

Voices of Temptation

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link to audio file:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/wvnc09yhcg1smp8/A.%20F.%20BATTISTA%20Voices%20of%20Temptation.mp3>

Abstract. *Voices of Temptation is a stereophonic composition inspired by the first of Thomas Stearns Eliot’s “Four Quartets”, Burnt Norton. It investigates voice’s possibilities through its dematerialization, micro/macrosopic analysis and interaction with electronics, and its relationship with time and reality.*

1. About *Voices of Temptation*

The “Four Quartets” by Thomas Stearns Eliot are regarded by many to be the greatest philosophical poem of the last century. In this opera, T. S. Eliot considers the relationship between life in time, a life of bondage and suffering, and life in eternity, freedom, and happiness. The first of the quartets, “Burnt Norton”, which is the text used for this composition, is the most explicitly concerned with *time* as an abstract principle. Its final section, the fifth, is strictly connected to the concepts of reality, time and death; despite the apparent vitality of words and music, also these must die. Through the repetition of words and the use of structures like *chiasmus* and *pastiche*, Eliot creates a rhythm not dependent on previous poetic forms. It is as if the mere meaning of the words is not enough to express the philosophical concepts Eliot wants to explore, as they “decay with imprecision”: he must exploit the physical properties of the words themselves. The repetition and circularity of language that are this poem’s hallmarks highlight the infinite circularity of time: just as past, present, and future cannot be separated with any precision, neither can the words used to describe them. Rather than exploiting bizarre combinations of images or intricate formal devices, Eliot uses the gravity of terms like “past” and “present” to create a beautiful monument of ideas.

VOICES OF TEMPTATION starts from *Burnt Norton* to explore voice’s possibilities and physical properties of the words themselves, as Eliot does. Luciano Berio always admitted to be very sensitive, perhaps too much, to the excess of connotations that voice, whatever it does, brings. From the most insolent noise to the most exquisite singing, voice always means something, always refers to something other than itself and

creates a very wide range of associations. In this sense, a voice is a *continuous temptation*.

In this composition, almost all sound events come from a male voice declaiming Eliot's verses in their Italian translation, but it results clear only in a few moments for some key verses. One centre of interest in the quartet is constructed around the Chinese jar and the ruminations on poetry in the fifth section. It is a tribute to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", with which it shares some of its thematic concerns and its imagery. The Chinese jar represents the capacity of art to transcend the limitations of the moment, to achieve a kind of victory over, or perspective upon, time. In its form and pattern, in its physical existence, the jar is able to overcome the usual imprecision of human expression. By emphasizing form and pattern, Eliot suggests that poetry, which takes advantage of the linguistic versions of these, may also be able to achieve transcendence. Nevertheless, at the end there still remains the ghostly laughter of children in the garden, mocking "the waste sad time" of the poet and of poetry. In the same way, the composition's aim is to transcend language limitation and to extend the infinite spectrum of sonority of voice *through* music.

2. Algorithms and strategies

Voice is acquired ad hoc on the basis of the composition's purposes. Each sound is subjected to various editing processes, especially warping, shuffling, convolutions, delays. All the processes I've used are related to my idea of composition: I'd like to bereave voice from its connotations. I formed complex sounds without any harmonic relationship. Changing the envelope of each sound, I meant that synthetic sounds have a typical profile of the sampled voice sound and voice loses its shape to conquer another one.

Many of the sound events are severely distorted, or deprived of their transitional attack, to create events more or less prolonged with an attack transient artificially slow. On some of these I applied a new transitional character, quick and impulsive, using the spectrum of the resonance area, commonly less rich in harmonics.

The continuous bands are constructed from pink noise, with an excess of power for the low frequencies, molded with the convolution of other waveforms. I used a delay in multiple sections, also with feedback, with the possibility to modulate or maintain constant the delay time.

2.1. Space

Space is not mainly focusing on the forward axis, but tends rather to a wide distribution of the composition, also with moments of prevalence of exclusive zone or with obvious sudden contrasts.

I used MaxMSP to create an algorithm that allows me to manage the mapping of each sound event by creating random trajectories.

References

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