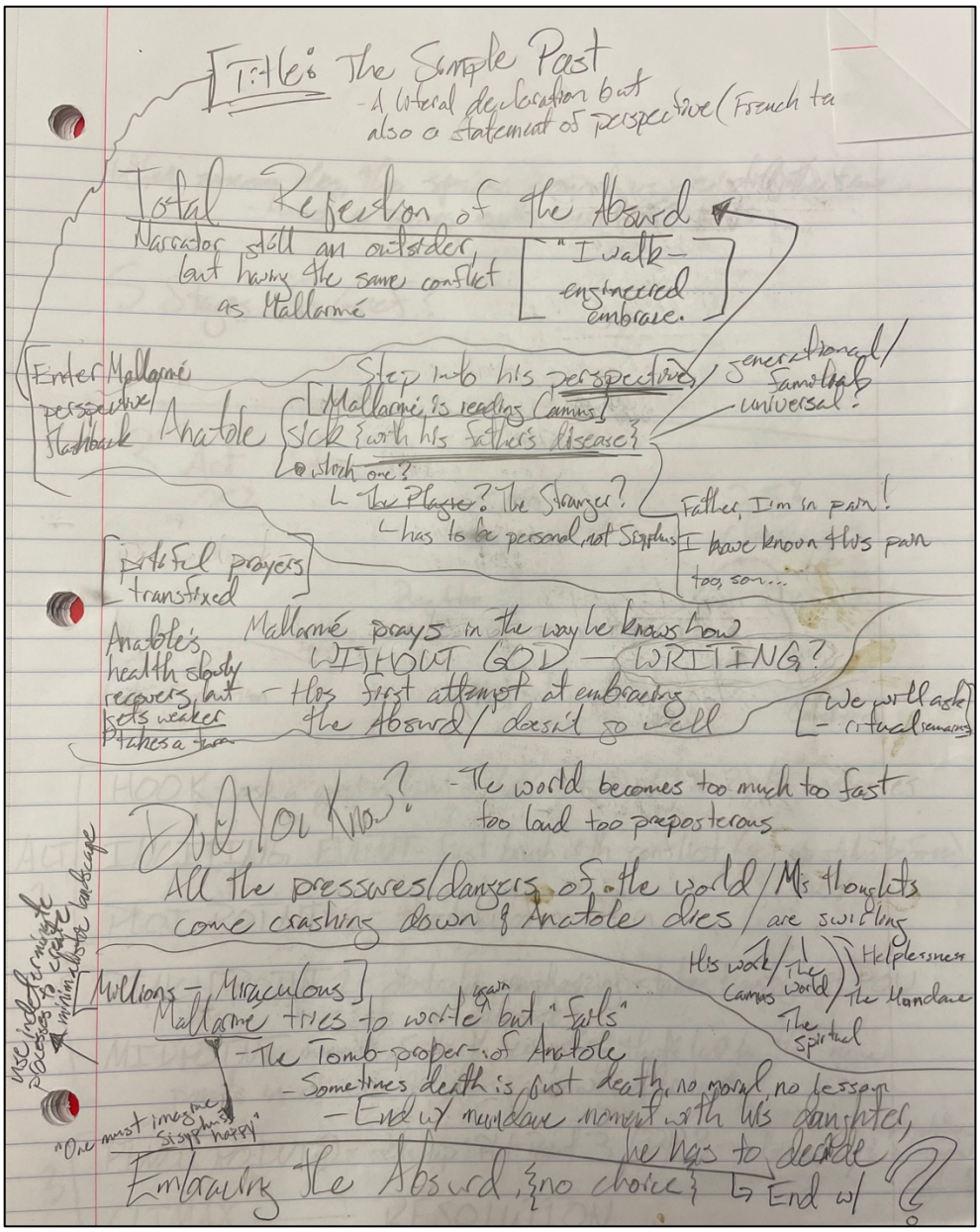
[1] Steven Johnson, ed, *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Edgard Varèse, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg,* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 129).

[2] Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays." Translated by Justin O-Brien. University of Hawaii. Accessed September 13, 152023.

and man-made. The piece is a collection of photographs, book excerpts, poetry, and sketchbook pages centered around twenty "threads" which Pérez explicitly names (a sketchbook page with the list of threads appears in the work itself). The powerful images, the collection of work from multiple authors and media, as well as the explicit naming of the intention created an intense experience for me. From this, I decided that collage would be my process for creating this piece. What this collage would consist of, I did not know.

In the days following the visit to Mass MoCA, I began to pick apart and reconnect the elements I had collected for my currently nebulous piece. By this time, I had researched Albert Camus, whose Absurd Man theory would soon become central to the narrative of the piece. It would be the addition of composer Maurice Ravel, and his *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* that would complete the picture. I began by separating the stanzas and themes from *Musings* (Am I alone? Will anyone understand me? What is truly important? Will anyone care?) and asking a question: what if the man whose perspective we step into was the poet Mallarmé? It was this question that would lead me to the difficulty of Mallarmé's life, his constant striving towards an Ideal through his work, and the death of his eight-year-old son. His failure to write about his son's death, in addition to the posthumously published sketches of his attempts, would be what solidified the thread between Mallarmé and the themes of *Musings from Honfleur*. Through further collage and research, I would flesh out a web of parallel narratives based on real events. These narratives tell the story of Mallarmé's losing fight to bring about an Ideal world through poetry as well as the broader conflict in Art between the Ideal and the Absurd.



Ex. 1 My original sketch first connecting the poem to Mallarmé's life.

This piece has allowed me to evaluate in my work the questions that presented themselves in my parallel research of contemporary music in the 20th Century. What are the 'inherent' hierarchies of music and Art? Where did they come from? How have they been manipulated in the past? How could they be manipulated in the future? Which ideas have been interpreted wrongly or are incomplete? Can Art play a role in relearning or retranslating? Are there better methods besides Art? What is my role in all of this?

The piece I have written deliberately breaks from both Modernist and Postmodernist sensibilities. By collaging the literal musical and historical materials of the last two cultural periods, this piece seeks to analyze the consequences of my Artistic lineage while simultaneously being a part of it. Through this collage, I create parallel, meta-narratives that tell the literal story of the piece as well as engage with the broader conflict of the Ideal and the Absurd. As with the artists before me, I seek to legitimize my work by affirming the "continuity of variation" and "appealing to its genealogy."[3] Nothing comes from nothing. I am a part of a long line of Artists that have had the same questions. Each offers their own unique ideas, work, solutions, and consequences. Only by understanding the history can we accurately evaluate where we are now and how to move through it.

[3] Michael Hicks, "John Cage's Studies with Schoenberg," *American Music* 8, no. 2 (1990), 135.

Schoenberg and the Western tradition

"He who really uses his brain for thinking can only be possessed of one desire:
to resolve his task. He cannot let external conditions exert
influence upon the results of his thinking.
Two times two is four- whether one likes it or not."
-Arnold Schoenberg, Style and Idea (124)

Creative Focuses of Western Music

Up until the 20th century, the primary material allowed to be manipulated in Western music was the tone. In the Classical era, this manifested broadly in harmony and form, vertical arrangements of notes. In the Romantic era, harmony, key relationships, and form took a backseat to melody, the linear arrangement. Putting the creative weight on melody allowed harmony and form of Romantic music to become less rigid and less tonally grounded. With this new freedom, different composers began to develop systems to manipulate musical materials other than pitch. For Erik Satie, his primary material became duration, and with it, the creation of original forms. For Johannes Brahms, his focus on melody led to motivic development, or the manipulation of melodic fragments (called motives) to produce unified materials.

While composers began experimenting with new ways of organizing musical materials, all other aspects of the musical experience remain intact. Certain boundaries and expectations between the composer, performer, and audience were part of the common practice. The composer was (and largely still is) seen as a monolithic genius responsible for providing divine experiences for the performers and audience. The process of writing is a solitary one and the mystery surrounding this process contributes to a kind of mythology around particular composers. Schoenberg gives us this quote from Brahms: "A good theme is a gift of God… Deserve it in order to possess it."[4] The performer, responsible for realizing the composer's vision, is given the

[4] Leonard Stein, ed, *Style and Idea: Selected writings of Arnold Schoenberg* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 67.

freedom to interpret the notation. A few exceptions exist, such as the improvised classical cadenza. However, in most cases the performer is not responsible for creating their own musical ideas. The audience, in concert performances, is always a passive consumer of the music, responsible for the act of listening and nothing more. It is within this frame that artists would experiment and broaden the scope of what can be manipulated within this tripartite relationship.

What is Style? What is Idea?

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) is responsible for one of the biggest shifts in music composition in the 20th century. Seeing the persistence of freer, ungrounded harmonies, he sought to find a new kind of organization of pitch. How he chose to do this would have profound impacts on the Western Music tradition thereafter. He saw composition as having two main parts: Style and Idea. Style can be described as the method by which the artist produces a work; its observable characteristics. In Classical music, the ability "to follow the elaboration and derivation of its themes and modulations" as well as recognizing "the number of voices in canons and the presence of a theme in a variation" is to develop an awareness of a piece's style.[5] Each composer's manipulation of the musical material is different, thus producing their own unique style. "Every man has fingerprints of his own, and every craftsman's hand has its personality; out of such subjectivity grow the traits which comprise the style of the finished product."[6] For the Idea, "In its most common meaning, the term idea is used as a synonym for theme, melody, phrase, or motive. I myself consider the totality of a piece as the *idea*: the idea which its creator wanted to present."[7] In general terms, Schoenberg explains the Idea in reference to pliers:

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[5] Stein, *Style and Idea* 121.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, 121-122.

> [M]ultiplying the power of the man who squeezed them to such an extent that he could cut wire- this idea can only have been conceived by a genius. Certainly more complicated and better tools exist today, and there may come a time when the use of the pliers and other similar tools may become superfluous. The tool itself may fall into disuse, but the idea behind it can never become obsolete. And therein lies the difference between a mere style and a real idea. *An idea can never perish.*[8]

The Idea, at its essence, seems to be the invention of a new perspective or a new mode of thought that serves a broader function beyond its pure aesthetic value. The Style is simply the subjective manifestation of the Idea. Through these two components, Schoenberg attempted to create a new kind of music, to "convey a new message to humanity; [and] there is no great artist who fails in this respect."[9]

A New Idea: Composition with 12 Tones

Schoenberg's contribution to Western music was in the form of a new system of organization to accommodate and expand the capabilities of atonality. Describing the impact of atonality on modern music, philosopher and Schoenberg critic Theodor Adorno states: "The liberation of the modern painting from objectivity… was to art the break that atonality was to music."[10] Atonality embraced the complexities and abstract nature of modern life without trying to place them within an objective frame. Schoenberg, seeing this embrace of atonality without objective rules or standards.[11] sought out a way to bring order to the chaos. "Can one understand sound-combinations if they hang forever in the air and never settle down; if they never gain a firm footing? I read somewhere of a device by which aeroplanes refuel over the sea without standing firm anywhere (if so, where?). If that is possible, should one not do it?"[12] In the years

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[8] Ibid, 123.
[9] Ibid, 114.
[10] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*. Translated by Anne G Mitchell and Wesley V Blomster (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 5.
[11] As Schoenberg writes, "[o]ne no longer expected preparations of Wagner's dissonances or resolutions of Strauss' discords" (Stein, *Style and Idea* 216).
[12] Stein, *Style and Idea* 101.

after the First World War, Schoenberg would begin to explore this musical equivalent of the refueling plane that never lands.

Before the conception of 12-tone technique, Schoenberg made use of motivic development as his primary method of composition. As he progressed in this style, his motives began to include more and more pitches until all twelve notes of the octave were used.[13] After several years of experimenting with ordering these motives, Schoenberg formulated his "*Method of Composing with Twelve Tones Which are Related Only with One Another,"* commonly referred to as 12-tone technique, or simply 12-tone.[14] This method places the twelve notes into an order, called a basic set or row, from which all pitch materials for a piece are then derived. Using various operations, the basic set can be manipulated but its intervallic structure and ordering remain intact to avoid repetition and the "danger of interpreting the repeated tone as a tonic."[15] These operations include mirror forms: inversion and retrogression whereby the original pitch set is flipped vertically or horizontally respectively. Schoenberg references Beethoven's last string quartet, Op. 135, as historical precedent for these mirror forms:

> The original form, *a,* 'Muss es sein', appears in *b* inverted and in the major; *c* shows the retrograde form of this inversion, which no reinverted in *d* and filled out with passing notes in *e*, results in the second phrase of the main theme.[16]

Schoenberg would use this framework for composition beginning in 1923 and would continue until the end of his life.[17]

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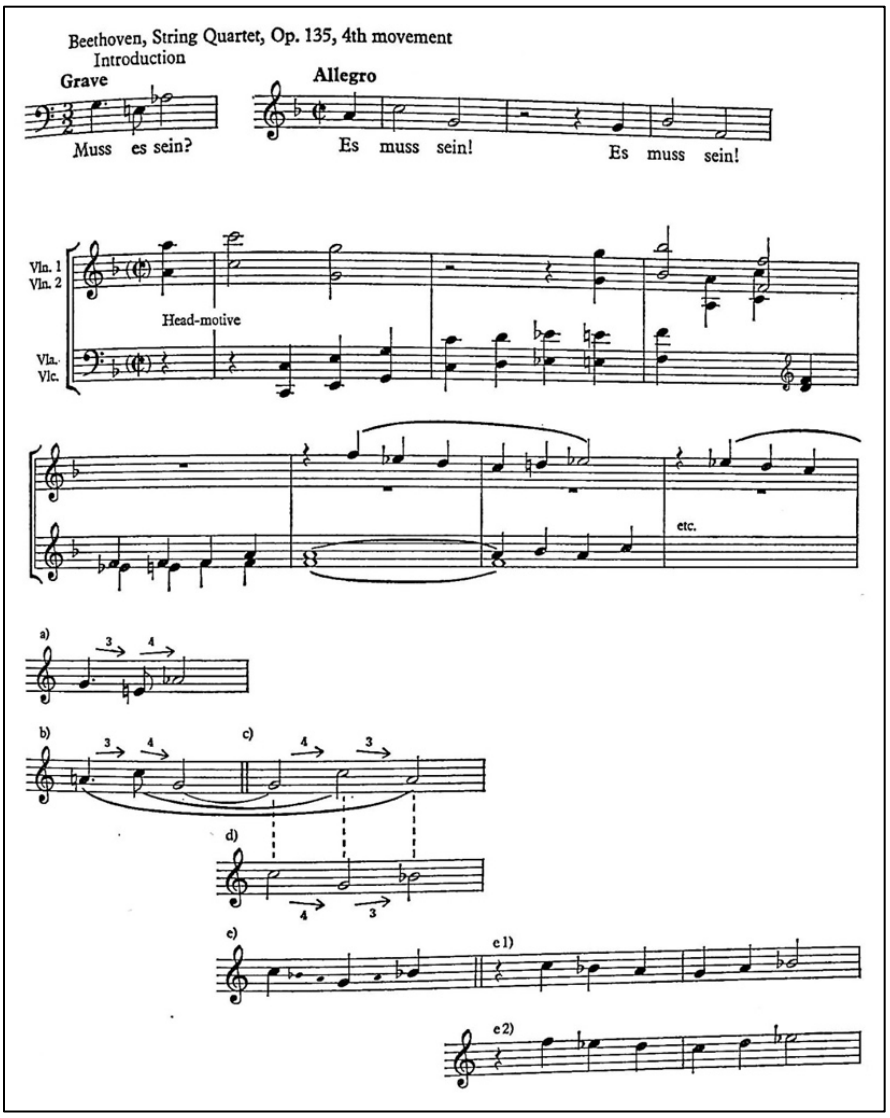
[13] Walter B. Bailey, ed, *The Arnold Schoenberg Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998) 101-109.
[14] Stein, *Style and Idea* 218.
[15] Ibid, 220.
[16] Ibid, 222.
[17] Bailey, *The Arnold Schoenberg Companion,* 116-117.



Ex. 2 Schoenberg's analysis of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 135.[18]

How can dissonance be organized to be understood without a tonal center? 12-tone allowed him to "establish the law of the emancipation of dissonance, according to which the comprehensibility of the dissonance is considered as important as the comprehensibility of the consonance."[19] Schoenberg sought to establish a musical lineage of the comprehension of dissonance. Starting with J.S. Bach (1685-1750) in the Baroque period, Schoenberg shows the historical use of dissonance through the passing tone, where a dissonant note is surrounded by

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid, 91.

consonant ones.[20] Within this framework, Schoenberg argues that the dissonance is allowed to be understood so long as its tension is resolved to its surrounding consonance. But as music progressed past the tonality of the Baroque period, dissonance is not always resolved to a consonance, thus obscuring its comprehensibility. The increasing length of motives only exacerbates the issue of understanding. In typical modernist fashion, Schoenberg presents a rational basis for the need for order:

> The first precondition for understanding is, after all, memory… But the precondition of memory is recognition… If then, in music, a figure is so constituted, so lacking in character, for example, or is so complicated, that I cannot recognize it and remember it, then correct understanding of all that follows… is impossible.[21]

The Consequences of Composition with 12 Tones

Did Schoenberg succeed in allowing dissonance to enter the same realm of understanding as consonance? Many music critics saw Schoenberg more as "a constructor, an engineer, an architect, even a mathematician" rather than an artist.[22] In 1948, looking back on his work, Schoenberg summarized his legacy as follows: "If people speak of me, they at once connect me with horror, with atonality, and with composition with twelve tones."[23] Audiences of his time failed to comprehend what Schoenberg deemed most important because of his music being so heavily dissonant. The difficulty Schoenberg faced was in the translation of the system into a musical product; an Idea into a Style. The listener, presented with a piece of music, must work to get from the product back to the idea that produced it using only what is heard. Schoenberg was aware of this difficulty: "it requires intense attention to grasp… I am sure that a full

[20] Ibid, 100-101.
[21] Ibid, 103.
[22] Ibid, 121.
[23] Ibid, 76.

understanding is difficult to acquire if one has not gradually become acquainted with my ideas."[24] The gap between the Style of Schoenberg and the Idea of Schoenberg was too vast for most to reconcile. To the audience of his time, he was remembered almost exclusively for the aesthetics of 12-tone composition, not the Idea which he cared so deeply about.

Despite his legacy being that of an unfeeling logician, Schoenberg, the composer, treated the 12-tone system as a means to a creative end. Just as the progression of tonality was from rigid tonal relationships to loose, dynamic ones, so was Schoenberg's exploration of his own system: "When I compose, I try to forget all theories and I continue composing only after having freed my mind from them."[25] What sets Schoenberg apart from his contemporaries is that he acted as both 'composer' and 'theorist'. Rather than accept atonality as presented, he created a new system of pitch organization with rules and operations. But he also spent his life finding ways of using the system creatively. He is not popularly remembered for this playful artistry. He is remembered as a controlling egoist that cares not for the ears of the audience, only for the creation of something new. In his own words:

> 'Why? Why make it so hard for the listener; why not make things easier for him, in the way that he needs… To this I have to say: 'I can do it no other way, and it does not work any other way. Only, I did not choose to write like that, I do not go out of my way to write like that, and it would be a relief to feel I might do it differently.'[26]

There are two seemingly contradictory sides of Schoenberg at work here, the 'composer' and the 'theorist'. Only one had a profound impact on Western Music: the 'theorist'. Always on the side of the Idea, the theorist Schoenberg said, "Music is not to be decorative; it is to be true."[27] And to Theodor Adorno (philosopher and Schoenberg critic) the music that results, with

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[24] Ibid, 78.
[25] Ibid, 91-92.
[26] Ibid, 104.
[27] Arnold Schoenberg, *Probleme des Kunstunterrichts (Problems of Art Instruction), Musikalisches Taschenbuch,* Vienna, 1911.

its "negation of illusion and play… tends toward the direction of knowledge" rather than subjective expression.[28] Looking at 12-tone more broadly, the Idea of 12-tone composition was the comprehension of the irrational through structure and order. Faced with growing complexity in both life and art, Schoenberg found security in the logical organization of his chosen materials. Adorno points out the historical connections between Schoenberg, Beethoven, and a need for creating meaning from uncertainty:

> The total rationality of music is its total organization. By means of organization, liberated music [twelve tone/modern music] seeks to reconstitute the lost totality…Beethoven reproduced the meaning of tonality out of its subjective freedom. The new ordering of twelve-tone technique virtually extinguishes the subject. The truly great moments in late Schoenberg have been attained despite the twelve-tone technique as well as by means of it…[29]

However, in the process of seeking that security through organization, "a system by which music dominates nature results."[30] Further elucidating the lateral move from tonality to 12-tone, Adorno points out that this human control over music is not a new idea: composer Josquin des Pres, who died in 1521, was dubbed by Luther, "the master of notes who compelled the notes to bend to his will, in contrast to other composers, who bent to the will of the notes."[31] In this way, the 'great composer' asserts their value through their ability to dominate their materials in order to produce new art. As Adorno shows, this power structure has its roots in history and has continued through Schoenberg and into the rest of the 20th century. Having opened the door to his 'blind alley,' Schoenberg opened the possibility for the artists to follow him to work in new territory while evaluating the consequences of his work.[32] Pierre Boulez

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[28] Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music,* 41.
[29] Ibid, 69.
[30] Ibid, 65.
[31] Richard Batka and Willibald Nagel, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik,* (Stuttgart, n.d., Vol. I), 191.
[32] Schoenberg described his path in composition as a blind alley. He saw tonality as a carousel at a fair, a cheap ride but enjoyable nonetheless. His loneliness and uncertainty in his quest for organization gave him no pleasure (Stein, *Style and Idea* 95)

(1925-2016), for example, would later apply Schoenberg's serial technique to "dynamics, attack, register, tempo, and density."[33] However, not all composers subscribed to the systemic organization of musical material. Others saw the growing Absurdity of modern music and began a new path.

[33] Johnson, *The New York Schools,* 21.

Cage and an Alternative

"Proposal: take facts of
art seriously: try them in economics/
politics, giving up, that is, notions about
balance (of power, of wealth)
foreground, background. They will kill
you she said, with kindness. There's a
temptation to do nothing simply because
there's so much to do that one doesn't
know where to begin.
Begin anywhere."
-John Cage, Diary of How to Improve the World (30)

Cage's Philosophy

Learning from/despite Schoenberg

Not only credited with changing the landscape of contemporary music, one of Schoenberg's students, John Cage (1912-1992) is also largely responsible for breaking boundaries between the artist, performer, and audience. If Schoenberg's primary concern was the emancipation of the tone, Cage's concern was the total freedom of the sound. "[H]e could see no reason why Schoenberg… should not have gone the entire way and freed music from its 12 notes. If every tone is equal to every other, then any controllable sound is equal to any other or to any tone."[34] Like Schoenberg, this mission would come gradually through years of practice and theory. Gradually moving beyond subjective expression, Cage's artistic vision became socially engaged: the purpose of music was "to sober the mind and thus make it susceptible to divine influences."[35]

Cage's educational path as a composer was largely self-directed. He bounced from institution to institution and teacher to teacher throughout his musical life. Before studying with Schoenberg in the 1930s, Cage was taught by Henry Cowell, a prominent American composer

[34] Hicks, "John Cage's Studies," 131.
[35] Johnson, *The New York Schools,* 119.

who was known by "many young composers as a kind of patron saint of the self-taught."[36] In these early educational years, Cage wrote small-form pieces that were emotional and expressive in nature.[37] Cowell pointed Cage toward Schoenberg in 1935 when he was teaching at the University of Southern California and University of California- Los Angeles. There is little documentation about their time together,[38] but what can be gleaned from their relationship is that Cage gained an appreciation for structure and what can be controlled with the mind or with the body. But he also began to question the history of Western Music, the domination of nature, the mythology attached to Schoenberg, and the expectation for him to participate in it. He would eventually also categorize Schoenberg as "refusing risk" and having "maintain[ed] conventions and accepted values."[39] Thus began Cage's exploration of what he thought Schoenberg left behind: the sound itself.

The Development of a New Avant-Garde

It is, perhaps, important to note that this questioning, as well as his interest in "mysticism and Eastern philosophy" came in the 1940s in the years following World War Two.[40] While there is not necessarily a causal relationship between the war and Cage's exploration, historians often use the World Wars as markers for significant cultural shifts. When life events become incomprehensibly horrific (i.e. global war), the previous modes of life tend to come into question. It is also important to note that these ideological shifts occurred while Cage was in New York (starting in 1942), sharing ideas with a group called The New York School, or The Club.[41] This group was an informal gathering of composers and Abstract Expressionist painters

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[36] Hicks, "John Cage's Studies," 126.
[37] Johnson, *The New York Schools*, 117.
[38] Hicks, "John Cage's Studies," 127
[39] Johnson, *The New York Schools,* 3.
[40] Ibid, 119.
[41] Ibid, 116-117.

where lectures, concerts, and presentations were given around various themes.[42] For Cage and the other artists of the group, the connections formed in this group would be a "cleansing path" and a "brilliant light" in the midst of the isolation brought by their experimental nature and rejection of tradition.[43] In this development of a new American avant-garde, the ideas and sentiments of the New York School shared much with French Existentialism and Absurdism. The writers "Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett, the Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, [and] the Theater of the Absurd" offered a parallel to the kinds of questions Cage and the rest of the group were concerned with.[44] This informal community, filled with questions, would begin to change traditional notation and performance practice in diverse and important ways.

Cage's years with Schoenberg would begin a lifelong process of grappling with the definition of music, subjectivity, paradox, and responsibility. In The Club, Cage explored ways to reconcile what he saw as society's holding of "two opposite positions" valuing the traditional artist that prioritizes accessibility, while simultaneously praising the "individualist" for his unwillingness to compromise in the name of progress.[45] In his lecture *Defense of Satie,* given in 1948, Cage not only "criticized Beethoven for defining compositional structure according to harmony rather than by units of time" but also against the "musical manifestation of the composer's subjectivity."[46] No longer reliant on these modes, Cage began to formulate an idea of what exactly the composer has at their disposal. Example 3 shows Cage's four elements that make up what we call music: Structure, Method, Material, and Form.

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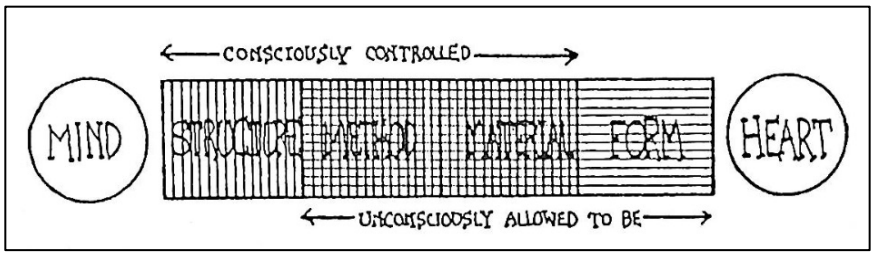
[42] Ibid, 7.
[43] Ibid, 4.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Paul Cummings, ed, *John Cage: Documentary monographs in modern art,* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968), 77-78.
[46] Johnson, *The New York Schools*, 114.



Ex. 3 Diagram from "Forerunners of Modern Music," *The Tiger's Eye,* March 1949.

He defines Structure as the musical object itself, the separate parts of a piece that work together to form a whole. Form is similar to Schoenberg's Style in that it is the characteristic of a particular piece that gives it life, that distinguishes itself from other works of the same Structure. Cage says in the lecture, "to give another illustration, we all have in common the fact of our structure as human beings, but the way in which we live, that is, the form of our life, is individual. The continuity of actions for each one of us is different."[47] Material refers to the actual sounds of the music. As music progressed, "New materials have been proposed: quarter tones by Alois Hába, forty-third tones by Harry Partch [referring to divisions of the octave beyond 12 notes], electronic instruments by Edgard Varèse, screws, bolts, and bits of rubber by myself, dissonances by all and sundry."[48] And finally, Method is the process by which the Materials are gathered together. For example, twelve tone composition and tonality are both methods of organization. "As we accept differences in syntax from one language to another, or differing habits in people, so we can accept these differing methods of composing."[49] Using these terms, Cage began to explore what lay beyond Schoenberg's new method by manipulating all four of these elements of music.

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[47] Cummings, *John Cage: Documentary*, 79. In biology, this phenomenon is called homology- identical physical structures are expressed similarly in different organisms because of shared ancestors.
[48] Ibid, 78.
[49] Ibid, 80-81.

Despite his agreeableness to these four aspects, Cage does make one unilateral statement: "There can be no right making of music that does not structure itself from the very roots of sound and silence- lengths of time."[50] This switch from Beethoven's (and Schoenberg's) prioritization of harmony to a prioritization of time would prove to be one of the most influential realizations of Cage's artistic career. This would free him from the boundaries of traditional composition and push him towards new, unanswered questions.

Developing a new Idea (Musical and Otherwise)

The exploration of duration and the four elements of music in the 1940s "marked a crucial stage in the evolution of his compositional language and aesthetic philosophy."[51] It was during this period that he began moving away from his expressive, early works and towards something new. He began to see expressive music as a kind of trickery for an audience; it was something that holds emotional weight for the author, but nothing more.

> The most that can be accomplished by the musical ex-pression [sic] of feeling is to show how e-motional [sic] the composer was who had it. If anyone wanted to get a feeling of how emotional a composer proved himself to be, he has to confuse himself to the same extent that the composer did and imagine that sounds are not sounds at all but are Beethoven and that men are not men but are sounds. Any child will tell us that this simply is not the case. A man is a man and a sound is a sound.[52]

Having unilaterally rejected music as a means of subjective expression by 1949, Cage had begun searching for ways of making music that did not contribute to the false escapism of his early works.

With this disregard, if not outright abolition, of Style, the variation of Cage's work points to the growing complexity of the artistic landscape and global society. In this way, Cage seems to follow Schoenberg's directive to focus on the Idea (Schoenberg would later call Cage not a

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[50] Ibid, 81-82.
[51] Johnson, *The New York Schools*, 114.
[52] Ibid, 119-120.

composer but "an inventor of genius").[53] Explicitly in the 1960s but also in the preceding years, the Ideas Cage's work explored relate to the abstract societal function of music rather than music for spectacle.[54] In his later writings, he would describe this work as "composing actions" ("…the creation of artistic works modeling social situations within which we might prefer to live")[55] which "make music suggestive and relevant to the serious questions which face Mankind."[56] While the social theories codified *after* the works were completed, it is important to analyze the work in this way as it tracks Cage's ideological progress.

Cage's Praxis

Music of Changes (1951) to *Music for Piano 4-19 (1953) (decoupling notation and performance)*

The tools with which Cage experimented with removing subjectivity were borrowed from his study of Zen Buddhism. The foundation of Zen is "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so."[57] The relinquishment of desire and the ego is what leads to enlightenment. To realize this desire in his music, he began to use chance and indeterminacy. Chance being the outsourcing of musical decisions to randomly determined processes and indeterminacy where some musical decisions are allowed to be determined by the performer in a variety of different ways. The method he used for his chance procedures during this period was the *I-Ching*. This book, also called the Book of Changes, contains "an ancient Chinese philosophical system and serves as an oracle of divination."[58] He acquired the book from fellow NY School composer Christian Wolff. Using the *I-Ching*'s 64-hexagram chart, Cage would assign a musical element to

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[53] Hicks, "John Cage's Studies," 125.
[54] Johnson, *The New York Schools* 129. This worldly concern is reminiscent of Adorno's statement: negation of play and illusion [in Art] tends toward knowledge.
[55] Ibid, 128.
[56] Ibid, 124.
[57] Kyle Gann, *No such thing as silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 141.
[58] Gann, *No Such Thing,* 149.

one of the sixty-four images and then toss coins as a method of choosing. That musical element would then be included in the work.[59]

Music of Changes, was composed using this process. The score for *Music of Changes* is a hyper-precise arrangement of pitches, durations, tempi, and dynamics determined by the *I-Ching* method. In later pieces using the *I-Ching*, he would adopt a more indeterminate approach. In *Music for Piano 4-19* (1953), the only determined element of the piece is pitch. Instead of a rigid arrangement of rhythm and time, the notation is in a "space-time format in which duration is understood in terms of the relative position of notes on the staff."[60] This effectively accomplishes Cage's goal of removing his own subjectivity from his work. By outsourcing some compositional decisions to chance procedures, he attempts to "free the sounds from the composer's grasp, and let them be themselves."[61] And by outsourcing the rest of the decisions to the performer, the notation of the score (and thus the voice of the composer) is decoupled from the musical performance.

This, however, does not remove *all* subjectivity from the work; and in doing so, it creates more contradictions and power dynamics. With indeterminacy, "the traditional performer-interpreter becomes instead a performer-creator, who has to make fundamental decisions regarding the music's public appearance."[62] This effectively shifts the performer into the composer's place. In Cage's case, his most trusted and frequent collaborator was David Tudor. He was responsible for the realization and performance of most of Cage's works throughout their careers. Cage's appreciation of Tudor's discipline and virtuosity was not unspoken:

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Johnson, *The New York Schools*, 23.
[61] Ibid, 47.
[62] Ibid.

> [The] giving of freedom… to a musician like David Tudor… provided results that were extraordinarily beautiful. [But]… given to people who are not disciplined… people with particular likes and dislikes, then, or course, the giving of freedom is of no interest whatsoever.[63]

With this admission, Cage admits the shift of the weight of subjectivity away from himself and onto Tudor. A fuller realization of Cage's removal of himself would manifest shortly after *Music of Changes.*

4'33"(1952)

As Cage historian Kyle Gann puts it, "*4'33"* is one of the most misunderstood pieces of music ever written and yet, at times, one of the avant-garde's best understood as well."[64] The piece, whose performance involves "a man sitting at a piano for four and a half minutes without playing" profoundly changed the landscape of contemporary music.[65] The unspoken question provokes strong reactions from all who consume it: Is this music?

> Many presume that the piece's purpose was deliberate provocation, an attempt to insult… the audience. For others, though, it was the logical turning point to which other musical developments had inevitably led… For many, it was a kind of artistic prayer, a bit of Zen performance theater that opened the ears and allowed one to hear the world anew.[66]

For Cage, *4'33"* would be the largest step into the removal of the self. Using the *I*-Ching, Cage "simply omitted the tables for sonority and dynamics and retained those for duration."[67] Rather than compose, Cage's contribution was "an act of framing, of enclosing environmental and unintended sounds in a moment of attention."[68] An allowance and *awareness* of the full spectrum of sound without intention. And in their presentation as such, a "blurring of the conventional boundaries between art and life."[69]

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Gann, *No Such Thing,* 10.
[65] Ibid, 12.
[66] Ibid, 10-11.
[67] Ibid, 153.
[68] Ibid, 11.
[69] Ibid.

The musical score was no longer an exact depiction of what the performer plays and the audience hears. Rather, it now functions as a set of instructions with an infinite number of possible realizations. This change in the score's function allowed Cage to challenge the Art/Life divide more directly. What *4'33"* showed was that silence was in fact "not *nothing,* but *something.*"[70] Similarly, art only appears to be in a vacuum, it never actually is.

Black Mountain College (1948 and 1952)

In line with Cage's non-traditional education, he would spend two summers in residency at an unaccredited university in Asheville, North Carolina. "Black Mountain College focused on a redefinition of the arts by stressing a holistic and experimental approach to art rather than a technical or formal approach."[71] In the college's short lifespan (1933-1957), it was a hub for artistic experimentation, hosting such Artists as Josef and Anni Albers, Cy Twombly, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, and Franz Kline. Cage would attend the 1948 summer session with a long-time collaborator, the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham. It was during this session that Cage would deliver *In Defense of Satie* where he declared duration superior to harmony, and defined Structure, Method, Material, and Form. His attack on Beethoven[72] angered the Schoenbergian faculty of the college.[73] Not a trained pianist, Cage played some of Satie's works for solo piano to supplement the lecture. This, combined with an amateur staging of Satie's obscure play, *The Ruse of Medusa,* was another statement Cage made against the high-mindedness of Beethoven and Schoenberg.[74] Essentially, Cage's argument was that pitch (Beethoven and Schoenberg) was something to be mastered by a

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[70] Ibid, 127.
[71] Ken Friedman, ed, *The Fluxus Reader*, (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1999), 138.
[72] Cage would say, "Beethoven represents the most intense lurching of the boat away from its natural, even keel." Because, he says, silence cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony (Cummings*, John Cage: Documentary, 81*).
[73] Vincent Katz, ed, *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art,* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 253-54.
[74] Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College,* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 154.

great few. Duration (Satie), however, could be experienced and appreciated by everyone, regardless of skill level.

Invited back for a residency in 1952, Cage would experiment with the idea of the score as a set of instructions as it applies to theater. Along with the other faculty at the college, Cage organized a multi-disciplinary performance that took place in the dining hall. Though it took place in the months before *4'33"* was premiered, *the Untitled Event* (also called *Theater Piece No. 1*) posed some of the same questions as *4'33"*. If *4'33"* was a private invitation to consider the separation of Art and Life by using the 'Art frame,' *Theater Piece* was the first step in using Art to organize Life.

There are several, sometimes contradictory accounts of what transpired during the piece. All that is known for certain is that the event took place in the dining hall. According to David Tudor, there was no score. One was transcribed after the fact: "Almost certainly John had a plan, but I don't recall seeing it… [often] he distributes a plan that you can use or not, but it's just a piece of paper with numbers on it."[75] Using his chance procedures, Cage recalls that there was a score and that had time brackets for each action to be performed. To build a picture of what the event itself looked like, below is a description of what Cage remembers of the event.

> At one end of the rectangular hall, the long end, was a movie, and at the other end were slides. I was on a ladder delivering a lecture which included silences, and there was another ladder with M.C. Richards and Charles Olson went up at different times… Robert Rauschenberg was playing an old-fashioned phonograph that had a horn… and David Tudor was playing piano, and Merce Cunningham and other dancers were moving through the audience. Rauschenberg's pictures [the White Paintings] were suspended above the audience.[76]

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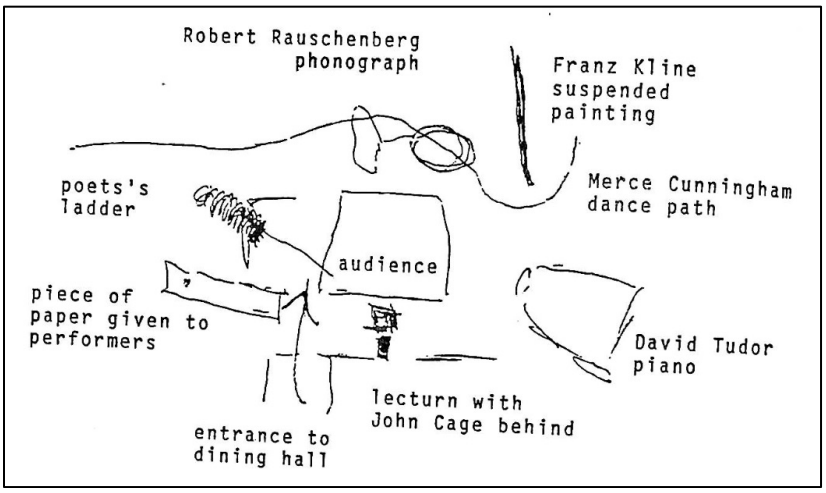
[75] William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performance*, (Australia: Harwood Academic, 1996), 102.

[76] Fetterman, *Theatre Pieces,* 98-99.



Ex. 4 M.C. Richards' sketch of the performance space done for an interview in 1989.[77]

This event broke new ground for what it meant to be a composer. By engaging in a new kind of intermedia collaboration, Cage explored the full capabilities of durational organization by applying them to human action. This step was crucial in bridging the perceived gap between Life and Art. It is one thing to notice the divide (or lack thereof), but it is another matter entirely to act upon it. The *Untitled Event* was not an act of passive engagement, but active manipulation on the part of the performers. Because of this active participation through multiple disjunct media, the piece presents itself as a quasi-Absurd event. M.C. Richards notes that,

> When you are first exposed to that kind of theatre, it seems to me, you might mistakenly think that you are supposed to give each element the same attention that you would be giving if it was the only thing going on. And that can be very stressful. You have to just sort of let it roll over you, and not try to make sense of the individual threads.[78]

To me, this mirrors the Absurd nature of the increasingly modernized world these artists were living in. Cage's reaction, in this piece and others, is not a Schoenbergian organization, but rather an active acceptance of the current state of things; a reconciliation rather than a rejection. Taken together, *4'33"* and *the Untitled Event* point to the two sides of Cage at work in this struggle: the passive meditator and the active composer. These two perspectives, to him, would not be

[77] Ibid, 100.
[78] Ibid, 101.

opposite each other on the spectrum of subjectivity, but working in combination to move forward in Life.

Cage's Influence and Evaluation

Throughout Cage's life, he expressed a desire to improve the world. He started this work in the field of music, then sound, then something in between music and Life. In 1967, he would write that music "is child's play…Our proper work now if we love mankind and the world we live in is revolution."[79] Cage's desire to free the sound extended to the freedom of those who interacted with it. Through interaction with Cage's work, one might achieve a kind of perspective shift. *4'33"* and *the Untitled Event* are not passive in the way that Schoenberg's music or Cage's piano works are. Instead of considering one's subjective or aesthetic place in the Artistic landscape (passive audience member), Cage's works make audiences question the Artistic experience as well as their place in it. By shifting the frame of Art away from himself, it created opportunity to bring in other bodies and minds. In this way, Cage's works challenge the monolithic stature of the composer and invite collaboration and community across the spectrum from composer to audience.

Cage is not without complication and contradiction. Though his aim was to take himself out of his music, John Cage is one of the most revered composers in contemporary Western Music. Fellow composer Pauline Oliveros explains the apparent paradox of Cage's pervasive personality and his rejection of his own voice:

> This is the apparent irony of Oriental discipline or Zen practice- the realization of oneself by getting oneself out of the way, [*laughs*] which seems to be a paradox but is not. You can't get yourself out of the way unless you realize yourself. I think this is very much what has happened.[80]

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[79] Johnson, *The New York Schools*, 123.

[80] Peter Dickinson, ed, *Cage talk: Dialogues with and about John Cage*, (Rochester (N.Y.): University of Rochester Press, 2006), 172-173.

As with Schoenberg, Cage's personality and aesthetic won over in the translation of the Idea into the Life of the culture. Cage wanted to show audiences their own possible paths to enlightenment. Some of his works attempted this through the process, some through mindfulness, others through action. In the end, the Art/Life divide is very much alive in popular culture. Cage's work lies right in the center, testing the boundaries between spectacle and interactivity, individualism and collaboration, and Art and Life.

Like Schoenberg, Cage was both a writer and a composer. Schoenberg lamented having to hold audiences' hands and spell everything out until the Idea had lost its charm. He, of course, had to do some spelling in his theoretical essays and articles, but he never sought to educate during the work. The teaching and the product were separate for him. Cage took a different approach. As he puts it, "I think of my books as my teaching, and I think of my work as an example of what I would teach."[81] Cage's desire to enact and teach an Idea through his work closed the gap that Schoenberg would not cross. Instead of the definitive statements of 12-tone, Cage poses a question and allows space for an audience to develop a statement (whether the statement is to the question Cage poses or not is irrelevant to him). This kind of educational shift, being 'talked at' versus being 'talked with' in a musical work presents an opportunity for dialogue and interaction which did not previously exist in traditional art practice.

[81] Fetterman, *Theatre pieces*, 232.

Fluxus and Life as Material

"Fluxus is, indeed, the name of a way of doing things.
It is an active philosophy of experience that only sometimes takes the
form of art. It stretches across the arts and even
across the areas between them. Fluxus is a way of viewing
society and life, a way of creating social action and life activity."
-Ken Friedman, The Fluxus Reader Introduction (ix)

Towards Total Freedom

Natural Outgrowth in the New School

Once Art and Life become one, how can someone make meaningful work without bounds? Cage's *Theater Piece*, the experimental pedagogy at Black Mountain College, and Cage's teaching in the latter 1950s that would lead to the development of a new genre of performance. It would be Allan Kaprow, one of Cage's students in a seminar at the New School for Social Research in the 1950s, that would coin the term Happening "to designate simultaneous multi-media performance art."[82] Much as the New York School group was influential for the development of the American avant-garde, the New School and its new class of artists would prove itself equally as full of ideas. In Cage's time, meeting Marcel Duchamp at the time the New York School was active was extremely influential. Duchamp had a distaste for aesthetic judgment and created pieces called 'readymades' ("among them urinals and bicycle seats with wheels attached to them") that subverted definitions of what Art was at the time.[83] What Duchamp showed Cage was that objects as they exist naturally serve Artistic function. Dick Higgins cites Duchamp and Cage as "uncles of Fluxus rather than… father figures."[84] Much as Duchamp was to Cage, Cage was an inspiration for the students of the New School. The students of this class (George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow, and Jackson Mac Low)

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[82] Ibid, 104.
[83] Johnson, *The New York Schools*, 8.
[84] Friedman, *The Fluxus Reader,* 222-223.

would separately and collectively contribute to the development of a new, global art community: Fluxus.[85]

Parallel Growth around the Globe

Almost simultaneously, artists in Wiesenbaden, Germany (Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Arthur Køpcke, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Karl Erik Welin, Emmett Williams, and Wolf Vostell) began producing work that similarly broke down the boundaries of traditional art practice. They were not unified under an ideology but formed an informal community much like the New York School.[86] The term Fluxus entered this group in 1962. George Maciunas, an architect and designer from Lithuania, attempted to organize the group's work into a "gallery and through a magazine named *Fluxus.*"[87] In 1962, Maciunas proposed a festival to raise money for the publication of the magazine called the Fluxus Festival. Thus, a new 'movement' was born. Much like Cage and his pervasive personality, Maciunas is often credited with creating Fluxus. Its actual lineage is much more complex and collaborative. In Europe, the artists involved in the Fluxus Festival "had known and worked with each other long before 1962."[88] In America, the same was true and it was the combination of these parallel developments that created a more accurate history of Fluxus.

The Fluxus Lineage

According to Dick Higgins, who was responsible for his own socially charged publication: *Something Else Press,*[89] the true history of Fluxus is that there is "no distinct

[85] Fetterman, *Theatre Pieces,* 104.
[86] Friedman, *The Fluxus Reader,* 243-44.
[87] Ibid, 243.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, 245.

parentage or pedigree," rather something like a cloud of disparate influences. Higgins summarizes the lineage as follows:

> *1. Once upon a time there was a collage, a technique. Collage could be used in art, not just in visual art.*
> *2. When collage began to project off the two dimensional surface, it became the combine (Rauschenberg's term?).*
> *3. When the combine began to envelop the spectator it became the environment…*
> *4. When the environment began to include live performance, it became the happening (Allan Kaprow's term, usually capitalized in order to distinguish it from just* ***anything*** *that happens).*
> *5. When happenings were broken up into their minimal constituent parts, they became events. I first heard that term from Henry Cowell, a composer with whom both John Cage, and, many years later, I myself studied…*
> *6. When events were minimal, but had maximum implications, they became one of the key things which Fluxus artists typically did (and do) in their performances. That is, I think, the real lineage of Fluxus.*[90]

In its initial presentation, Fluxus presents itself much in the same way as Dada, the 19th century French movement that prized nihilism and irreverence (Erik Satie was part of the Dada movement). But just as Cage had two sides, the philosopher and the creator, Fluxus and Dada also exist as two sides of the same coin. As Robert Filliou puts it, "Fluxus was founded on principles of creation, of transformation and its central method sought new ways to build…"[91] This mirrors Cage's duality of both philosopher and composer, but Fluxus prioritizes the creation and interaction.

But what is Fluxus? I believe Ken Friedman put it best when he said Fluxus is "the name of a way of doing things."[92] It is not a unified way of doing things, but a *frame* of intention that, when applied to Life materials, allows a work of art to appear. In 1962, John Cage would actually produce this frame in the sequel to *4'33",* called *0'00".* The instructions for *0'00"* are to "perform a disciplined action" so long as the action is not the performance of a musical

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[90] Ibid, 222-223.
[91] Ibid, 243.
[92] Ibid, ix.

composition, and "no two performances can involve the same action."[93] The discipline of the action and its placement within a musical composition form the frame for which any action, when paired with intention, can be perceived as Artistic. Within this frame, the work of the Fluxus group generated diverse activity and interaction that serve both social and artistic functions.

Many writers have noted that Fluxus, and Maciunas in particular, attempted to 'kill' Art. The group's challenge to the commercial and elitist nature of the gallery system manifested in several anti-art campaigns held by the individuals of the group. These events (picketing concerts of Stockhausen[94] and the Museum of Modern Art)[95] held the group together in the public eye as a unified collective. It would be Macuinas' anti-art sentiments that would push the group toward specific, overtly political actions. In the end, however, Maciunas' characterization and attempted unification of Fluxus did not come to be. "Fluxus was in reality closer to the Bell Labs model in which participants were credited with particular innovations and works within the larger Fluxus project."[96] The value of difference and disagreement in Fluxus, as Michael Oren notes, would ultimately be a major factor in bringing it together under one name.[97]

12 Fluxus Ideas

Description, Not Prescription

Because of the diverse nature of the ideas and work of the group, attempts to analyze the work from a unified perspective is almost impossible. Many attempts have been made (by Maciunas, by Higgins and others), but there are always exceptions. But Ken Friedman's 12

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[93] Gann, *No Such Thing,* 196.
[94] Michael Oren, "Anti-art as the end of cultural history," *Performing Arts Journal* 15, no. 2 (May 1993), 12.
[95] Oren, "Anti-art," 10.
[96] Friedman, *The Fluxus Reader*, 139.
[97] Oren, "Anti-art," 2.

Fluxus Ideas offer a picture of the work that relies on a characterization of possible traits over a standard of judgement.[98] As with Schoenberg's Style and Idea, Cage's Method, Form, Structure, and Material, the "core issues" of Fluxus are: "1 *Globalism* 2 *Unity of art and life* 3 *Intermedia* 4 *Experimentalism* 5 *Chance* 6 *Playfulness* 7 *Simplicity* 8 *Implicativeness* 9 *Exemplativism* 10 *Specificity* 11 *Presence in time* 12 *Musicality.*"[99] Matching some of these concepts with a piece of work will provide, perhaps, a clearer picture of the group, its intention, and its resistance to categorization.

Unity of Art and Life

Theater for a Poor Man (1961), Nam June Paik[100]
Summon a taxi, position yourself inside, request a long ride, OBSERVE THE METER.

Nam June Paik, a part of the Fluxus community but also the father of video art, demonstrates the Unity of Art and Life with this piece. Using the frame analogy, the performance of this piece can (and likely does) happen in cities around the globe. It is the decision to designate the action as a *performance* that allows the breakdown of Art/Life to occur. To me, what is important about this act of labeling is the implication that a performance is, as Paik puts it, theater. It is an Artistic act that carries with it the implication that it can be tailored externally and internally to suit each individual. By changing the perspective in which the Life action takes place, it invites manipulation. The reevaluation of habitual activities and consideration of their consequences are some of the most important tools in socio-political engagement and world improvement. The perspective shift and subsequent interaction that Fluxus work imposes creates

[98] Friedman, *The Fluxus Reader,* 244.
[99] Ibid.
[100] These works are not cited deliberately. Because one of the tenets of Fluxus is radical access, the generators of Fluxus work did not subscribe to standard notions of ownership. Addionally, their work is rarely written down, and few physical documents exist marking their place in history. The ephemera produced by Fluxus categorically resists academic categorization.

frames for people to act upon their internal and external lives. Put succinctly, "it is clear that the radical contribution of Fluxus made to art was to suggest that there is no boundary to be erased."[101]

Experimentalism

#96, Bob Lens
Saw a chair into pieces
Make a chair out of these pieces
Same procedure with other furniture
pieces or various other objects
Deconstruct-construct.

In Craig Saper's essay, he characterizes Fluxus as a laboratory. He states that the social goal of the Fluxus laboratory was to disseminate knowledge in simple, often humorous ways.[102] The Fluxus method of sharing this knowledge, in the form of a score, allows a quasi-scientific approach to the creation and enaction of the art. "It means trying new things and assessing the results. Experiments that yield useful results cease being experiments and become usable tools."[103] In Bob Lens' piece, this experiment of building a chair out of a chair creates a constructive scenario in which new ways of knowledge might be formed. For example, one might make a non-functional, aesthetic representation of a chair from its constituent parts. But what if one ends up making a functional chair that one finds quite comfortable? Then the piece takes on a new meaning and usefulness. This kind of experimentation with attention to the results provides a method for change. This concept provides a potential method for the goal of Globalism. Progress is made through repetition, awareness, and collaboration. "In science, the

[101] Ibid, 247.
[102] Ibid, 137.
[103] Ibid, 248.

notion of collaboration, of theoreticians, experimenters and researchers working together to build new methods and results, is well established. Fluxus applied this idea to art."[104]

Chance

Danger Music No. 24 (1962), Dick Higgins
Find it. Attack it.

In Fluxus there are multiple kinds of Chance. The lineage of "Duchamp, to Dada and Cage"[105] can be characterized as random chance; the outsourcing of decision to chance procedures to produce randomized results. The other kind of chance, evolutionary chance, has more similarity to Experimentalism. As in Bob Lens' piece, there is a chance that, through repetition, "in an unplanned way, or… [as a] result of a sudden insight" that might produce innovation.[106] Higgins' piece makes use of random chance. The ambiguity of 'it' allows any number of 'it's that might be found and attacked. The 'it' might be a physical object (i.e. a tree), a social structure (a police state), or a mental process (negative self-talk). Higgins piece makes no mention of the consequences of this assault but as always, the ramifications of the performance are relevant to the Fluxus work.

Playfulness

BEETHOVEN WAS A LESBIAN, Alison Knowles and Pauline Oliveros (1974)

[104] Ibid, 248.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

Ken Friedman describes the Fluxus focus on play amid the elitism of 'high art' as "a loud fart in a small elevator." The humor and playfulness of Fluxus sometimes comes in the form of "jokes, games, puzzles, and gags." Often the irreverence of the humor is overemphasized in the public eye. But, "[p]lay comprehends far more than humor."[107] The play with style, ideas, experiment, or social structure is the same play contained within the game or gag.

Simplicity

Three Aqueous Events, George Brecht (1961)

- ice
- water
- steam

"In mathematics or science, an elegant idea is that which expresses the fullest possible series of meanings in the most concentrated possible statement."[108] The purpose of this kind of elegance is for efficiency of comprehensibility and accessibility. If this is the case, why had George Brecht not simply written: boil ice? The Art, the intention, that can be gleaned from the work lies in the split of the events into their three phases. It is not simply that Brecht wished for you to boil an ice cube, but to attune to each phase of the water.

Implicativeness

The Destruction of All Art (1963), Ben Vautier

THE
DESTRUCTION
OF ALL ART
IS ART TOO
PLEASE TEAR
THIS UP

[107] Ibid, 249.
[108] Ibid.

In the spirit of experimentation and play, Fluxus work, through interpretation or otherwise, encourages the production of more Fluxus work.[109] The performance of a Fluxus score leads to a Fluxus action. Likewise, a Fluxus action might then be turned into a Fluxus score. Ben Vautier's piece, along with its anti-art sentiments, encourages the reader to participate in the death of art. But, if one takes Vautier's example in their own work, their action must also be destroyed to accomplish the mission. The implication of an ongoing process and the question of where or when to stop ensures the continuation of the work.

Musicality

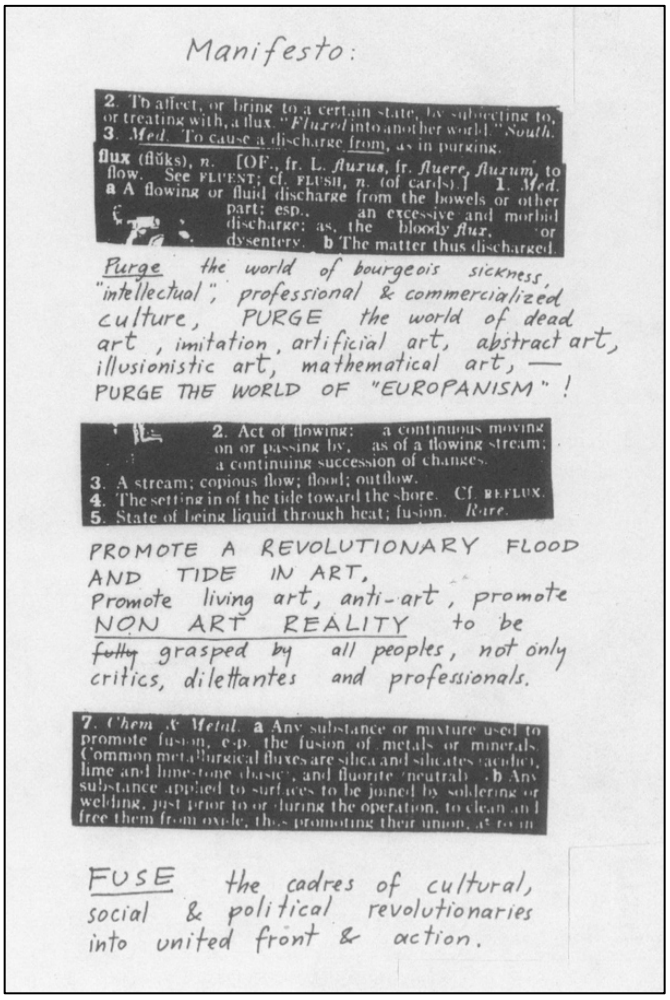
Centre Piece (2003), Ken Friedman
Imagine a life.
Live it.

Despite its outgrowth from experimental music and its use of the score as a set of instructions.[110] Musicality gives credence to the individuality of the performer. A Fluxus score may be "realized several times, and in each state it may be the same work, even though it is a different realization of the same work."[111] This aspect, despite music being an artform itself, Musicality actually points to Art/Life unity as well as Globalism. The score as a structure allows for interaction and varied interpretation. By calling in each individual's unique circumstances and perspectives to the performance practice, the Fluxus score acts as another exemplification of perfect democracy. This kind of composing action, a la Cage, which Fluxus has now made the standard of practice, pushes the whole body of work beyond spectacle into Life action.

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 250.
[111] Ibid, 251.

What's in a definition?

Maciunas and Grand Social Theory



Ex. 5 George Maciunas' *Fluxmanifesto* describing his view of Fluxus through the dictionary definition of flux.[112]

George Maciunas and Henry Flynt were a kind of inseparable philosophical pair in relation to Fluxus. While not a producer of artistic work, in the 1960s, Flynt's influence was felt through his interaction with Maciunas and "in the relentlessness with which he took to extreme positions implicit in Fluxus performance."[113] Flynt provided Maciunas with ideological backing for killing art and attempting to unify Fluxus under this umbrella. In Maciunas' words, Fluxus

[112] Oren, "Anti-art," 13.
[113] Ibid, 4.

"could have temporarily the pedagogical function of teaching people the needlessness of art."[114] This philosophy came out of Flynt's *brend theory*: a theory of aesthetics and action that prizes the development of any individual's subjectivity as uniquely their own. "[I]f taste is subjective, then nobody is more able than me to create an experience to my taste… the artist is in the same false position as the fashion designer who says 'Wear my clothes to be yourself.'"[115] Thus, artistic practice should not be an expression of subjectivity, but a tool to help an audience realize and act upon their own tastes. Taking it one step further, Macuinas' work "Communists Must Give Revolutionary Leadership" (1965) suggests that by accomplishing this on a collective level would bring socialist revolution without conflict.[116]

Theories of Flynt and Maciunas were largely rejected by the Fluxus community. Flynt "tended to be isolated… [it] deprived him of experience that might in certain cases have given his judgment a broader base, as well as of earlier recognition and influence" (Oren 4). This removal from the system which he theorized about creates a rift between his idealized vision and the facts of the practice. While many Fluxus works do prioritize non-Art reality and "authenticity of experience," it never did so in a unified way because authentic experience manifests differently in different people.[117] In Flynt and Maciunas' eyes, this lack of organization was the great failure of Fluxus. To others, "The most important thing about Fluxus is that no one knows what it is."[118]

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[114] Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Introduction' to *Fluxus Codex,* Jon Hendricks, ed, (Detriot, MI, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection in association with Harry N Abrams, New York, 1988), 37.
[115] Oren, "Anti-art," 21.
[116] Ibid, 19-21.
[117] Ibid, 5.
[118] Friedman, *The Fluxus Reader*, 213.

The Art/Life Divide as a Medium

The shift from Cage to Fluxus is perhaps as stark as the one from Schoenberg to Cage. Fluxus made use of many of the same philosophical theories as Cage, but it was able to make the jump from Art materials to Life materials. It fully shifted the static object status of the public audience to the dynamic subject without separation between Art and Life. Part of Flynt's *brend theory* was the rejection of escapism and illusion. Only forty years after Schoenberg had to reckon with the Absurdity of Postmoderism, the artists of the 1960s were facing an even more Absurd world. One with the atom bomb, the television, a Cold War, a Civil Rights movement, among other equally incomprehensible things. With this increasing complexity, Flynt saw that,

> [T]he masses turn to fantasy and mysticism when their possibility to achieve satisfaction in actual life is blocked- and that in a period in which the masses are dynamic and are able (at least seemingly) to gain advantage for themselves, to gain a share of power, that they embrace a factographic [, or documentarian,] aesthetic.[119]

Fluxus, as much as it sought to do anything, tried to create actionable knowledge and experience rather than an escape from reality. The spontaneous and varied nature of the practice prevented large-scale political action that many of the artists saw as necessary for societal progress. Is that kind of collective action even possible now? Has it ever been? Is there a version of Fluxactivity that maintains its individualistic nature and is more organized and better positioned for measurable positive progress?

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[119] Oren, "Anti-art," 21.

The Flower Cries Blue: a self-evaluation

Considering all that came before (Schoenberg's organization, Cage's removal of self, Fluxus' pivot to Life), what do I want my place in this lineage to be? With the pace of the world moving even faster than it did even twenty years ago, what is my job as an Artist? What is the best way forward? In my previous work, I was squarely within the hierarchies and materials of Schoenberg and Beethoven. In my current explorations, I find myself oscillating between wanting to follow Cage's display of alternate social realities and wishing to act directly in Life like the Fluxus group. Through all this, the questions of interaction and accessibility kept plaguing me. The next step to move from traditional practice to a more engaged practice, I saw, was to build a bridge rather than reject all my previous work. For my project, I have written a piece that attempts to fill the gaps between my old practice, and these new, interactive ideas that I would like to explore in my future work.

Rather than create an entirely original work, my new, collage-based process allows me to directly evaluate history and its consequences through the *connection* and *juxtaposition* of the Art that has come before me. I see this as a step toward Cage's process. I have rejected my own voice (to an extent), but instead of the sounds themselves, I am focused on allowing histories to be visible so that their consequences might also be made so. This manifests in the music but also in the development of a narrative structure. The collage of historical events, mythology, poetry, and symbology are my way of interacting on the Life spectrum. However, unlike Fluxus, this manipulation of Life is not direct as the piece exists as a purely Artistic product. But, again, I am attempting to build a bridge in my practice. By channeling this collage process into a narrative, I side-step the problem of abstraction and accessibility associated with so much of the avant-garde. As with Schoenberg and Cage, their ideas got lost in the translation into musical products. By

sticking with an accessible medium (storytelling), I hope that audiences will connect to and understand the themes more easily.

Collage (Narrative)

What follows is a description of the full narrative and its source material, themes, and symbology. The thesis project comprises about half of the full narrative. Due to time constraints and performance scheduling, I was able to write music for three scenes and stage four in total. The fully staged thesis performance will include:

Introduction: Satie, *Ogive no. 1*, Context and Reading of *Musings from Honfleur*

i. the Problem <Bovinus>

ii. /\SEMIRAMIS/\

iii. /did you know?

iv. Le Tombeau

Introduction

In the introduction, the audience is given a summary of the first half of the full opera. In what will be the first scene, Mallarmé's Idealism is laid bare in my adaptation of his poem, *L'Azure.* In it, the beauty of the Blue Ideal haunts and curses him. He cowers under the immense weight of the Ideal plane and his inability to adequately express its beauty.[120] After this introduction to our poet, we meet the rest of his family. His son, Anatole (whose name means sunrise), is born and Mallarmé is transfixed. Surely this, the perfect, innocent beauty of a child, is not meant for this world. As time passes, however, Anatole and Geneviéve (his older sister) grow and change, slowly embracing the Absurdity of their imaginations and the world around them. This begins the second scene. At the same time, his wife Marie continues to remind him of

[120] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse.* Translated by E.H. and A.M Blackmore. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2006), 20-23.

the practical Absurdity of their lives, telling him he needs to return to the "obligatory pastime" of teaching to support her and their growing household.[121] As the years begin to pass, Anatole becomes sick. Anatole is sick with the same disease Stéphane had when he was child: rheumatism, a painful inflammation of the joints and muscles. Helpless to aid his Anatole and racked with guilt that he has given this pain to him, Mallarmé tries to write but the poetry does not come as easily. Anatole's sickness gives new urgency to his need to provide for his family and continue teaching and giving lectures. For one particular lecture, he is invited to speak in Oxford on music and literature. Instead of delivering his own prepared speech, an Unnamed Character gives him a sheet of paper with a new speech for to deliver.

i. the Problem <Bovinus>

This speech is an adaptation of the Greek mathematician Archimedes' Cattle Problem. Written in the form of a poem, the Problem consists of seven linear equations and two exponential ones relating the four herds of sacred cattle of the Sun.[122] In this adaptation, the Cattle Problem, rather than a thought experiment, is a set of practical instructions for building a towering garden out of cows. While this scenario is incredibly Absurd, there is a historical reason for its inclusion in the piece made clear in the next movement. After stumbling through both the Cattle Problem and his grief, the audience rises to its feet and showers him with praise for his incredible wisdom. This drives Mallarmé over the edge. In the midst of the mob of positivity (or the contented herd, as Nietzsche would put it), our poet emphatically rails against Absurdity and damns the masses for their praise of such nonsense. His outburst is interrupted by Geneviéve, telling him Anatole has something to show him.

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[121] Mallarmé, *Selected Letters*, 221.
[122] Chris Rorres, "Archimedes' Cattle Problem (Statement)" 1995.

ii. /\SEMIRAMIS/

From his sickbed, Anatole introduces his father to an exotic bird Mallarmé's friend Montesquiou gave him. The bird's name, which we know from Mallarmé's letters, is Semiramis.[123] What is known about Semiramis is that she was the Queen of Babylon from 806-811 BCE but very little else about her story is factually verifiable. This, as we know from the Absurdists, is not a problem. The parts of her mythology I have chosen to include are her creation of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. While 'hanging' is likely a mistranslation from the ancient Greek, more accurately, the Gardens would be described as terraced. The invention that allowed this great feat of human ingenuity was the Archimedes Screw, a device that carries water uphill, revolutionizing the way irrigation systems could function. This is the path the Cattle Problem took to enter the piece. The parrot Semiramis, then to the hanging gardens, the Archimedes Screw, then his cattle problem. Now, there is one more layer to Semiramis' story.

The biblical Queen Semiramis and King Nimrod were responsible for the creation of the Tower of Babel. The human race, united by shared language, grew strong and began to question the Christian God and why they could not commune with him in his heavenly plane. Thus, in their strength, the people of Babylon built a tower to stretch up to the heavens so they might confront God directly. God, of course, did not take kindly to this and destroyed the Tower. Not only did he destroy this symbol of humanity's unification and strength, he destroyed their unity itself. God scattered the people of Babylon across the globe, confusing their language. In some retellings, Semiramis and Nimrod, in their wickedness, are not only responsible for world

[123] Mallarmé, *Selected Letters,* 128.

languages but also all major world religions besides Christianity. Semiramis has analogues across the deities of the Western and Eastern world. In all of them she is depicted with a child a crescent moon.[124] If you recall, Anatole means sunrise. In order for the moon to rise, the 'son' must fall.

All of this in a parrot. To return to *our* story, Semiramis the parrot is introduced to Mallarmé through Anatole. Though his condition has worsened overall, the company and conversation of the parrot brings him much joy and begins to heal him.[125] Semiramis tells of the Tower/Garden made out of the cows of Archimedes and its great scale and beauty. Anatole and Geneviéve guide their father through what the bird has told them already, much to Mallarmé's apprehension. Now face to face with the embodiment of Absurdity and after his temper has run thin, our poet must make a choice. Either he can accept this Absurdity and his son's health returns, or he continues his rejection and adds to his son's pain and his own guilt. The conflict between the Ideal and Absurd is now brought into raw, physical form with measurable consequences. By the time Mallarmé accepts his inability to curb the Parrot's musings, Anatole dies anyway. The final Absurd act is the one that Mallarmé is powerless to prevent, despite his final acceptance: death. Mortality knows not and cares not for the trials of humanity. It is the one thing we all must answer to and are powerless to stop.

iii. /did you know?

The perfect family is shattered. A balanced four wrecked into an unstable three.[126] It would be a year before Mallarmé picked up a pen again. With his perfect child gone, he has no shield, no filter from the Absurd and it hits him like a run-away train. Unable to process his grief,

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[124] REAL Bible Believers. "History of Nephilim, Nimrod, Semiramis & Babylon's Tower | Intermediate Discipleship #34 | Dr. Kim," March 14, 2020. Accessed September 13, 2023.
[125] Mallarmé, *Selected Letters,* 128.
[126] Mallarmé, *The Tomb of Anatole*, 76.

he becomes frozen, eerily still in the face of an onslaught of nonsense that would have previously caused him to run madly through the streets. For a moment, our poet becomes the Absurd Man. Things have no higher meaning. They are just things and they just are. This philosophy is so antithetical to his poetic beliefs that previously, this state would have been unthinkable to him. He begins to pick up the pen and finds that its power, its bite, its nuance is gone. But of course, it is just a pen. It is his power, his bite, his nuance that is gone.

The text for this movement is inspired by another poem by Izzy Stitchick, *Did You Know?* (See Appendix B). The poem hyperbolically and satirically defends several Absurd positions about modern life- that poor people are faking it, that women's rights are a joke, that gender is dangerous, climate change is not real, and that the government really cares. By bringing in the issues of our time, not only does this place the story within our modern landscape, but for Mallarmé it represents another thing that is just beyond his current understanding. There would be no way for someone in the 1870s to understand our contemporary issues in all their complexity. The onset of modernity in Mallarmé's time was marked by the development of the bicycle (as in *inflicted on the legs*) and the emergence of the top hat. The symbol of false status and sophistication, Mallarmé railed against everything the top hat stood for in a letter to a journalist.[127] During this scene, these two texts (Mallarmé's letter and *Did You Know?*) are superimposed on a soundscape of other Absurd, seemingly mundane things that now remind Mallarmé of Anatole. The overall effect is a vortex of Absurdity suffocating all higher thought. The essence and beauty of things is gone, only numbness remains.

[127] Mallarmé, *Selected Letters*, 217-218.

iv. Le Tombeau

Time passes. Like learning to walk again, Mallarmé slowly tries to regain the words to describe the weight that he feels. But they are not the words of a seasoned poet with aspirations of the Ideal, all he can manage are fragments; abstract and disorganized thoughts gathered in splotches all over the page. These fragments are not my own fiction. *Le Tombeau pour Anatole* is a collection of 202 of his sketches and notes aspiring to become a complete work about Anatole and his death that never came to fruition. Text for this section will consist of fragments of these fragments; the cries of a broken man searching for meaning in a truly meaningless act of mortal cruelty. For Mallarmé, it is not a cliché to say that the dead live on in our memories, he truly believed this idea. If he could immortalize his lost child through language, and not just language, the proper language, he would not truly be dead. Being only seven years old at the time of his death, there was no way for the child to know what his fate truly meant. Thus, if the acceptance of physical death is refused, Anatole lives on. But, as we know, Mallarmé has failed in his effort to make a complete work. His son truly is dead. Or is he? In light of the Absurd, if Mallarmé shifts his definition of what constitutes true poetry away from the Ideal and toward the Absurd, suddenly his notes and sketches take on new significance. The simple decision to change his perception can save his lost child. Does he accept that which he has worked so hard to defend against?

If I have represented myself properly in this paper, you already know that I will not answer this question. We are beyond answers now.

Geneviéve enters her father's writing room and asks,

"Daddy, what are you doing?"

He responds, "I- I'm trying- I'm trying to wr-"

"Daddy, I want to go the forest, can we go?"

"Of course love,"

he says through the deep exhale of parents that submerge their needs for their children's,

"What do you want to do there?"

"I want to hear the birds sing."

Collage (Musical)

For musical materials, I would use a similar process of gathering historical materials and rearranging them. By connecting Satie's *Ogives* to Izzy's poem and Ravel's *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé,* the music and the narrative became intricately connected. Satie representing the Absurd, and Ravel representing the Ideal. As I progressed through my research, I began solidifying this dynamic between the Absurdists and the Idealists. To establish this lineage and to symbolize my trajectory through from Modernism, to Post-modernism, to now in the music, I began to fill out the rest of the timeline and gather more materials.

On the side of the Absurdists, I make use of Satie's *Ogives,* Claude Debussy's *Clair de Lune* (for its lunar symbology)*,* Earle Brown's development of aleatoric boxes, and Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel.* Both Brown and Feldman were composers in the New York School with John Cage. Brown's piece *Available Forms 1* (1961) moved away from traditional notation and towards more dynamic notation. His use of boxes to create indeterminate textures and gestures creates the opportunity for active engagement with the performer, conductor, and composer. Like Cage, this was a way for Brown to shift more interpretive responsibility away from himself and have all parties participate more fully in the work.[128] For the Idealists, Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 135 (which Schoenberg analyzes in *Style and Idea*) and his

[128] Johnson, *The New York Schools*, 37.

piano piece *Moonlight Sonata*, Ravel's *Trois Poèmes,* Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (an adaptation of Mallarmé's work), and, additionally, Feldman's *Rothko Chapel.*

By quoting these pieces, I take my compositional process from indirect inspiration to direct manipulation. Throughout the process, I would balance a variety of chance procedures with my own subjective manipulation of the materials. My quotation would range from exact, extended passages, to using the same abstract pitch materials.

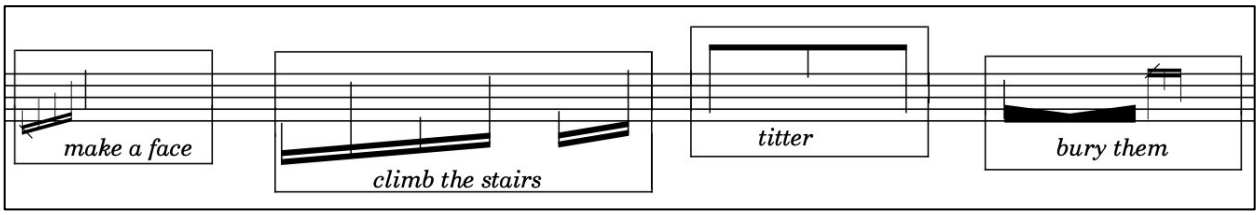
/\SEMIRAMIS/\

Form

Scored for the full ensemble (four voices, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano), /\SEMIRAMIS/\ is the climactic scene of the opera. In it, we see the progression of Anatole's sickness until his ultimate death as well as the personification of the Absurdity Mallarmé fights against. This movement creates physical consequences (Anatole's death) to Mallarmé's poetic actions. By continuing to reject Semiramis' seemingly nonsensical attitude, Mallarmé prevents his child from getting better. This forces him to decide: his child, or his ideals. And, in the end, when Mallarmé finally chooses his child, Anatole dies anyway. This final Absurd act, the one everyone is powerless against, causes Mallarmé's downward spiral for the rest of the opera.

The movement is fifteen minutes in duration split in three sections separated by sudden turns of health for Anatole. Each of the three sections is composed of traditionally notated music and Anatole's collapses are scored using aleatoric processes. Aleatory is the name of a number of indeterminate procedures that outsource musical decisions to the performer. The aleatoric process I use for these sections is box notation; the system first developed by Earle Brown that uses non-metered cells for sound organization. My boxes use pitch contour, loose rhythm, and gesture in Cage's style of indeterminacy to include the performer in the compositional process.

By allowing multiple interpretations, the notation exemplifies the Absurdity of the moment in the scene. The gestures in each box are inspired by the expression markings of Erik Satie, who was known for his eclectic indications for the performers. For example, in his piano piece *Danse Maigre*, some of Satie's markings are: "Rather slow, it's alright with you," "Outside- all right," "Full of subtlety, if you want to believe me," "No noise, believe me once more," and "On yellowing velvet."[129]



Ex. 6 An excerpt of the aleatoric boxes used in */\SEMIRAMIS/*.

In addition to using box notations, the scene splits in two during these moments. Semiramis begins directing the instrumental ensemble through the boxes while Geneviéve and Mallarmé interact with Anatole. In the final boxed section when Anatole finally passes away, the scene splits in three: Semiramis with the ensemble, Geneviéve with Anatole, and Mallarmé offstage to mail a letter to Marie.

The number three is an important thematic number in this movement. In addition to the scene relationships, and the numbers and shapes from the Cattle Problem, the dynamic between three and four is made clear in the seventy-sixth fragment of *Le Tombeau pour Anatole*:

family perfect

balance

father son

mother daughter

[129] Ching-Wen Chang, "The eccentric humor in Erik Satie's piano music," 2019.

broken –

three, a void

among us,

searching…[130]

The symmetry of the family relations, arranged in a square, contrasts the broken family after Anatole's death represented by three. The relationship between three and four plays out in the harmonic material of the movement (the difference between a major third, a total of four half steps, and a minor third, three half steps).

Process

My process for composing this movement involved arranging themes around narrative focal points and then connecting the music between each point. By abstracting and rearranging quoted materials, I started writing the vocal lines, then moved into the instrumental parts. By starting with the text, I was able to illustrate character relationships as well as focus on each individual character's internal feelings. Most of the instrumental music is representative of the conflict between Semiramis' external, Absurd world and Mallarmé's internal struggle against it. In this way, the musical materials mirror and provide additional layers the central conflict of the opera as it plays out in the scene.

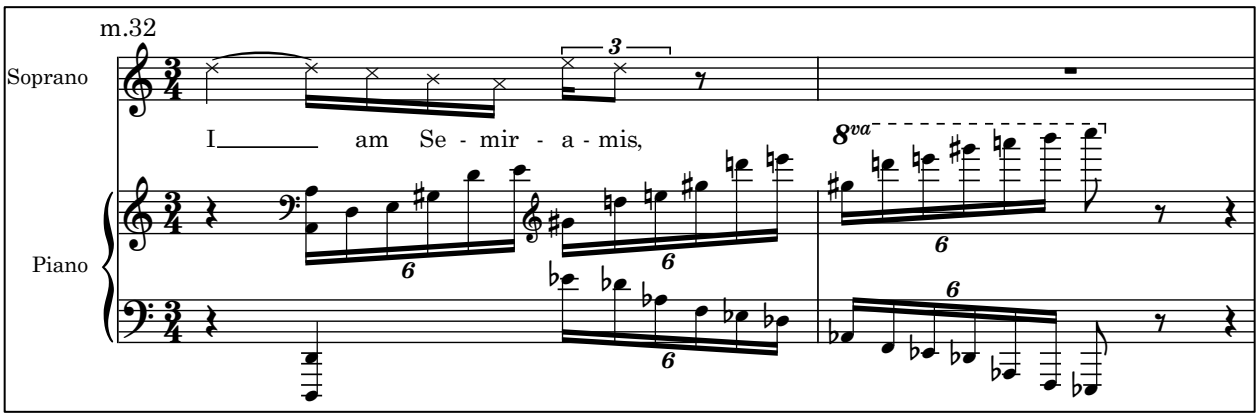
Quotations and References

The central themes of this movement map extraordinarily well onto Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*. Feldman's attitudes toward Rothko and his work mirror the struggles of Mallarmé. Rothko's work is an exploration of the spiritual; they are "windows to otherness and nothingness."[131] Despite this, in the last section of Feldman's piece, he breaks from his atonal,

[130] Mallarmé, *A Tomb for Anatole,* 76.
[131] Alex Ross, "Music Fills the Rothko Chapel." The New Yorker, March 7, 2022.

other-worldly music and writes a repeated four note motive (G B A C) in the vibraphone.[132] On top of this hazy pad, a hymn-like melody is placed in the viola suggesting a child-like, "primordial innocence."[133] After several iterations of this melody on its own, it is superimposed on the previous material: a haunting six-note chord in the choir. Music writer and critic Alex Ross labels this chord the "chord of eternity."[134] When placed on top of the tonal viola melody, the Chord of Eternity musically exemplifies what Life is. It is the beauty of the child-like in relationship to the unknowable. Keeping with the terms Absurd and Ideal, what side you place Rothko's work on is more a sign of perspective than any one truth. The Chord of Eternity might represent the pain and weight of the Ideal and trying to realize that kind of unknowable beauty. It might also represent the discordant reality of Life while the melody in the viola symbolizes the perfect, untouched beauty of childhood. Regardless of what perspective is imposed on either musical subject, the reality of Rothko's life and his work is both elements, the Absurd and the Ideal, in relationship.

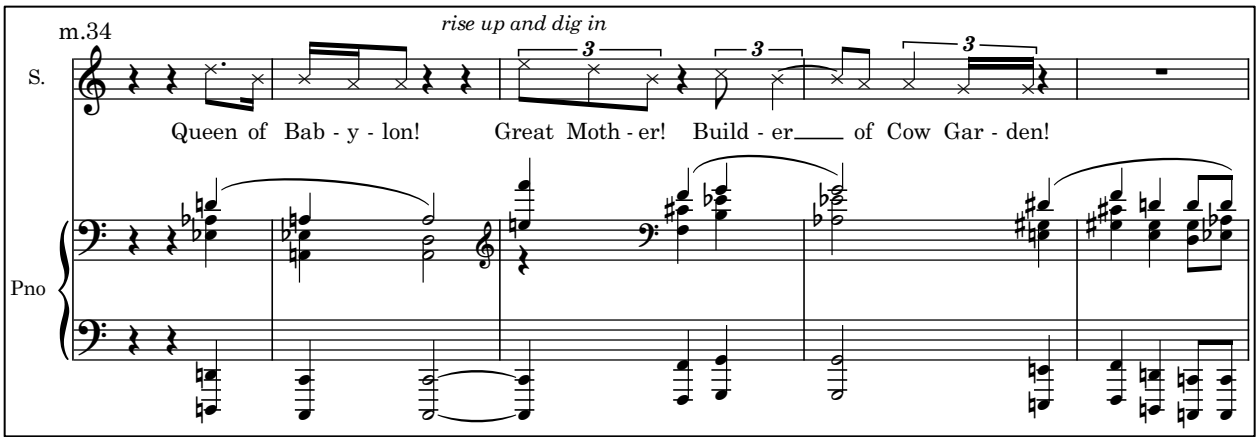
In /\SEMIRAMIS/\, I use the pitches of the Chord of Eternity (C# D D# E F G#) to represent the Absurd. Throughout the movement, Semiramis' actions are set using the pitches in the Chord of Eternity. We are properly introduced to Semiramis and her theme in measure 32.



[132] Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel.* New York: Universal Edition Inc., 1973.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.

Ex. 7 Semiramis' theme presented in full

This gesture, which includes all the pitches of the CoE, is the musical representation of the Tower of Babel's fall. The ascent of the right hand of the piano shows the tower's height while the left hand telegraphs its crash downward. In the following measures, the melody of Satie's *Ogive No. 1* is harmonized using the CoE pitch collection.[135]

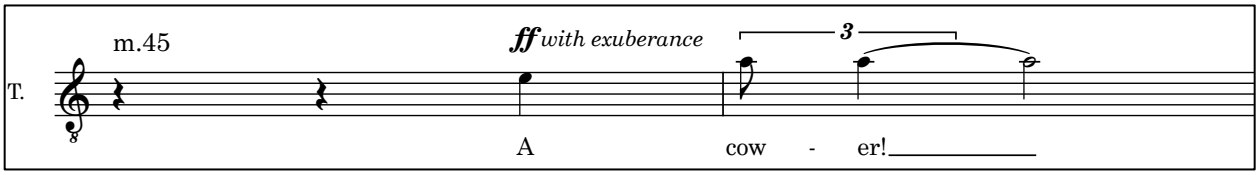


Ex. 8 Harmonization of Satie's Ogive as Semiramis' continues her introduction

This puts Satie and Semiramis firmly in the same camp: the Absurdists. As noted in Feldman's piece, the Absurdists and the Idealists have more in common than they have apart. Satie's contemplative nature and reverence come through in the Ogives. For Semiramis, that reverence for Life is just as present, it is just hidden underneath the grating dissonances. This is what I see Semiramis' job as in this movement: demonstrating the beauty and spirituality of the Absurd.

As in Feldman's piece, the Absurd and the child-like are intricately connected. Anatole and Geneviéve have already accepted Semiramis and it brings them joy. In fact, in mm.45-46 Anatole makes a joke that solidifies his acceptance of Semiramis. In response to learning about Semiramis' tower of cows and seeing his father's resistance to Semiramis' narrative, Tole decides to make it simpler for Mallarmé:

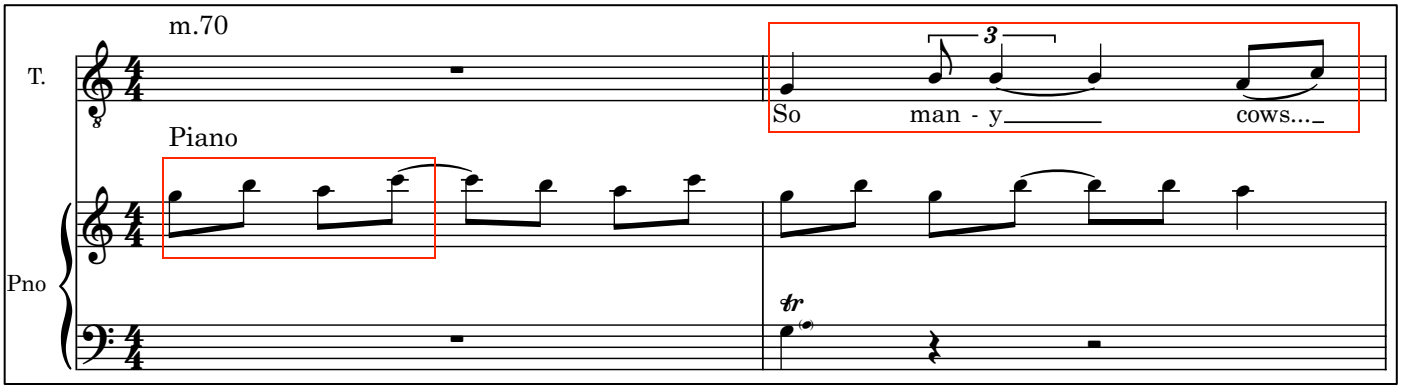
[135]Erik Satie, *Quatre Ogives.* Paris: LE CHANT DU MONDE, 1965.



Ex. 9 Anatole's wordplay combining The Tower and the Cows

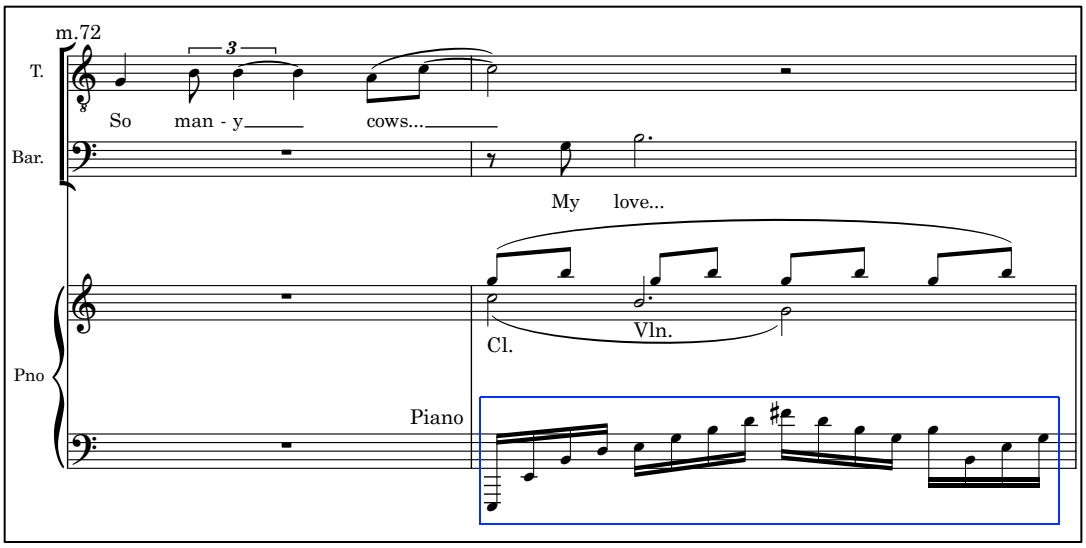
This moment sets up the relationship between Mallarmé and the rest of his family as well as his inner feelings. This is a truly painful moment for him as his children are seemingly slipping away from him and his values.

Anatole's theme, seen through Mallarmé's perspective, uses the other half of Feldman's piece: the four-note vibraphone motive, G B A C. There are several iterations of Anatole's theme. In mm.70-76, Anatole's theme appears in full as he begins to awake from his first health episode and the initial anxiety is relieved from the scene.



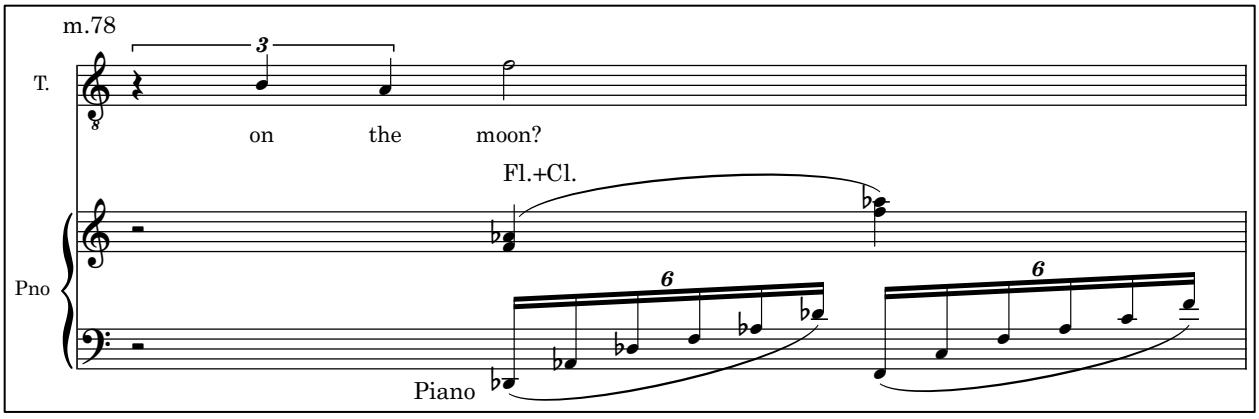
Ex. 10 Anatole's theme in the piano and tenor voice

In this moment, Anatole's theme is combined with Mallarmé's Idealism, symbolized by the first movement of Ravel's songs: *Soupir.* The dominant tonal area in *Soupir* is E minor with strong emphasis on F# in the melody. This Emin9 sound is used to convey Mallarmé's weighty sense of responsibility in trying to interact with the Ideal. In m.73, this sound is superimposed on Anatole's theme, uniting Anatole's return and the return of the Ideal to Mallarmé's life.



Ex. 11 Anatole's theme presented with an E minor harmony in the piano

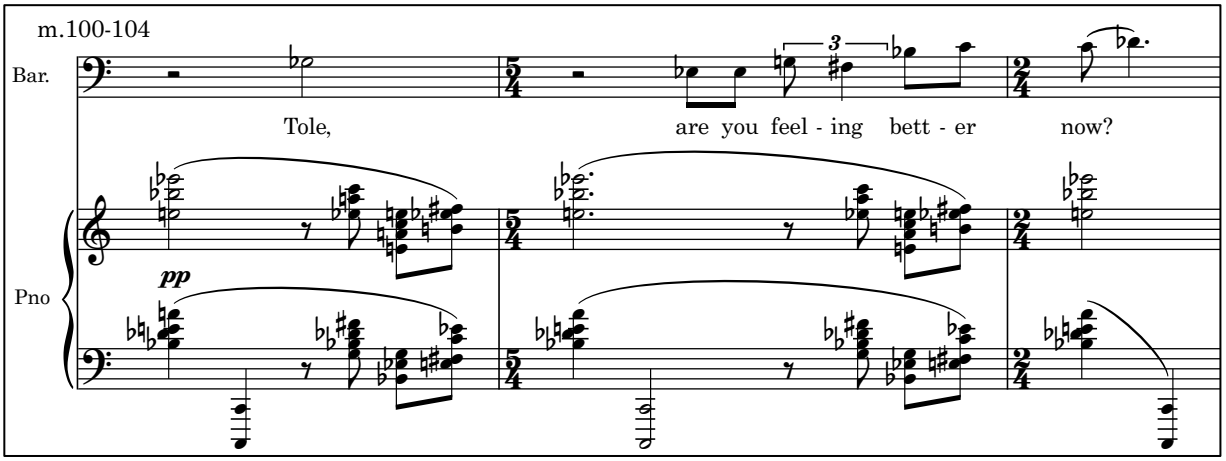
To return to the spiritual connections of Semiramis, the symbol she is often associated with, the moon, also makes an appearance in this movement. Claude Debussy's solo piano piece *Clair de Lune* is quoted whenever Semiramis mentions the moon. The moon represents a spiritual comfort for Semiramis that, in turn, spreads to the rest of the family. However, because Anatole is represented by the sun and light, the sun must set in order for the moon to come out. The first appearance of Debussy's iconic piece is in m.75 in the piano.[136] This iteration of the theme is distant, and the mood quickly moves back to anxiety. It is only when Anatole latches on to this theme that a fuller orchestration of the theme is presented in m.78.



Ex. 12 An excerpt of Clair de Lune at Anatole's mention of the moon

[136] Claude Debussy, *Suite bergamasque.* Paris: E. Fromont, 1905.

As Mallarmé begins to negotiate new boundaries with Semiramis by trying to accept her narrative, Anatole gains strength but at what cost? This causes Mallarmé to retreat into his thoughts and wish he could forget this whole experience. The 'Forgetting Theme' comes from another section of Ravel's *Soupir..*[137] The text from rehearsal marker 3 to 4, where this passage appears translates to: "toward October's pitying Blue, pale and true, which mirrors in broad pools its endless lethargy."[138] This mention of the Blue recalls Mallarmé's first poem on the subject: *L'Azure*. This, in addition to the hazy and wandering nature of the piano texture, made me connect this passage to the line: "Come from the Lethean ponds, and on your way, / dear Tedium, gather livid reeds and mire / to block up, with your hands that never tire, / the blue holes torn by birds in wicked play" from *L'Azure.*[139] Borrowing from Greek myth, the Lethean pools express a deep desire to be washed clean of his memory, his pain. In mm.100-103, Mallarmé silently expresses this desire to forget in light of Anatole's improving health as a result of Semiramis.



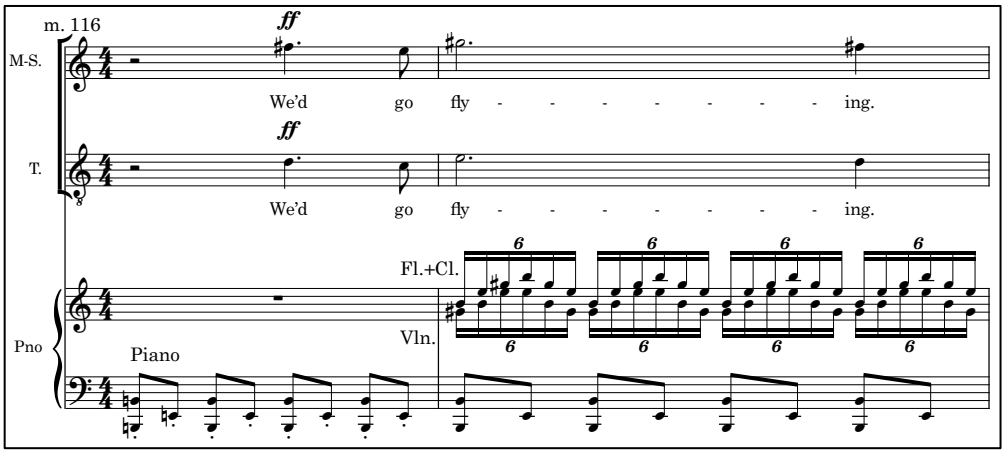
Ex. 13 The Forgetting theme is played in the piano. The thick harmonies create clouds of dissonance that hang in the air.

[137] Maurice Ravel, *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé.* Paris: Durand, 1914.

[138] Mallarmé, Collected Poems, 25.
[139] Mallarmé, Collected Poems, 23.

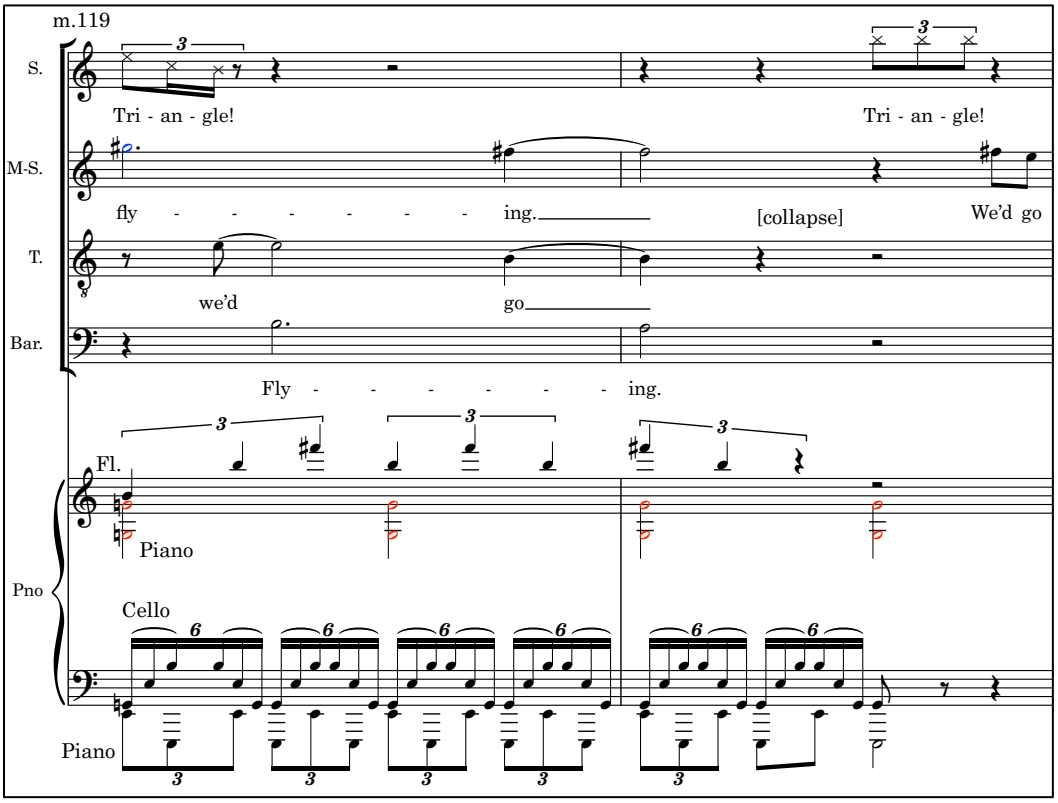
This passage is immediately followed by a joyful episode where Anatole describes how he would play with the cows on the moon. As Geneviéve joins in, Mallarmé's inner state begins to fracture once again. This is shown in the music in a return of Semiramis' theme: the Satie *Ogive*. This time in lighter orchestration over top a foreboding eighth note pattern in the left hand of the piano (m. 104). The *Ogive* represents the tenderness and Semiramis while the march-like eighth notes are symbolic of Mallarmé's growing concern that his children are growing further from him.

Soon after, Geneviéve and Anatole begin to fly with the cows in their imagination. The harmony shifts from Semiramis' key center, the tonic D from the CoE, to Mallarmé's key center from the Ravel: E. But this time, it appears not in the minor, as it has before, but in the major. This change from a minor third (3 half steps), to a major third (4 half steps), shows that, perhaps in spite of Mallarmé, Geneviéve is the one that brings perfect balance to the family in the midst of this crisis. Geneviéve's melody is scored in the high tessitura giving it a bright, slightly strained timbre. This sound suggests that, seeing Anatole's decline and Mallarmé's unhelpful efforts, Geneviéve forces this experience to be a happy one. To support Geneviéve, the instruments have a thicker orchestration (in E major) of the arpeggiated texture in *Soupir*.



Ex. 14 Geneviéve and Anatole's vocal duet accompanied by arpeggiation in the ensemble.

This texture continues as Mallarmé tries to assimilate himself and fly with his children. By the time he connects with Geneviéve's melody, Anatole has faded away again. This is represented in the tolling G naturals (the minor third of E) in the piano and new arpeggio in the cello clash harshly with the G# (the major third) in Geneviéve's melody. The Gs continue until Anatole begins to awake for the second time.



Ex. 15 The previous texture is overtaken by the G naturals and the introduction of the cello.

As Anatole begins to wake, the scene stays split in two, this time with Mallarmé separated from the children and Semiramis as he writes a letter to Marie. This sets up the final split when Mallarmé leaves to mail the letters, Semiramis leaves to conduct the instruments and say the final number of cows, and Geneviéve is left with Anatole as he passes away. The movement ends when the physical relationships on stage are split into three. However, as Anatole wakes up from the previous collapse, his theme is presented in a new way. Unable to

speak but very much at the forefront of everyone's mind, his theme is fragmented and augmented as the harmonic foundation. As Mallarmé continues to write, more interruptions to Anatole's theme occur with pitches from the CoE pitch set. This continues until a new harmony is firmly established: C#min/D#. This unstable, dissonant chord is arpeggiated in triplets in the piano and elaborated in the other instruments until all twelve pitches are represented in the final measure of the section.

Following the buildup of dissonance, Mallarmé displays raw, unfiltered emotion for the first time since his outburst after his lecture. In m.169, his words are harmonized with the pitches from the Forgetting Theme but with the tonic E instead of C. This tension between Mallarmé's tonic E and Ravel's harmony represents his desire to fight for his son, his Ideal world, and his simultaneous wish that none of this ever happened. His first true expression of grief is a complex one which he will continue to explore in the rest of the piece. The simultaneous need to be present in this painful reality and the need to fight it and make something better are what drive him.

As the movement draws to a close, Semiramis begins to get personal. She tells Anatole how she was turned into a bird by the Sky and how lonely she's been. Each time she sinks into a depressive, much more human state, the moon appears to provide sanctuary. With each mention of the moon, Debussy's *Clair de Lune* appears in the piano. The first few gestures of *Clair de Lune* are fragmented and spread throughout mm.182-194 until everything stops and the melody is heard in full. First, with the pitches Debussy wrote and then harmonized with the CoE pitch field. In this way, Semiramis fully claims the moon as her own. The moon's ethereal beauty is no less beautiful when presented in this dissonant way, it is a beauty for her and that is all that matters. As the full statement of *Clair de Lune* appears, Mallarmé writes (and sings) the line: "I

know he thinks of you, like a white flower recalling the vanished sun." The vanished sun (when heard also sounds like "the vanished son") and the appearance of the moon musically telegraph Anatole' death at the end of the movement. The third time Anatole collapses and the third time Semiramis says how many cows is the final time. Mallarmé would never be the same.

/did you know?

Form/Process/Quotes

The form and process of this movement are products of each other. For fixed media (no instruments, just electronics), this scene is a look inside Mallarmé's mind. Anxiety, tension, guilt, shame, and regret all fill his mind in an Absurd vortex that swallows him whole. His thoughts are no longer poetic strings of words but a collage of the things that remind him of Anatole and the futility of his struggle to find poetry. By combining found sound sources from advertisements of the last century, children's educational programs, vocabulary lessons, lectures on philosophy (on Camus specifically), and pieces by Beethoven and Debussy, the audience gets to feel this struggle for themselves. Some sources are from modern times and bring Mallarmé's conflict into our perspective.

While not directly inspired by it, parallels can be drawn between John Cage's *Williams Mix* (1952) and this piece. Placing his 'score as instructions' in electronic territory, *Williams Mix* is a project for magnetic tape that resulted in a sound collage. After collecting a library of sounds and sorting them into categories ("city, country, or electronic"), using the I-Ching, he assembled a score that shows future composers how to alter the tape.[140] The act of cutting the tape containing each sound alters the sonic properties contained on it. For instance, pitch, timbre, and volume could all be altered by cutting the tape in different shapes. By instructing the

[140] Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 228.

performer/composer in how to cut and arrange the sounds, Cage controls the process but not the final product.

In my work, this process happens entirely in the digital realm, substituting cut tape for automation lines. And, unlike Cage, I oscillate between chance procedures and subjective manipulation. All the sound sources come from Internet Archive, imslp.com, or a no-input mixer (hardware used to generate harsh noise). The found sounds can be sorted into five broad categories: music, childhood, bicycle, grief, and other. These categories yielded sounds that relate to those topics but also other phrases that connect to other themes of the broader piece (death, acceptance, family, futility). To organize these categories, two musical works served as the backbones: Beethoven's *String Quartet Op. 135 (Muss es sein? Es muss sein.)*[141] and Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*[142] (a tone poem based on Mallarmé's work of the same name). Played backwards and forwards simultaneously, I would arrange spoken or musical phrases from a given category to elaborate the musical gestures in each piece. The Beethoven quartet served as the structure for the bicycle sound sources while the Debussy became the backdrop for the childhood education sounds. While not entirely chance processes, I outsourced the manipulation of structure and form for my piece to Beethoven and Debussy. Having arranged these sections (bicycle and education) separately, effectively composing two different pieces, I superimposed them and repeated the process. Chance gestures created from the combination of the two complete works yielded new opportunities for changes to structure and form.

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[141] Ludwig van Beethoven, "String Quartet No. 16 in F Major," Live at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Borromeo String Quartet, 2009.
[142] Claude Debussy, "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune," Constantin Silvestri, Orchstre national de France, Paris: Radiodissusion-télévision française, March 12, 1959.

The third movement of Luciano Berio's orchestral piece, *Sinfonia,* is precedent for this process. *Sinfonia's* third movement uses the scherzo from Gustav Mahler's *Second Symphony* as a backbone. Berio calls it "a skeleton that often reemerges fully fleshed out, then disappears, then comes back again… but it's never alone: it's accompanied throughout by the 'history of music.'"[143] Superimposing more quotations on top of the Mahler scherzo allowed Berio to "explore from the inside a piece of music from the past."[144] It is "at the same time an analysis, a commentary, and an extension of the original."[145] This is how I see */did you know?* It is an analysis, commentary, and extension of not only Beethoven and Debussy's traditional Idealism, but also the Absurd, 'non-musical' sounds and noise.

After much experimentation, a global sense of form began to emerge. The sections had been glued together and a static tide of Absurd noises resulted. My next step was to sort through the chaos and find memory triggers that would remind Mallarmé of Anatole. Once I found those moments, I made them dynamic by adding filtering, volume, and panning automation. In addition, once more musical gestures had been made from the sounds, I began using the sound from the no-input mixer to further orchestrate each gesture. The harsh timbral quality of the sounds from the no-input mixer are uncomfortable, bringing the audience fully into the stabbing pain that Mallarmé feels. I use the no-input mixer to make larger sections clear as well. The more sustained, dynamic textures make the largely static found sounds have trajectory over larger periods of time. This helps the audience understand what to listen to and how to listen to it. Instead of a rapid succession of important sounds the audience needs to process, the no-input mixer places the background sounds firmly in the background.

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[143] *Luciano Berio: Two Interviews with Rossana Dalmonte and Bálint András Varga.* Translated and edited by David Osmond-Smith, (London: Marion Boyars Publishers 1985, 2009), 107.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

Le Tombeau

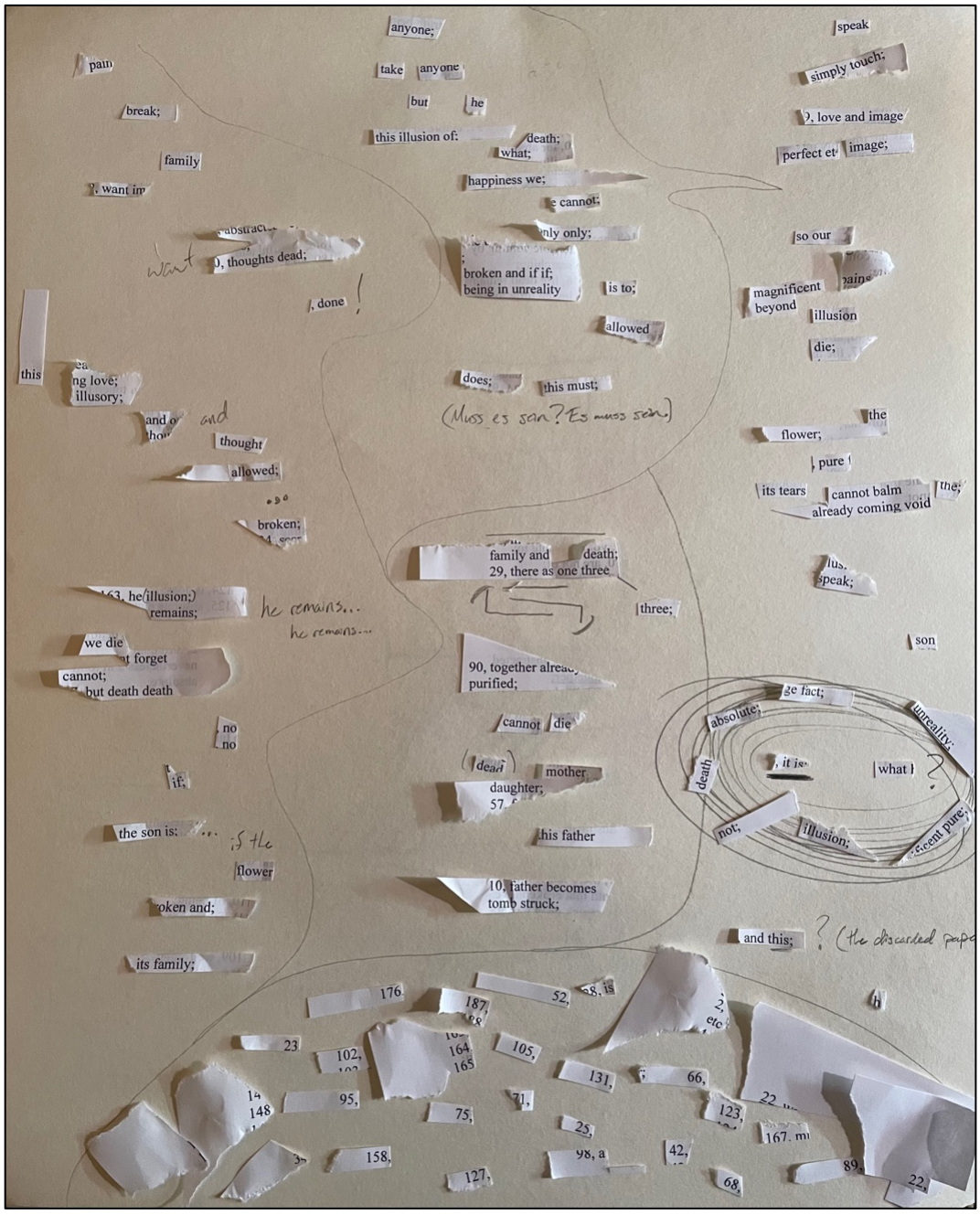
Form

The final movement of the opera comes in four parts, three main sections and a coda resulting in about seven minutes of music. Again, the juxtaposition of 3 and 4 present themselves in the macro and micro aspects of the form. The metric and rhythmic divisions are all multiples of three. The majority of the piece is set in 9/8 (3 beats split into 3 subdivisions). When it deviates from 9/8, the dominant rhythm still uses divisions of three. The large form of the piece is in four parts: three main sections and a coda. The musical drama is effectively complete after the third section, but Mallarmé's striving for something more, his desire for symmetry propels the piece forward until he is interrupted by Geneviéve. In contrast to the three-part, Absurd form of */\SEMIRAMIS/\,* the Ideal four parts of *Le Tombeau* paradoxically pull Mallarmé away from his son. Separating the four parts are three transitions that quote Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 135. The inclusion of this piece, specifically of the fourth movement, came as a result of the arrangement of textual fragments.

Process

To mirror Mallarmé's fall away from the Ideal and into depression, the process of composing this movement made use of extensive chance processes. Again, starting with the text and using the fragmented poetry of *The Tomb for Anatole* as a model, I began trying to replicate the poetic situation Mallarmé was faced with. By taking randomly determined fragments from *The Tomb* and putting them into a computer program, I was able to create hundreds of random arrangements of words in an indexed list. I then put myself in Mallarmé's position, quite literally trying to put the pieces back together and reproduce something poetic from the jumbled mess of

nonsense. By ripping and cutting the paper in various ways, I reconstructed four ‘poems’ from the text.



Ex. 16 The reconstructed poems that resulted from ripping the indexed phrases

These poems, much like *The Tomb’s* fragments are struggles and meditations on grief, family, and memory. Their tone is somber and the pain of the writing process comes across in their simple, unadorned word choices. For example, Mallarmé’s denial of Anatole’s death manifests in

the line: “If being in unreality is allowed, does this must?” Did my child have to die? This phrase, “Does this must?” is the most un-poetic way to say “Must it be?” which provided me with another music to text connection: Beethoven’s String Quartet mentioned above.[146]

The four poetic fragments are separated by three sections that echo the fourth movement of Beethoven’s String Quartet: *Muss es sein? Es muss sein.* In the movement, Beethoven uses three different three note motives based on the phrase *Muss es sein? Es muss sein* (Must it be? It must be.) Beethoven provides a definitive answer to the question “must it be?” The central conflict of this movement is Mallarmé’s attempts to deny of this statement, to deny his son’s death. In the three iterations of Beethoven’s motives, the question is posed and answered twice. My structure is the reverse; the answer is stated twice, then the question. This is also representative of the progression of my research; from modernism (statements), to post-modernism (finding new statements), to the era we are in now (only the questions). The two “Muss es sein” statements in my piece come at the moments where Mallarmé’s frustration reaches a breaking point and he rips up the poem he was working on. After the final section where the question is posed, Mallarmé gives up writing and speaks directly to Anatole. This movement away from Art and to Life brings him closer to Anatole (as shown in the staging). But, of course, Mallarmé goes back to trying to make his grief into something more.

After the text was set, I used a similar process to produce the musical materials. I took Ravel’s *Trois poèmes of Stéphane Mallarmé* and ripped up the score. Using the themes I had already derived from the Ravel, I rearranged the musical fragments to match the thematic elements of the text. Like putting together a puzzle, I also arranged the musical fragments to match the contour lines I had drawn to separate my poem fragments. The process and time of

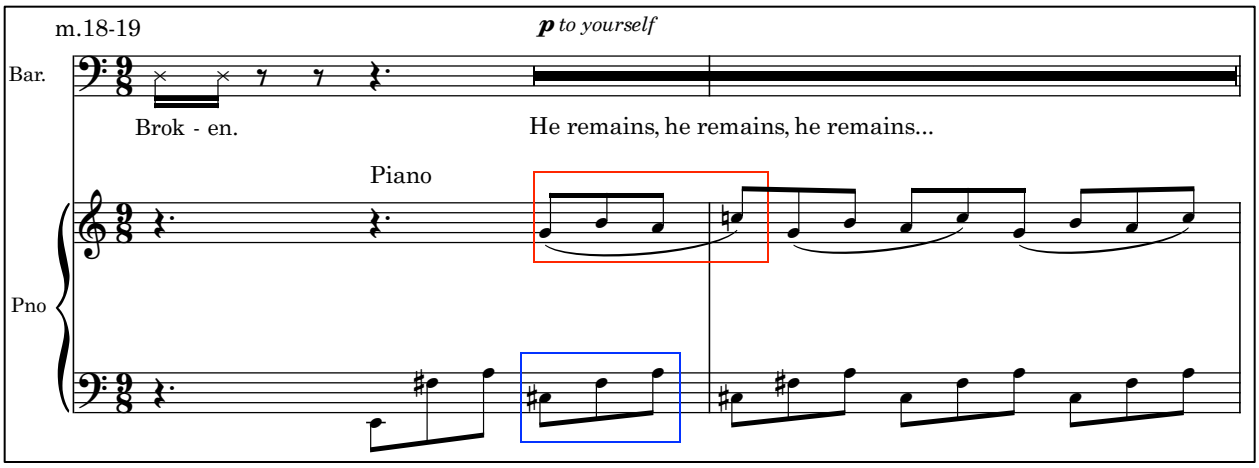
[146] This quartet is the piece Schoenberg cites as precedent for the mirror forms of 12-tone (Stein, *Style and Idea*, 222).

arranging the elements visually allowed me to formulate a complete emotional picture of the movement. The spirit of fragmentation more than the fragments themselves would eventually make it into the final piece.

Quotations and References

The inclusion of Beethoven's Quartet allowed me to make a connection to another one of Beethoven's pieces: the first movement of the *Piano Sonata No. 14,* Moonlight.[147] Thematically, after Anatole's death, the sun has set, and the moon has risen. I thought it was only fitting that the *Moonlight Sonata* be the basis for *Le Tombeau.* The pensive repetition of its iconic arpeggios put Mallarmé's tunnel vision and weariness on full display. With the exception of the climax (mm. 60-66), the entire movement is based on the Moonlight ostinato. Instead of setting it in the original key, I change the motive to be in F# minor, placing C# in the bass. The reason for this was to make the tonal environment as hostile as possible to G, Anatole's note. G, against the tonic F#, creates a minor 9th which is the most dissonant interval. The C# in the bass creates a tritone with G, the least stable interval. Through these dissonances, the music exemplifies the pain that Mallarmé feels as he tries to force Anatole to stay with him. It is also this unfamiliar tonal territory that shows the new reality that Mallarmé is faced with and has no tools to deal with. In mm. 18-19, Anatole's theme is presented directly on top of the Moonlight ostinato as Mallarmé repeats: "He remains, he remains." Not only is the pitch dissonant, but a rhythmic dissonance occurs as well: Anatole's four-note theme against the Moonlight three-note theme.

[147] Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Sonaten für das Pianoforte, Op. 27, No. 2*. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, n.d [1862], pp 15-26.

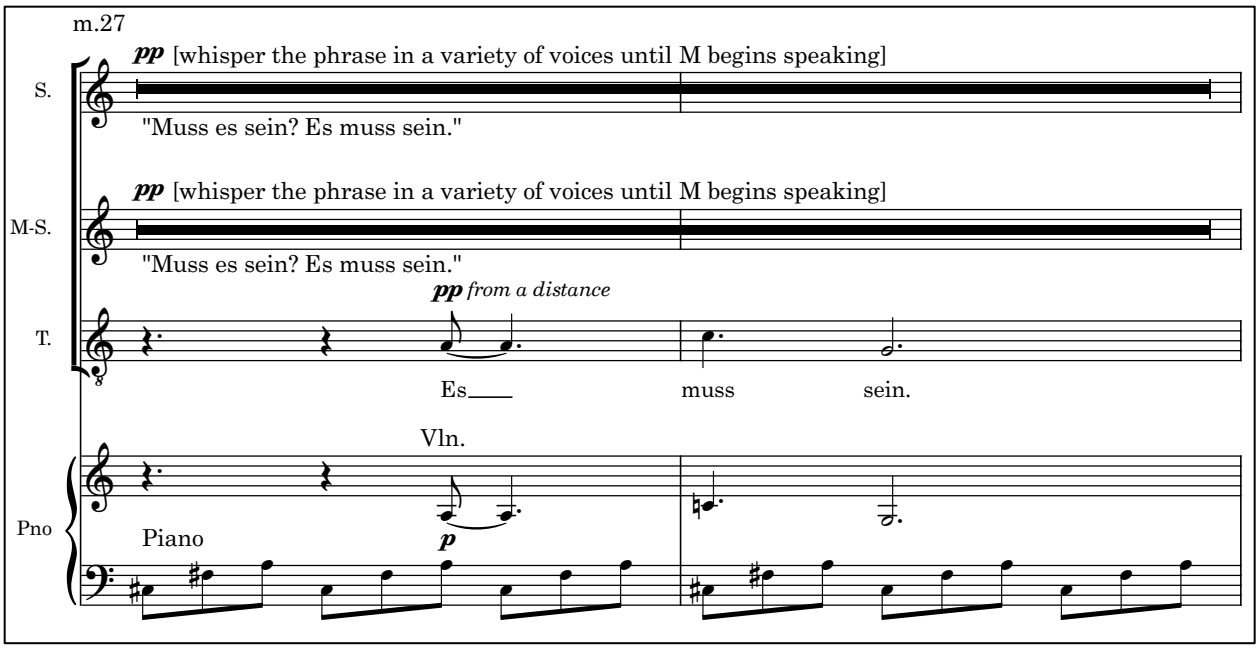


Ex. 17 Anatole's theme appears in the red box while the Moonlight theme is in blue.

In addition to Ravel's *Soupir* making an appearance in this movement, the third song of the set, *Surgi de la croup et du bond* (dedicated to Erik Satie), is quoted. Its first appearance is in m.21. Throughout the piece, Ravel repeatedly makes use of a major chord with its minor ninth in the bass (e.g. A major/Bb).[148] I use the chord D/Eb to symbolize Death. This is more to its incredible instability than to any thematic connection to the Ravel. Occasionally this chord is accompanied with pitches from the CoE as well as Anatole's note: G. In m.21, the chord comes as a surprise as Mallarmé tries to fight death and perhaps get too close to reality. Instead of continuing to probe the subject, his thoughts return to Anatole and the Ideal *Soupir* appears for a brief moment before it's shattered by a second statement of the Death chord in m.26.

The Beethoven Quartet is presented for the first time in mm. 27-33. After the pain of writing becomes too much, Mallarmé rips up his first poem and a distant voice declares that there's nothing he can do: It must be.

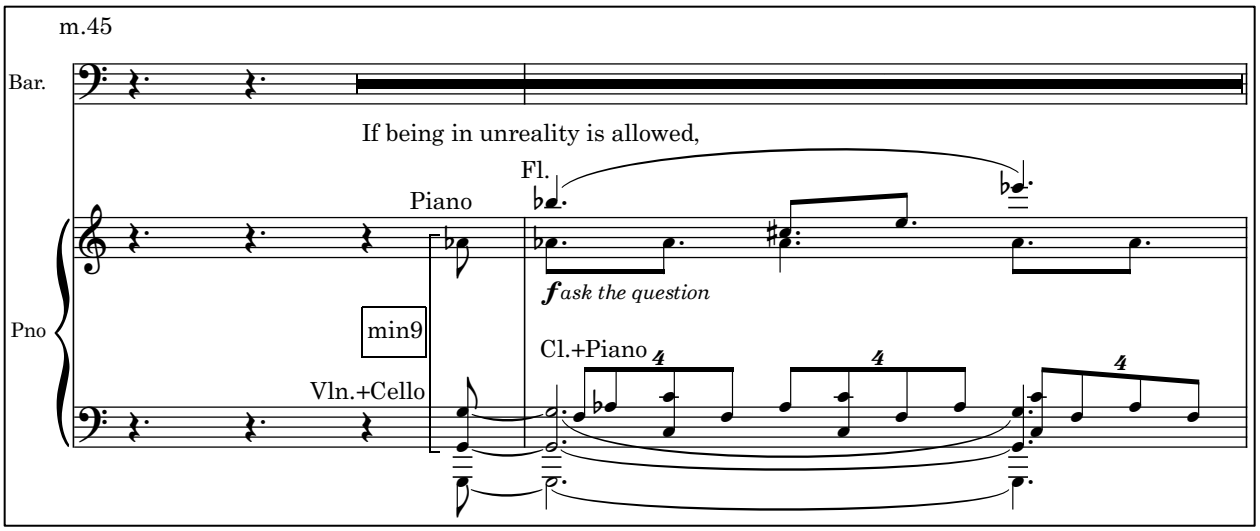
[148] Ravel, *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé.*



Ex. 18 The first transition, “Es muss sein” section.

This first statement of Beethoven’s theme is tonally disjunct on top of the Moonlight ostinato. Ending on a G on the word “sein (be),” the uncomfortable feeling that results from its dissonance with the F# and C# and pushes the tension forward. In addition, the G acts as a dominant for the new bass note: C, the tonic of the Forgetting/Lethe Theme.

In the next section, Mallarmé explores this wish to forget. A new tonality that shares the dissonance of the Death Chord is introduced. The C bass in m.33 quickly resolves to an F in m.35 that I use to represent ‘unreality:’ F minor/G. This chord comes from Ravel’s *Soupir* as the text mentions the pale blue of October. Now, instead of the *presence* of the Blue Ideal tormenting him, it is the absence and attempts to bring it back that brings him true pain. With the G in the bass, Mallarmé places Anatole as the foundation, but the upper notes shift to create the same dissonance (the minor ninth) as before. As Mallarmé continually attempts to embrace the idea that Anatole is not gone, to live in this false reality, the F minor/G is coupled with a metric change in m.45.



Ex. 19 The meter accelerates as the harmony becomes more unstable.

By changing the metric pattern to four pulses put keeping the ostinato as three notes, the music feels as if it speeds up. This shift creates a sense of urgency even though the tempo has not changed. By forcing four notes uncomfortably into the space of three, the Ideal becomes even more painful. Eventually, the music sinks back to the persistent three pulses.

At the end of this fragment (m.47), Mallarmé asks the question "Does this must?" As noted above, the connection to Beethoven's Quartet occurs here and will enter the music through the quotation of another piece. Charles Ives' *The Unanswered Question* comments on the human struggle to interact with the unknowable. A muted trumpet asks "The Perennial Question of Existence" to an ethereal string orchestra (who happens to play in G major) representing the "Silences of the Druids- Who Know, See and Hear Nothing."[149] The final section of the ensemble, a quartet of winds, attempt to answer the trumpet's question. With each iteration of the question, the winds, representing human struggle to find the answers, get increasingly agitated. Their melodic lines increase in complexity, dissonance, and tempo, as the urgency surges. As Ives puts it, "as time goes on, and after a 'secret conference,' [they] seem to realize a futility and

[149] Charles Ives, *The Unanswered Question*, (New York: Southern Music Publishing Co. Inc.).

begin to mock 'The question.'"[150] This mocking occurs in the section marked "Allegro" where the winds have a similar pitch contour to the question, but it is punctuated by pointed eighth notes and a flippant flourish at the end.

As Mallarmé begins the question, "If being in unreality is allowed," Ives' question is pronounced in the flute in m.45. The addition of the expression marking *ask the question* invites the performer to make this connection to Ives' work. After Mallarmé finishes the question and begins to mock his own terrible grammar, the instrumental ensemble uses Beethoven's "Es muss sein" to answer to the question in mm.47-48. The "Es muss sein" musical figures, along with Beethoven's chromatic elaboration of the theme, are disjunct and accelerated. In the original quartet, this motive (Es muss sein) is scored in a bouncy, cheerful Allegro section. With the expression marking *allegro* in my parts, the parallel is drawn from Beethoven to Ives and the futility of the human in the face of the Ideal. Underneath the "Es muss sein" figures, the question is posed again in the high register of the cello as shown in Ex. 20. This orchestration gives the question the character of an outcry as another, urgent iteration of the "Es muss sein" transition occurs mm.49-55.

As a result of Mallarmé's asking of the question, the following music enters new harmonic territory. For the first time, the Ideal E makes an appearance without dissonance; that is, until the "Es muss sein" statements begin. The cello carries the B from the end of their question throughout this section to created tension. "Es muss sein" now finishes on an F, creating a tritone with the B and a minor ninth with the bass E. This unrelenting insistence form both sides, Absurd reality and Idealism, comes to a head in these six bars.

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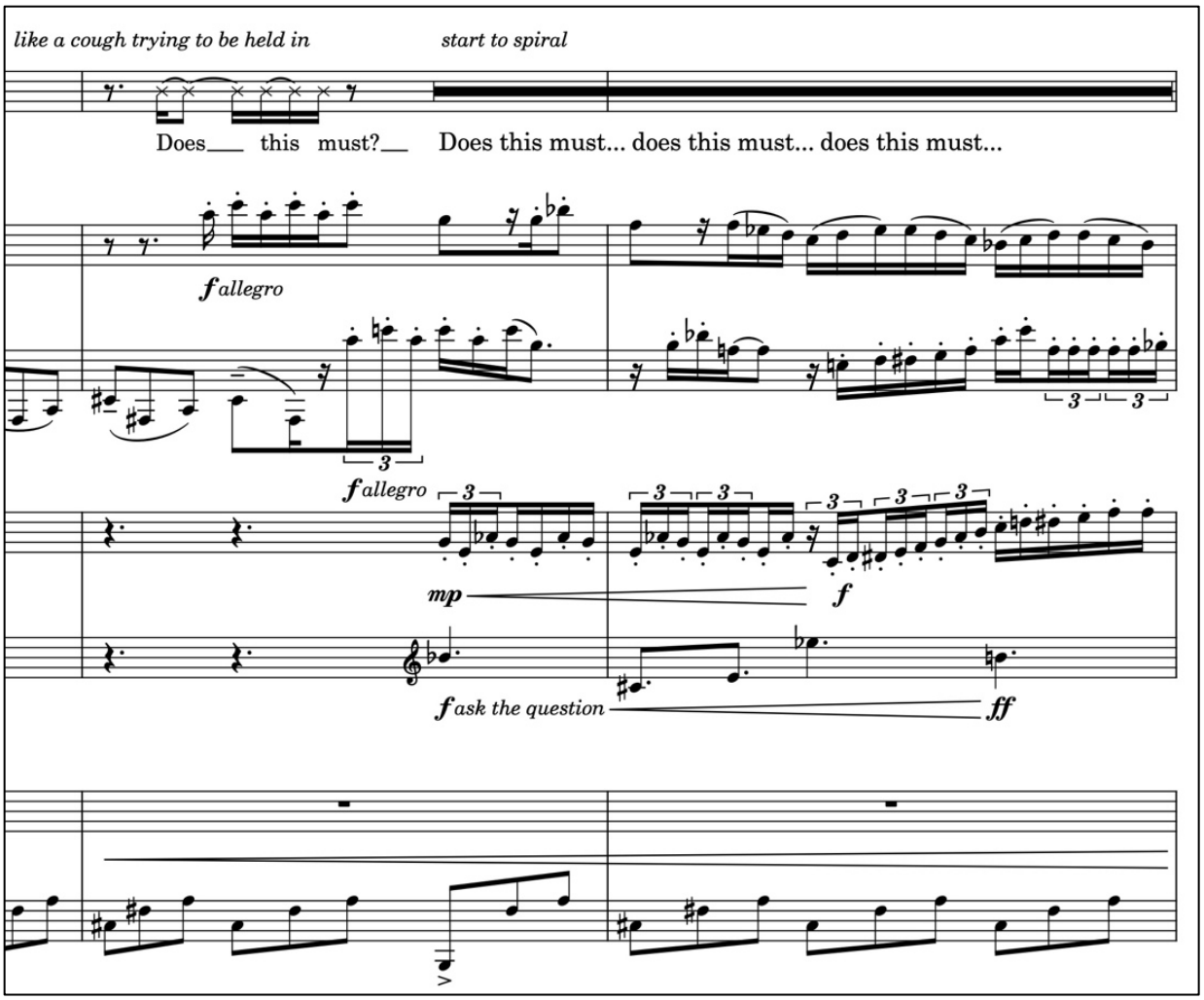
[150] Ibid.



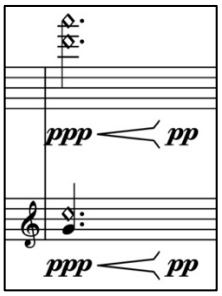
Ex. 20 The flute, clarinet, and violin play altered figures from Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 135 while the cello intones Ives' question.

In the following section (m.55), Mallarmé starts again and returns to his family. A placid E chord with a violin melody referencing *Rothko Chapel's* viola melody brings comfort to him. As his thoughts turn in on himself, his responsibility as a father, his disease, his helplessness, an arpeggiated E minor triad is accompanied by a metric shift to 4/4. His Ideal is given to him for a moment but still feels deeply wrong in this new reality. Mallarmé's mind fractures and slowly rips the Ideal apart with the addition of more pitches until an unrecognizable Bb minor dominates the E minor (mm.61-63). It is at this point that Mallarmé stops writing and directly reckons with what it means to navigate life without his son. Only by experiencing his raw,

unfiltered grief head on does he begin to move forward. For the first time, in m.71, the Moonlight ostinato falls silent. His mind stops swirling and he is fully present in this reality.

The final transition section intones the unspoken question, Muss es sein? I put Beethoven's motive in the high register of the piano to give it an otherworldly quality. The pitches of this simple motive exemplify the question it asks. It begins with a G, down a minor third (three half steps) to an E, then up a major third (four) G#. The E and the G form the basis for Mallarmé's Ideal E minor, nakedly shown in this motive as a descent to the non-Ideal three (perhaps it never was as ideal as he thought). While the rise of four to the G# is the rise Geneviéve took with Anatole as they flew with the cows, the truly perfect four. The Ideal and the Absurd are now reversed. In the face of his new circumstances, in the face of death, to hold an Ideal position is an Absurd act. The only truly Ideal position is to embrace and celebrate the Absurdity.

In the following measures (80-88), Mallarmé leaves his poetry behind and, in a kind of prayer, speaks directly to Anatole. As he speaks, no longer trying to produce what he calls poetry, Anatole's spirit reaches out to him. Anatole's spirit steps closer to Mallarmé four times as the strings, from the ethereal plane, peek through the silence. Their soft harmonics show Mallarmé and Anatole slowly becoming one. The cello intones Anatole's G while the violin plays a D and A. Again, D (Semiramis' tonal center) is the easiest way to resolve to G. For the first time, Mallarmé embraces this new harmony and acheives his communion with the ethereal.



Ex. 21 Harmonics in the strings producing (D G A)

However, the emotion and tension of the silence becomes too much, and his mind begins to swirl. As Mallarmé tries once again to rationalize and categorize, the Moonlight ostinato returns in the piano with no embellishment. His endeavor is exposed for what it is, futile and unending. He continues until there is a knock at the door. Again, silence returns and his daughter gives him another chance to accept reality. The performance is over before we hear a reply.

Conclusion

My journey mirrors Mallarmé's journey. I began as an Idealist, creating and asserting my subjective experience. I believed that Art and Life were separate but informed each other. I have struggled to accept the state of the world I live in. But now I have an appreciation for the Absurd. I know that Absurdity is not an invalidation of the Ideal but an opportunity for a different kind of beauty. I know that Life and Art are not separate; they are arbitrary arrangements of letters that have convinced us that they are not the same thing. I know that arbitrary arrangements of letters lead to actions that have consequences. And I know that I have only just begun to understand them.

Beethoven and Schoenberg set the stage for Western music to manipulate the tone. And not just *the* manipulation of the tone but *their* manipulation. The elitism and inaccessibility of both Classical and Contemporary music makes audiences into objects, incapable of being trusted with the creation of Art. With Satie's shift to duration, and Cage's exploration of this, the audience shifted to subjects through the breaking of this mysticism of the Art experience. Despite his mythic status in contemporary music, Cage's work attempted to bring audiences in and realize their own power. His statement was not, "Look how beautiful I have made Life to be!" it was, "It is beautiful." The same is true of Fluxus. However, Fluxus leans into the fact that reality is not Ideal. It offers a way out through the change in perspective from a Life-experience to an Art-experience. Life becomes more fluid and thus more able to be made better.

Developing this new practice of collage and multi-layered narrative has allowed me to evaluate not only this history, but, more importantly, the continual struggle to understand and process the world we live in. The Art experience, and the beauty, comes not from the act of production, but from the awareness and arrangement of what has come before. This practice is

not entirely my own. As my research has shown, everything is a natural outgrowth of what came before. Starting in the mid-2000s and the Internet Age, cultural scholars have recognized a new trend called Meta-modernism. This new perspective is about the acceptance of contradiction, "a kind of informed naivety, and a pragmatic idealism."[151] Meta-modernism oscillates between the tenets of modernism and postmodernism without judgement. It recognizes the necessity of modernism's grand narrative and optimism while leaving room for postmodern skepticism. The analysis of these perspectives and their consequences using both sincere and ironic expression is at the heart of Meta-modernism. The knowledge-filled play and gag familiar to Fluxus comes through in this way. Meta-modernism recognizes that humor is necessary as an end, but through ironic expression, it also has the ability to critique and express deep emotion with sincerity.[152]

Another aspect of Meta-modernism is the "transparent balance between the old and the contemporary."[153] By taking materials from the past with mixes of sincerity and irony, a kind of remixing occurs; I call this specific type of remix 'cultural sampling'. My experiences with cultural sampling and remix come from hip hop and jazz. In these two mediums, it is not only common but *expected* that artists quote and use what came before. It is a way of paying respect to the lineage while inserting your own touches on it.[154] In jazz circles in particular, a quote or reference is a sign of knowledge and respecting the history. On the bandstand, it allows musicians to connect to their shared knowledge and engage with each other in the present moment. After the show, an audience member might recognize the tune of the song quoted. This

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[151] Anne-Laure Le Cunff, "An Introduction to Metamodernism: The Cultural Philosophy of the Digital Age," Ness Labs, May 5, 2020.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

[154] With quotation, the question of ownership and privilege is prescient. Stealing from a culture that is not one's own to engage in stereotype and caricature is never acceptable and is often an expression of ignorance and oppression. What I hope to show is my *sincere engagement* with the cultures that produce the materials I use in this piece.

builds a bridge between the knowledge of the performer and the knowledge of the audience and can lead to further conversation and connection. By engaging with Meta-modernism in the 'cultural sampling' realm, I transparently evaluate the history of music, my place in it, and the consequences of each.

Returning to Cage's attempts to find musical terms to agree upon, for me, the Artistic term that can be agreed upon is storytelling. Another aspect of Meta-modernism, narrative storytelling, allows for a different kind of accessibility outside the bounds of the avant-garde. Everyone knows what a story is and how to engage with one. From an early age we are taught that stories teach us about ourselves and how to move through Life. My distillation of an Idea (the evaluation of artistic history and my place in it) into the narrative form, in addition to my compositional process, allows audiences to potentially engage with the Idea in a more relatable manner. Even if the reference and quotation does not translate to lay-audiences, the more accessible narrative expounds the same Idea.

To Schoenberg (hypothetically speaking), the boundaries between my piece's Idea and Style are blurry. My Style is not entirely my own because of my use of quotation. But the placement and rearranging of the many Styles becomes a Style under Meta-modernism. The Idea of which is that the world needs rearranging. Thus, the Style and Idea become intricately linked and much closer toward an engaged practice. If Cage were to evaluate my piece, he might recall a statement he made in his *Composition as Process* lecture. As he puts it, "WITH CONTEMPORARY MUSIC THERE IS NO TIME TO DO ANYTHING LIKE CLASSIFYING, ALL YOU CAN DO IS SUDDENLY LISTEN IN THE SAME WAY THAT WHEN YOU CATCH A COLD ALL YOU CAN DO IS SUDDENLY SNEEZE."[155] This piece is my sneeze.

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[155] John Cage and Kyle Gann, *Silence*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 46.

There are no blanket statements or clear directions forward, it simply *is.* It is my reaction to my present moment and an attempt to translate an Idea. Whether this Idea or expression has any higher significance is irrelevant to my decision to make it.

As I have learned from Fluxus, the label Art is the validation of a particular way of moving through the world; one that prizes awareness and engagement. For me, evaluating Art as the name of a way of doing things, its history, and its consequences have allowed me to unravel the growing complexity of both Art and Life. In our contemporary culture, I believe that Art and Life are out of balance. Because of the mysticism and wonder associated with Art experiences, the beauty of Life has become diminished. The deification of Art and Artist and the domination of nature that can result are products of a larger system in which I do not want to participate. There is so much cultural identification with this model of Art that any challenge to it, including Fluxus, causes people to retreat to the status quo. Major orchestras consistently perform works by Beethoven, Debussy, Ravel, and other deified (dead) composers, while the more accessible Flux-events remain underground. The methods of moving through Life in simple, playful, and effective ways are inaccessible because of the way we are socialized. This piece, and my research, has given me the opportunity to track the development of these socializations, recognize their necessity in our culture, and evaluate their ramifications. By engaging with the whole spectrum of Art and Life, from the Ideal to the Absurd, I cannot say that I have a definitive path forward. With further research, perhaps Meta-modernism has opened the door for me to continue to produce work that evaluates itself. Or, perhaps, I may begin working directly in Life materials as a Fluxus artist. Regardless of what path I choose to follow, to return to Cage's metaphor, my sneeze has built a bridge that allows me to engage with the full spectrum of

Art/Life. No expression is weighed any higher than any other, what matters is the intention with which they are done and the acknowledgement that nobody knows anything.

Art's obscured the difference
between art and life. Now let life obscure
the difference between life and art.
Fuller's life is art: comprehensive
design science, inventory of world
resources (if enough mined copper
exists, re-use it, don't mine more:
same with ideas). World needs
arranging.

-John Cage, Diary of How to Improve the World (24)

Appendix A

Musings from Honfleur, izzy stitchick

"I felt the urge to reassure him that I was like everybody else, just like everybody else"
-Albert Camus, The Stranger

I walk the streets of Erik Satie's birthplace
And I am at odds
With the question:

Is the human experience truly translatable?

Will the man lounging on the promenade
Immersed in a first edition of Albert Camus
Take one look at me
And scoff

to set his pretentions parisian precedent

Or will he softly pat the neighboring concrete
As an invitation to understanding. We will not speak as I step inside his perspective

And admire the pastel tiers of harborside garrets
Connected in their engineered embrace.

The whispering eaves of the crumbling church
Draw me closer with their pitiful prayers I kneel by the altar and think of Erik And whether he ever felt so reverent And transfixed in a place.

We will ask for answers in churches
And ponder philosophies on the promenade
Across generations and decades
Yet the ritual remains.

Millions of marbles of crystalline Retrievals, captures of the corporeal. We cradle the mundane in receptivity And coddle the babe to metaphysical fruition.

How Miraculous!

Conjoined by this nurturance of thought, We will send scrapbooked love letters
To the abstraction of human consciousness
Through the collective corpus collosum And only hope that another soul awaits Our celestial response.

Appendix B

Did You Know, izzy stitchick

That 3 in 4 poor people are just faking it?
Yeah, they just really love that government cheese.
Those goddamn tax-hungry leeches
All they have to do is pick up the phone and say:
"Another check Daddy, please?"

Did you know that women actually like to be told what to do?
Their frontal cortex is too clouded by gossip and man-lust
They think critically only if they absolutely must
Thank god for the new decision-maker device-
In pussy pop pink of course!

Did you know that nonbinary people are… real?
They're seducing our wives with their ambiguous gender.
I don't understand her please for connection,
She should just be grateful I still want to fuck her.

Did you know climate change is a hoax?
Those tree-huggers are denser than the trunks in their arms.
Rapacious forest fires and rising oceans are no cause for alarm
We'll simply eat money and drink beggar's blood when the world finally ends.

Did you know that the government really cares?
From thrones in white manors they shout, "Hey! Play fair."
They want what is best and vote with their hearts,
That's why this country is falling apart.

Appendix C

Link to Onedrive folder with scores and corresponding MIDI recordings: SEMIRAMIS, did you know, and Le Tombeau:

Scores and Recordings for The Flower Cries Blue

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