

NAKED EMPTY SILENCE

for cello, totem électrique, and electronics

(all notes are mouthpiece/movement 'accents';
keep the mouthpiece moving at all times)

(no trem.)

—tiny bit of msp—

(crini)

(still keep mouthpiece moving)

più mosso $\text{♩} = 63$
[3+8+13+5]

col legno tratto

crini

C2

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programme note

Samuel Beckett's *mirlitonrades* are small poems in French, described by the author as "gloomy French doggerel". I first came across them in *Harper's* magazine (US) in 2006. Several contemporary writers had translated a single seven-word poem into English, illustrating perfectly not only the difficulty of poetry translation in general but the rich abundance of meaning that can be mined from a few well-chosen words: "rêve / sans fin / ni trêve / à rien" ("dream / without cease / or treaty / of peace" according to Roger O'Keefe).

I found more of these translated in a blog post by Eric Hoffman. I was struck by one in particular: "naked empty silence / will never / be / empty silence". There is an obvious musical link here to Cage and what we might call the impossibility of silence, but *naked empty silence* is no *silent piece*. There is however a concentration on extremes of dynamic, for the most part extremely quiet but significantly amplified and thus inviting the listener to hear the (almost) silence, the delicate playing techniques through the sonic microscope that the microphone can be.

But what really attracted me to the musical potential of these short translated poems was the connection to the impossibility of an exact but always *obligatory* translation of a music score's symbols into sonic structures—or even the desirability of an attempt at such, whatever that may entail.

Jean-François' instruments, even when screaming, are delicate, unpredictable beasts. Writing for them necessitates navigating the unknown, to a certain extent, along with everything that can happen within it. A complex live electronics system increases the unpredictability and the need to think on your feet and react quickly during the performance. Choosing unstable sound production techniques on the cello seemed apt in this context, as well as the presentation and re-presentation of structures created with fragile sonorities on both instruments and elaborated with electronics. This double coupling forms a certain translation and re-translation, here by the same musicians rather than by different authors. It offers both players and listeners the opportunity to hear the same short musical utterance several times, extracting different significance upon each apprehension.

naked empty silence was written on the invitation of Gordon Williamson for Jean-François Laporte and Martha Bijlsma for the *zeitlupe* 2023 concert series in Hannover, and for Jean-François with Émilie Girard-Charest in Montréal.

programmtext

Samuel Becketts *Mirlitonrades* sind kleine Gedichte in französischer Sprache, die der Autor als "düsterer französischer Knittelvers" bezeichnete. Zum ersten Mal stieß ich 2006 in der Zeitschrift Harper's (USA) auf sie. Mehrere zeitgenössische Autoren hatten ein einziges Gedicht mit sieben Wörtern ins Englische übersetzt, was nicht nur die Schwierigkeit der Übersetzung von Gedichten im Allgemeinen, sondern auch die reiche Fülle an Bedeutung, die aus wenigen, gut gewählten Wörtern gewonnen werden kann, perfekt illustriert: "rêve / sans fin / ni trêve / à rien" (nach Roger O'Keefe "dream / without cease / or treaty / of peace", etwa "träumen / ohne Unterlass / oder Vertrag / des Friedens").

Mehr davon fand ich in einem Blogbeitrag von Eric Hoffman übersetzt. Eines davon hat mich besonders beeindruckt: "naked empty silence / will never / be / empty silence" ("nackte leere Stille / wird niemals / leere Stille / sein" vielleicht). Es gibt hier eine offensichtliche musikalische Verbindung zu Cage und dem, was wir die Unmöglichkeit der Stille nennen könnten, aber *naked empty silence* ist kein *stummes Stück*. Es gibt jedoch eine Konzentration auf die Extreme der Dynamik, größtenteils extrem leise, aber deutlich verstärkt und so den Zuhörer einladend, die (fast) Stille zu hören, die delikatsten Spieltechniken durch das Klangmikroskop, das das Mikrophon sein kann.

Aber was mich wirklich an dem musikalischen Potential dieser kurzen übersetzten Gedichte reizte, war die Verbindung zur Unmöglichkeit einer exakten, aber immer *obligatorischen* Übersetzung der Symbole einer Partitur in klangliche Strukturen - oder sogar die Wünschbarkeit eines solchen Versuchs, was auch immer das mit sich bringen mag.

Die Instrumente von Jean-François sind, selbst wenn sie schreien, empfindliche, unberechenbare Wesen. Für sie zu schreiben bedeutet also, sich bis zu einem gewissen Grad auf das Unbekannte einzulassen, zusammen mit allem, was darin passieren kann. Ein komplexes Live Elektroniksystem erhöht die Unvorhersehbarkeit und die Notwendigkeit, während der Aufführung schnell zu denken und schnell zu reagieren. Die Wahl instabiler Klangerzeugungstechniken auf dem Cello schien in diesem Zusammenhang angemessen, ebenso wie die Präsentation und Re-Präsentation von Strukturen, die mit fragilen Klängen auf beiden Instrumenten und mit Elektronik ausgefeilt geschaffen wurden. Diese doppelte Kopplung bildet eine gewisse Übersetzung und Rückübersetzung, hier aber durch dieselben Musiker statt verschiedenen Autoren. Sie bietet sowohl Spielerninnen als auch Zuhörerinnen die Möglichkeit, zu versuchen, dieselbe kurze musikalische Äußerung mehrmals zu hören und dabei unterschiedliche Signifikanz zu gewinnen.

naked empty silence wurde auf Einladung von Gordon Williamson für Jean-François Laporte und Martha Bijlsma für die Konzertreihe *zeitlupe* 2023 in Hannover und für Jean-François mit Émilie Girard-Charest in Montréal geschrieben.

performance notes

instrumentation

- 1 *bol* (*totem* instrument) with air, tube, and trombone mouthpiece
 - see <https://totemcontemporain.com/en/instruments/bol>
- cello
- electronics: these will need a separate performer seated as close to the hall's sweet spot as possible, next to the mixing desk
- both instruments are amplified, with a clip-on (e.g. DPA 4099) and stand-mounted cardioid for the cello
- the cello makes extensive use of *multiphonics*, notated as chords
 - see <https://cellomap.com/multiphonics-basics/> for details and examples
 - note that the lowest note of a chord, with a diamond notehead, represents the node at which the indicated string is to be touched in order to create the multiphonic
 - * all nodes are rounded to the nearest quarter tone so experimentation will be necessary to find the exact node nearby
 - the notes above the diamond represent the sounding pitch(es)
 - * these are also represented as partial numbers in square brackets above the staff so as to make it easy to recognise the multiphonic when comparing with cellomap.com
 - * the emergence of the sounding pitches will depend on the use of the bow, dynamic, etc.
 - * it is expected that the spectrum of any and all multiphonics will be in flux and even that at some points, or with certain playing techniques, none of the notated pitches will sound very clearly
 - * in any case though, the sounding open string should be avoided

beginning

- the room is silent, amplification gain is down to zero
- as such the cello is either barely or not at all audible until the gain slowly increases
- once the gain makes the cello's bowed bridge clearly present, effects from Max/MSP will be faded up
- at this point the piece can proceed from bar 4

Max/MSP

- at present these are improvised in a structured manner by the composer
- a mono summed signal from each of the cello and bol mics will be needed as line input
- as the output is an ambisonics signal, it can be routed to virtually any loudspeaker setup but a minimum of quad is required for proper representation

naked empty silence

michael edwards 2023

duration c. 14 minutes

start unamplified; repeat the first three bars as many times as necessary to establish the mood, the amplification, and the FX, before proceeding

slow, focused, and very present ♩ = 45

crini, on bridge, tonlos

poco 2 (fermata optional) 3 4 poco 5 6 7

cello

ppp < pp > ppp < p > ppp

bol

(finger tap)

pizz.

ppp

all tremolos unmeasured

poco 8 9 10 11 12 poco 13 14 15 16

ppp < p > ppp < p > ppp

poco 17 18 19 20 poco 21 poco 22 23 24 25 26

ppp (ppp)

27 28 poco poco 29 30 sim. 31 32 33 34 35

(ppp)

tiny bit of I msp in the tremolo (= molto sul pont.)

molto più mosso ♩ = 138

NB all jetés at lower dynamics should be light and not too intrusive

I[6+11+5]

36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45

(ppp) (ppp)

jeté- -

pizz. ppp

46 47 48 49 51 52 53 54

(jeté)

A2

molto meno mosso ♩ = 55

bounce then remove when done

start air, cresc. to pp by A3

pizz. pizz. pizz. p p

NB these harmonics all result in the same pitch and may or may not sound: a dull pizz attack is also fine as long as they're varied
IV[7] (sempre)

55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63

pizz. pp

pizz. pp

pizz. pp

64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72

arco ppp

(finger rub)

A3

73 74 75 76 77 78

pizz.

each note is a slight accent: move suddenly faster, just for a moment and continue the movement during the rests

+ pizz

air: *pp* (*pp*)

79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87

just movement accents, no pizz

pizz.

(*pp*) 3

88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95

pizz.

now stop moving during the rests

pizz.

96 97 98 99 100

pizz.

movement:

NB implicit in these tied multiphonics is a constant change of timbre as the individual harmonics emerge and disappear

IV[6+11+5] 102 103 104

col legno tratto (until B2) 105 poco 106 107 108 109 poco

A4

101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109

ppp pp

slowly turn off air to B1. NB these next bars function as a cross-fade from bol air to cello

101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109

naked empty silence

110 *poco* 111 *poco* 112 *poco* 113 *poco* 114 *poco*

115 *poco* 116 *poco* 117 **B1** 119 *pizz.* 120

pp *pp*

pizz. (air now off) *pp*

IV[6+11+5] II[3+11+8] (b) II[3+11+8]

(circular bowing: this small circular indicates small circle bows; large circles are also used)

121 *arco* 122 IV[6+11+5] 123 *poco* *poco* *poco* 124 125 126 127 II[5+9+11+4]

pp

128 *pizz.* 129 130 *arco* *poco* 131 II[5+9+11+4] 132 *pizz.* 133 II[3+11+8] 134 *arco* *poco* 135 II[5+9+11+4] 136 *poco*

pp *pp* *pp* *pp*

II[3+11+8] arco
pizz.
137 138 139

II[5+9+11+4] arco
pizz.
140 141 142 143 144 145

I[3+8+13+5] arco
pizz.

pp

sul pont.
III crini
poco
146 148 149 150 151 152 153 154

IV[6+11+5] ord. poco

B2

start air from nothing
mouthpiece just hanging on membrane

pizz.
pp

pp

155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162

III 3

first mouthpiece sound: on each note try to make the mouthpiece sound by moving the tube + pizz

air: *pp*

pp

più mosso ♩ = 63

B3

163 164 165 166 167 168 169

III II

+ pizz

pp

5 5

air

pp

naked empty silence

(vertical trem.: long to short)

(careful not to produce a pitch on the tailpiece)

170 171 172 174 175 176

ppp

pp

meno mosso ♩ = 51

||[5+9+11+4] **col legno tratto**

177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184

pp

pp

air

B4

pizz.(light)

||[3+8+13+5]

186 187 188 189 190 191

pp

ppp

pp

jeté → *tratto*

(air off)

pizz.(light)

pizz.

||[3+8+13+5]

poco più mosso ♩ = 55

||[5+9+13+4]

192 193 194 195 196

pp

p

ppp

jeté → *tratto* → *crini*

C1

pizz.

(pp)

air

198 199 200 201 202 203

pp

poco

poco

(all notes are mouthpiece/movement 'accents';
keep the mouthpiece moving at all times)

pp (*pp*)

204 205 206 207 208 209

(no trem.)

pp

poco

clb crini

210 211 212 213 214 215

-tiny bit of msp-

(crini)

pp

(still keep mouthpiece moving)

(*pp*)

216 217 218 219 220 221 223 224

più mosso ♩ = 63
|[3+8+13+5]

col legno tratto-----> crini

pp

C2

air

I[5+9+13+4] I[3+8+13+5] 226 227 jeté→tratto 228 II[5+9+13+4] II[4+11+7+3] jeté crini 229 clb 230

mouthpiece held, no pitch as such but low if any, with vibrato, never stable the notes represent 'sudden' changes

II[4+11+7+3] I[5+9+13+4] 231 clb(single)₁ 232 233 234 235 236 237 I[5+9+13+4] crini→col legno tratto-----crini

II[4+11+7+3] 240 jeté tratto 239 clb jeté→tratto 241 pizz. col legno clb(single) jeté→tratto tratto C3

I[6+11+5]
II[4+11+7+3]
jeté → tratto → crini

244 (b) 245 246 247 248 249 250

mp *mf*

251 252 253 254 II[7+10+13+3] 255 256 257 258 259 260

3

air

molto più mosso ♩ = 116 in this section a staccato dot implies a battuto attack

I[6+11+5] II[7+10+13+3] jeté → tratto jeté → tratto jeté → tratto I[6+11+5]

261 C4 262 263 264 265 266

p

mouthpiece 'thrown' onto membrane in rhythmic unision with the cello

IV[10]: bow behind fingers 267 268 269 270 271 272

IV[7+10+13+3] jeté→tratto jeté→tratto

II[7+10+13+3] I[6+11+5] **D1** molto meno mosso ♩ = 63

273 275 276 277 278 279

on this note, remove the mouthpiece suddenly and block the tube with the thumb

mf

these notes indicate a noise burst caused by slightly removing the thumb and replacing it quickly; let the burst create membrane resonances ad lib.

these held notes are longer noise sounds, beginning with a burst and proceeding with a diminuendo each time; interact with the membrane ad lib.

280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288

push tube into membrane to create a low drone by D2

289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299

mf

the length of the held notes from here to the end is left to the discretion of the performers, but each could be up to a minute or more length

IV[7+10+13+3]
 IV[10]: bow behind fingers

D2

match and hold the pitch of the very high bol tones; if necessary re-establish the pitch but both players should endeavour to hold or return to the established pitch

establish a scratchy subharmonic and in one of the following repeats, after enough of the subharmonic, tune down the C string to match the pitch of the bol and establish the open string, abandoning the subharmonic

D3 I

D4 *più mosso* ♩ = 86

sudden jump to high tone(s)

sudden jump to lowest drone: A1 if possible

repeat these bars until you or the audience can't take it anymore

consider coordinating these reattacks with something similar on the bol

sudden high, short noise burst breaks off the piece

