THE NOTHINGNESS OF PRESENCE: SOUND, RITUAL, AND ENCOUNTER IN

THE MUSIC OF INTO YOUR HANDS

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The ritual music written for the Compline service of the Liturgy of the Hours, *Into Your Hands*, is analyzed using an ontological and phenomenological approach, which seeks to answer how such sound/musical phenomena wed to the specific ritual dynamics of Compline in their own right can create a potential for encounter with the Divine. The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber’s understanding of *encounter* is used to show that the sound/musical phenomena in itself bears similarities with the nature of the Judeo/Christian God, and such a nature is revealed to be both irreducibly non-conceptual as well as an entity that establishes the ontological actuality of one’s being. Studies in the beginnings of humanity at large as well as the beginnings of the individual fetus reveal that an integrated expression of music and ritual can be said to have formed the impetus of such ontological beginnings through *encounter*. Therefore, one of the first sounds heard in the womb - that of water (or amniotic fluid) - constitutes what may be an archetypal sound of *encounter*. The phenomenological effects of such an archetype are analyzed in the music of *Into Your Hands* through topics such as the loss of aural perspective, immersion, dynamic swells, cyclic harmonic progressions, and simultaneity. Works of other composers who use similar techniques are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

_Around the lip of the cup we share, these words,_
_My Life Is Not Mine._

_If someone were to play music, it would have to be very sweet._
_We’re drinking wine, but not through lips._
_We’re sleeping it off, but not in bed._
_Rub the cup across your forehead._
_This day is outside living and dying._

Rumi

In the history of humanity, music and ritual have been integral aspects of a single
unction, expression, or tradition. The abstraction of music from contexts such as the
social or spatial experience of sound contains the potential to orient an interpreter
toward a disembodied understanding of music. As the ethnomusicologist John Blacking
has articulated, “we must recognize that no musical style has ‘its own terms’: its terms
are the terms of its society and culture, and of the bodies of the human beings who
listen to it, and create and perform it” (Blacking 1973, 25). And yet the “terms” of a
music’s society and culture can prove to be even more enigmatic due to the fact that so
many societies tend to create music surrounding the ineffable qualities of the religious,
spiritual, or supernatural impulse. This impulse has been most universally embodied in
ritual acts (Bellah 2005, 189).¹

There resides a danger in objectifying this impulse for the sake of a musical,
cultural, and/or ritual analysis due to the tendency of an “outside” observer to become
steeped in a bias that dichotomizes his or her own thought (and favors it) against
participants’ actions. The ritual theorist, Catherine Bell, has located the problems with
such analyses in the “manner in which we theoretically constitute ritual as the object of

¹ See Robert Bellah’s interpretation of Bruno Nettle’s work
a cultural method of interpretation” (Bell 1992, 16-17). She argues that our understanding of “human experience” (Bell 1992, 17) is severely limited when ritual is conceived of as simply being an active representation of cultural phenomena.

I locate the answer to the inevitable question then of how to analyze ritual music in the work of social anthropologist Bruce Kapferer, who calls for an approach that analyzes the “internal dynamics of rite as the potency of the capacity of ritual to alter, change, or transform the existential circumstances of persons in nonritual realities” (Kapferer 2005, 47). In other words, an approach that considers what the ritual and ritual music do (or at least seek to do)—in an ontological sense—to participants, not what they represent. Part of what I am proposing in my thesis is that this altering of participants’ existential realities occurs most remarkably in what the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, has described as “encounter” with the other. Ritual action is a seedbed for this “encounter” with the social other as well as the divine other, and the “encounter” of the Divine other mediated through the social other.

*Into Your Hands* is one such example of ritual music that was written for this purpose. It is integrated with the ritual of the last prayer service of the day in the Christian monastic tradition of the Divine Office: Compline (also known as “Night Prayer”). It is the purpose of this paper to explain how specific musical phenomena of the ritual music of *Into Your Hands* contain the potential to engender Buber’s “encounter” with the Divine. An explanation of Buber’s philosophy of “encounter” is first discussed, followed by an explanation of how the integrative functions of music and ritual generally engender this “encounter” (locating the universal religious impulse of ritual). It is within this framework that Compline ritual action is analyzed in its own right.
to reveal its specific accentuation of ontology (in line with Kapferer’s approach) of which the musical elements of *Into Your Hands* are integrated.
CHAPTER 2
THE DYNAMICS OF ENCOUNTER

The two elements of Martin Buber's philosophy—expressed in his book *I and Thou*—which I apply to understanding the musical and sound phenomena of *Into His Hands*, are the *irreducible* and the *actual*. Buber writes that man “establishes modes of existence” by the way he or she enters into reciprocity with an “other.” These modes are established in two ways: the “I-You” and the “I-It” relations (Buber 1970, 53). These modes of existence are ways one relates to the “other” whether that is other beings or other things. For instance, one can relate to a human being as an “It” but one can also relate to a thing as a “You” and vice versa. The “I-It” consists of what Buber calls “experience” and the “I-Thou” consists of reciprocity, or pure relation. It is not in “experience” but in reciprocity that one is confronted with both the *irreducible* and the *actual*.

To “experience” something or someone is to operate within the “I-It” and to treat something or someone as an “object of assertion” (Buber 1970, 138). It is to posses its traits and assert what it is through dividing it into intelligibly digestive parts that categorize the person or thing (Buber 1970, 138). This categorization is synonymous with a conceptual knowing and is the opposite of the *irreducible*. Yet to be in reciprocity is to respect what is unknowable (or non-conceptual) in the mystery of the other, and it is precisely this unknowable mystery inherent in all persons and all things that establishes the “I-You” relation, or reciprocity. It is this reciprocity that Buber calls “encounter.”
In “encounter,” participants possess nothing (Buber 1970, 55). Buber asks, “What, then, does one experience of the You? Nothing at all” (Buber 1970, 61). To relate to a human being as a “You” means that he or she is not made up of categorical things to know but is a “You” that is “neighborless and seamless;” not compared to anyone or anything else but “fills the firmament” of the other’s perception as a borderless being (Buber 1970, 59). This borderlessness can be compared to the non-conceptuality of irreducibility. “Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination” (Buber 1970, 62). Thus the irreducibility of “encounter” possesses a kind of phenomenological trait of “nothingness.”

The “nothingness” of the irreducible encountered in reciprocity is what establishes the actuality of a person’s being who enters into the “I-You” relation. “All actuality,” writes Buber, “is an activity in which I participate without being able to appropriate” (Buber 1970, 113). In other words, all actuality is non-categorical and evades a conceptual knowing. One participates more fully in actuality relative to the degree to which one’s entire being participates in reciprocity (Buber 1970, 62, 113). In this sense actuality is synonymous with presence by the fact that one is more fully conscious of one’s being relative to the degree with which one is more fully present to the other as well as relative to the degree in which one is more fully aware of the other’s borderless, non-conceptual presence. It is in this way that the “nothingness” of irreducibility interpenetrates and establishes the “presence” of actuality. Buber has articulated that the actual is not the consciousness of the ego experiencing itself as a subject and understanding itself as “being-that-way” but it is a consciousness of the “being-with” of reciprocity that establishes the actuality of one’s own being (Buber 1970,
114). “I require a You to become,” writes Buber, “becoming I, I say You” (Buber 1970, 62). Therefore, actuality is directly related to an ontology of “encounter.”
CHAPTER 3
THE SOUND OF ENCOUNTER

The physical nature of the sound phenomena in itself contains these two traits of nothingness and presence: irreducibility and actuality.² Edward Foley is a leading scholar of liturgical studies at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. In his article, “Toward a Sound Theology,” he makes the statement that the full possibility of Martin Buber’s relational paradigm can occur in the acoustic arena. This is due to his understanding of acoustic space as lacking specific content yet being a “sphere delineated by activity” (Foley 1995, 113) and how the human imagination translates this activity as a particularly human presence. Foley’s understanding of acoustic space bears similarities to the interpenetration of presence and nothingness in that the nothingness of the lack of “content” in the sphere of acoustic space contributes to the interpretation of sound’s activity as presence. For instance, the filling of acoustic space with sounds of rummaging in the woods at night will imply a “person-like [manifestation] far more than do movements which one merely sees” (Foley 1995, 109-110). Foley contributes this sense of presence to Buber’s understanding of the “You” as borderless.

² For the sake of this study “sound phenomena” is defined as “a vibratory disturbance in the pressure and density of a fluid, or in the elastic strain in a solid...capable of being detected by the organs of hearing” (Foley 1995, 109). In this way the concept of “music” is included within the terminology of “sound phenomena.” Any further definition of music that seeks to locate its departure from noise (for instance, John Blacking’s understanding that music’s essence lies in its human organization of sound [Blacking 1973, 32]) severely limits the hearer/interpreter’s ability to take into account potential ineffable qualities of aural perception that are central to the thesis of this paper. While a society’s organization of sound can certainly offer insights into how the society socially, politically, and/or humanly organizes itself this definition prematurely cuts off the more enigmatic phenomenological effects of music from its scope. Furthermore, any attempt to universally differentiate music from noise must take into account the perception of the hearer, whose differentiations could potentially be infinite. Therefore, such a differentiation is best left undefined for the purposes of this paper.
It fills the “firmament” of the imagination with the presence of being even more completely than sight.

Part of Foley’s article deals with grasping why sound (or music) is so often wed to ritual action in the history of humanity. He defines ritual as “patterned, shared, public behavior, expressing a meaning and purpose that cannot be put into words alone, [italics mine] in the face of some reality larger than ourselves” (Foley 1995, 115). What is relevant in this definition to this study is that it contains both the nothingness of the non-conceptual as well as the borderless presence of a reality larger than ourselves. Thus what has been discussed above about the aspects of the nothingness and presence of sound reveal similarities between the purposes of ritual and the purposes of music.

Foley interprets the aspects of this borderless reality of the ineffable as the presence (actuality) of the Judeo-Christian God and relates a list of the essential phenomena of sound to certain theological tenants of the Divine in the Judeo-Christian tradition. First, sound is a “time-bound” art. This correlates to the aspect of the Judeo-Christian God who intervenes in specific historical times and places and thus in a sense binds Himself to time. Second, the fact that sound is “perceivable but elusive, recognizable but uncontainable” (Foley 1995, 117) correlates to the paradoxical elusive presence of the Judeo-Christian God who is both present and hidden. He is “recognizable while remaining...unnamable... [‘I am who I am’: God’s self-given name to Moses at the burning bush, Exodus 3:14]” (Foley 1995, 118). Third, sound can be conceived of as a metaphor for engagement because physiologically the ear is always open to sound that dynamically enters into a kind of dialogue and communion. This
openness of the ear elicits some kind of response from the perceiver. In the same way, 
the Judeo-Christian God is understood as dynamic: one who “continuously initiates 
encounters” both historically and in the present (Foley 1995, 118). Fourth, Foley 
describes sound events as “fundamentally unitive” in their ability to create a sense of 
solidarity between persons experiencing the event, between persons performing the 
event, as well as between persons performing and experiencing the event. This 
correlates to the relational aspect of the Judeo-Christian God who calls communities of 
peoples to form a common identity under a covenant. Lastly, Foley understands the 
encounter with sound as particularly imagined in the human psyche as human presence 
because of the tactile aspects of acoustic space discussed above. This correlates to 
the God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures who is considered a “beloved,” a 
“mother,” a “father;” the presence of a personal being who loves. It is these correlations 
that lead Foley to argue that ritual wed to sound is the “locus for encounter with and the 
revelation of such a God” (Foley 1995, 120).

Such an understanding of the presence of sound in itself as an impetus for 
“encounter” is strengthened by the explanation of theories for the origins of music. 
Such theories reveal how the origins of music are intimately interwoven with the origins 
of ritual under the common theme of presence.
Two theories on the origins of music bear striking similarities with each other in that each affirms the origins of a proto-musical experience emerging via a proto-ritualistic experience in humanity’s hominid ancestry. Both also affirm that their respective understandings of this musical-ritual experience are rooted in the ontological beginnings of what it means to be human.

In his article “A Neurobiological Role of Music in Social Bonding,” the neuroscientist Walter Freeman theorizes on what kinds of activities could have bridged the epistemological solipsistic gap existing biologically between humanity’s hominid ancestors’ brains. Such a gap limited the ability of hominids to share conceptual information. His research affirms that a deeply emotional bond must exist between subjects in order for conceptual knowledge and information such as language or culture to pass between persons or groups. His research also shows how music can create altered states of consciousness that can break apart existing neuro-pathways in the brain, making the brain malleable to receive new information and re-form synapses. He affirms that entrained movement present in dance and entrained rhythm present in music are the basic elements that can create such a deeply non-conceptual emotional bond needed for the transmission of knowledge. He draws the conclusion that some kind of ritual consisting of music and entrained movement co-evolved in our hominid ancestors to “serve as a technology of social bonding” that engendered trust over and beyond familial groups, creating pathways in the brain to re-learn a sense of solidarity.
among the species. This, in turn, provided the basis and prerequisite for language and the evolution of humanity (Freeman 2000).

Two points in Freeman’s conclusions are relevant to this study. First, language - or conceptual knowledge - did not precede music; music formed the basis and impetus of conceptual knowledge. Second, the non-conceptuality of music contributed to a pre-lingual “emotional bond” that bears striking similarities to Buberian “encounter.” Music - through a “borderless” non-conceptuality - opened a way for creatures trapped within the bounds of their own instinctively learned synapses to fully encounter the “You” of another: to fully grasp the ontological being of another. And just as Buber has affirmed, this in turn caused the creature to become fully aware of its own being, which is the definition of actuality and human consciousness.

The research of Ellen Dissanayake similarly seeks to hypothesize the origins of music (Dissanayake 2000, 389-404). Her studies of mother-infant relationships has led her to offer an alternative view to human evolution from that of sheer competition which effects reproductive success. She affirms that because of increasing infant altriciality during hominization the need for deeper relational communion developed. This communion was actualized through “ritualized packages of sequential behaviors, vocal, facial, and kinesic, between mothers and infants” (Dissanayake 2000, 390). The prosody of “motherese” (the sounds a mother makes when enjoying her baby) are analyzed as musical with “rhythmic regularity and variety...dynamic variation in intensity, volume, speed, and alterations of vocal timbre” (Dissanyake 2000, 394). This integrative ritualized behavior of sound, movement, and expression leads Dissanyake to conclude that mother-infant interactions in humanity’s primate ancestors could have
been further developed and refined into the temporal arts of dance and music to “serve as affiliative bonding among adults in a species where close cooperation also became unprecedentedly critical for individual survival” (Dissanayake 2000, 389). In her view, it was not the most fit and strong of the species that enabled evolutionary survival but the most deeply bonded.

What is important about Dissanayake’s view is that this bond of communion is a literal outworking of the sounds of “encounter” at the dawn of a person’s being. It is comparable to Freeman’s view in that both see ritual as a part of entrained sound occurring between persons that enable Buberian reciprocity. It is this reciprocity that in Freeman’s view establishes the ontology of the human species and in Dissanayake’s view establishes the ontology of the individual in his or her most malleable state of infancy. Both see the origins of ritual, the origins of music, and the origins of human ontology as being interwoven by the single thread of encounter.

Dissanayake uses the term “dyadic coordination” to describe mother/infant interactions. Fred Cummins is both a linguist and cognitive scientist at University College Dublin. He has done extensive research observing speech patterns arising when two people read from one script, entraining the contour, rhythm, and dynamics of their speech (Cummins 2009, 16-28). In his article, “Toward an Enactive Account of Action,” Cummins sets up a framework by which to view the unparalleled amount of temporal accuracy arising from non-rehearsed synchronous speech. He calls this framework dyadic coordination and defines it within his own research as coordination that is “not entirely attributable to one individual or the other, but to the dyad” where there is “no individual locus of control” (Cummins 2013, 181). He quotes Merleau-Ponty
who said, “the properties of the object and the intentions of the subject [in this case, the properties of two subjects]...are not only intermingled; they also constitute a new whole” (Cummins 2013, 183). It is Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of this “new whole” of dyadic coordination that I believe can account for what Edward Foley described as a “reality larger than ourselves,” in whose face ritual wed with sound acts as the only way to develop meaning. As Buber writes, “Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You” (Buber 1970, 123). It is the entrainment of movement, sound, expression, etc. with the social other in ritual that can act as mediation for an encounter with the Divine. If the Divine is considered the source of being (which is the case in the Judeo-Christian tradition of which Compline is a part) then through the encounter of the social other’s complete ontological otherness reciprocated through the tactile movements of sound and body in ritual (the non-conceptual components of relation) a potential is created for an encounter with the Source of being itself: the Source of such a complete ontological otherness.
CHAPTER 5
MOTHER: THE GROUND OF BEING

Compline is the last service of the day in the Divine Office. It is prayed at night before one goes to sleep. Figure 5.1 shows what prayers are included in this Sunday night ritual, and in what order.

*Figure 5.1. Order of Compline.*

**Introduction:** “God come to my assistance, Lord make haste to help me. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen”

**Examination of Conscience**

**Psalmody:** Psalm 4 and Psalm 134

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 6:4-7

**Responsory:**

“Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit
   - Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit
You have redeemed us, Lord God of truth.
   - I commend my spirit
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
   - Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit”

**Canticle of Simeon:**

Antiphon: “Protect us Lord as we stay awake; watch over us as we sleep, that awake, we may keep watch with Christ, and asleep, rest in his peace.”

“Lord, now you let your servant go in peace;
your word has been fulfilled:
my own eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:
a light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel”

**Concluding Prayer:** “Lord, be with us throughout this night. When day comes may we rise from sleep to rejoice in the resurrection of your Christ who lives and reigns for ever and ever.”

**Conclusion:** “May the all powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death. Amen”

**Antiphon to the Blessed Virgin**

(National Conference for Catholic Bishops 1994, 330-333)
Many of the prayers reference an understanding of sleep as death and waking as resurrection. For instance, the Responsory’s text, “Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit,” is what Christ prayed as He died on the cross. Furthermore, the antiphon of the Canticle of Simeon (which is arguably the climactic prayer and center of the service) petitions that the participants rest in Christ’s peace as they sleep; following such a petition, Simeon’s words are prayed, “Lord, now you let your servant go in peace.” The Scriptural context of Simeon’s prayer is Mary’s consecration of the infant Jesus at the Jewish Temple. The old man Simeon had spent most of his life in prayer at the Temple, waiting and praying for the appearing of a Messiah. This prayer that the participants of Compline now utter is what Simeon prayed over the infant Jesus during this time (Luke 2: 22-38). Therefore, “peace” and “sleep” come to take on the meaning of a death united to Christ’s death. Further references appear in both the concluding prayer and concluding rite: “when day comes may we rise from sleep to rejoice in the resurrection of your Christ” and “may the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and a peaceful death.”

Such an interpretation of death is coupled with the fact that out of all the services of the daily Divine Office, only Compline concludes with an antiphon (or song) sung to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The text of the Salve Regina—the antiphon that Into Your Hands uses—reads “and after this our exile / show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus” (National Conference for Catholic Bishops 2004, 352). In Catholic theology, Mary is understood to be not only the mother of Jesus but also the mother of all believers in Him. Christ’s entrusting of His mother to the disciple John at His death on the cross (John 19: 26-27) is interpreted as Christ giving His mother to all disciples,
regardless of time or place, as their own (United States Catholic Conference 1994, 192, 630, 642). Therefore, in the face of death and as the last act of the rite, participants petition the Blessed Mother to show them the life of Jesus, i.e. the life of their homeland of heaven to which they will return after the “exile” of death.

Ellen Dissanayake’s theory reveals that the infant’s first encounter with life (encounter with his/her own being) is an encounter with the mother. This is a ritualized encounter of movement and sound. An analysis of the contents of Compline’s ritual dynamics shows that the fundamental aspect of its character contains a desire to return to the primary encounter of life—the encounter with Mother—in the face of death. If, as Buber understands it, one’s own being (actuality) is only realized through reciprocity and if the encounter with mother is the fundamental reciprocity that establishes actuality (what literally makes one come into being), then it makes sense that at death this fundamental encounter of being would want to be realized again as an affirmation of the essence of one’s life and as a desire for this life to continue despite death’s seeming ability to dissolve such an encounter.

R. Murray Schafer argues that there is an archetypal sound universally associated with the encounter with Mother. In his liminal work, The Tuning of the World, Schafer describes how within the literature of ancient man the ocean is often represented as the giver of life. This in turn is related to the idea of Mother because:

The ocean of our ancestors is reproduced in the watery womb of our mother and is chemically related to it. Ocean and Mother. In the dark liquid of ocean the relentless masses of water pushed past the first sonar ear. As the ear of the fetus turns in its amniotic fluid, it too is tuned to the lap and gurgle of water (Schafer 1977, 15).

Water “never dies” as Schafer articulates. It is constantly present in its manifold cyclic transformations of state in which it eventual returns to its beginnings (Schafer 1977, 18).
Its resonance against the varying climatic and geographic landscapes of place produces an archetypal sound signifying life due to both its resonance with the womb and its constant manifestations of presence. Such manifestations are enacted through an almost infinite array of spectral variation, which bear similarity to the human biological way of being-in-the-world:

The mind must be slowed to catch the million transformations of the water, on sand, on shale, against driftwood, against the seawall. Some sounds are discrete, others continuous. In the sea the two fuse in primordial unity. The rhythms of the sea are many: infrabiological—for the water changes pitch and timbre faster than the ear’s resolving power to catch its changes; biological—the waves rhyme with the patterns of heart and lung and the tides with night and day; and suprabiological—the external inextinguishable presence of water. (Schafer 1977, 16)

Thus, if we understand actuality as presence and presence as sound (as Foley has articulated), then water (in its infinite presence manifested through its infinite variations of sound which fundamentally resonate with the womb) is the archetypal sound of the actuality of both primordial and existential encounter (as Freeman’s and Dissanayake’s theories support).

These are the reasons why much of the instrumental acoustic and acousmatic sound material of Into Your Hands is inspired by the dynamics of water sounds. These sounds contribute to the music’s morphology of form, counterpoint, harmony, texture, and text setting in an integrative way with the ritual dynamics previously discussed.
A common element in all three pieces of *Into Your Hands* is the slow dynamic swells which move from a soft to loud to soft dynamic. “Meditation” prepares participants for the rite by presenting the listener with an inundation of these swells employed polyphonically between every individual voice and instrument, including multiple layers in the electronics. These swells are comparable to the movement and tide of waves and contribute to an effect of suspension that might be experienced as objects “turn” (as Schafer references, the slow activity of the human fetus immersed in the amniotic fluid of the womb) under water.

There are three levels of timing in which these swells occur, and which are directly correlated to the three bodies of instrumentation in the piece. The swells consisting of the longest sustain begin in the electronics with a D natural. In m. 8 another voice in the electronics at the E natural a m7 below the D gradually increases in volume. At rehearsal A the C# a m2 below the D swells into the acoustic space, at m. 18 an F# above, and at m. 20 an A natural below. This chord sustains for almost two minutes in the electronics until notes begin to fade out or change. The next group of instruments to swell into the acoustic space is the strings; with each respective part’s swell usually lasting about five to six measures. The voices change the quickest; with swells occurring across exactly twelve beats (or three measures). Almost all of these swells employ the stasis of one stable pitch, as shown in Figure 6.1.
Figure 6.1. Temporal levels of “Meditation.”
As “Meditation” progresses, the strings gradually transition from sustained pitches to short, pointilistic groupings of one to six notes, beginning at rehearsal B. Each instrument quickly repeats a single pitch according to its grouping until all the strings are pointilistically engaged in this busy texture. This move from a single swelled note to a single repeated note can be seen as a morphology from the swells’ submarine effect to that of a water droplet. The sense of each individual instrument’s stasis is held due to the fact that a single pitch is being repeated within its grouping. Thus the swelling stasis of a large, bulging body of water has become the tiny, broken droplets of rain: in a sense the essence of the material has not changed but only its state as well as the imagined perspective of the listener. Figure 6.2 shows the string’s activity at the beginning of this change.

Figure 6.2. “Meditation” string transformation mm. 68-76.

This change in the strings takes place together with the change in electronics, transforming from long sustained pitches to soundscape activity meant to represent typical sounds from a potential day in the life of participants. A motivic sound that occurs throughout the entire three pieces and is introduced here is the sound of
footsteps walking through stiff grass. This is introduced as the strings morph, creating multiple layers of potential signification: for example, the crunching and breaking of the grass is abstracted with breaks of silence in the electronics of “Psalm 4” at mm. 61-79 and mm. 130-147, while the strings imitate its timbre through the use of extended techniques (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3. “Psalm 4” strings’ imitation of electronics mm. 61-65.

Both of these instances (of “Psalm 4” and “Meditation”) show that the acoustic instrumentation and the electronics are specifically tied together in their morphology of content. This synthesis is perhaps the most striking at the end of the “Canticle of Simeon” (rehearsal D), where short repeated “note” gestures occur in the electronics through water droplets hitting a metal colander. At this point the strings engage in blatant imitation of the pitch and rhythmic material occurring in the electronics, as both
the string and electronics swell in and out of each other, with the strings finally fading into silence as the electronics take over (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. “Canticle of Simeon” swell between strings and electronics mm. 141 – 151.

Thus there is a gradual increase of synthesis between the acoustic and the electronic sound sources over the course of the three pieces that shifts between three relationships: 1) water in the strings / grass in the electronics in “Meditation,” 2) abstraction of grass sound in both the strings and electronics in “Psalm 4,” and 3) water in both the electronics and strings at the end of the “Canticle of Simeon” (as well as in the vocalists because they begin to play bowl gongs which imitate the water droplet sounds).

Such metaphorical potential for sounds and how this relates to non-conceptual encounter will be analyzed later, but what is important to know at present is that the synthesis of the acoustic and the electronic sounds forms a developing motive in Into Your Hands, which relates directly to the oppositions of water and dryness ending in the total immersion of acousmatic water sound, enveloping the acoustic through the use of
the swelling gesture occurring in hocket between them. In other words, the
development of the swell gesture culminates in how it is used to synthesize acoustic
and electronic sound. This synthesized development forms a macro-gesture as it
moves through the poles of immersive liquid and dryness; presence and nothingness;
continuous sound and abstracted silence. The entire body of acoustic sound serves as
its own representation of “death” moving into the “life” of water.

“Psalm 4” uses the dynamic swell as a water gesture that binds together
harmony, text setting, counterpoint and orchestration to accent the formal elements of
the piece. Each of these elements works together to give the listener a sense of
immersion, placing him or her within the potentially imagined space of the womb.

The text drives the over-arching form of the piece. Each singer is assigned a
short phrase from the psalm to repeat over either a one-note stasis or moving only by
m2 or M2 to a neighboring tone. These phrases are not sung in the direct order of the
Psalm but occur in sections of text that are relatively close to each other and that form
line couplets. For instance, the opening couplet of Psalm 4 is:

When I call, answer me, O God of justice;
from anguish you released me; have mercy and hear me

The bass is assigned “When I call” to sing repetitively, the tenor “O God of justice,” the
alto “from anguish you released me...hear me,” and the soprano “have mercy.” This
text consists of the first sub-section ending at rehearsal A. Figure 6.5 shows an
example of how this text is divided in this sub-section.

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3 More will be said about the significance of this counterpoint later.
The next couplet of the psalm reads:

O men, how long will your hearts be closed
will you love what is futile and seek what is false?

This comprises another sub-section from rehearsal A to m. 40, and a third sub-section begins at m. 42, ending at rehearsal B.

In the beginning sub-section (mm. 1-58), the dynamic swells arise in the strings at m. 16 out of a C2 M7/E harmonic stasis. Each swell brings to the acoustic foreground the neighbor tone movement of each respective instrument’s line (see Figure 5). This is done in imitation of the vocal line movements that have thus far developed over the string stasis. The swelling activity stops at rehearsal A and the strings again employ a harmonic and dynamic stasis signaling the beginning of the second sub-section. The swell gesture does not occur in this sub-section; instead, pairs of string instruments begin to change pitch together at staggered points throughout the sub-section, creating a subtle change of mood that pulls the listener slightly out of an immersed state by a stronger definition of harmonic change, which will be discussed later (see Figure 6.6).
This correlates to the change of mood in the text, which shifts focus to address men instead of God. At m. 42 the third sub-section is begun by the most significant simultaneous harmonic change so far in the piece as three string instruments (double bass, cello, and viola) change pitch at the same time (see Figure 6.6). Throughout this section, the dynamic swells return as the text in a sense answers its opening anxiety of “When I call, answer me O God...” with “the Lord hears me whenever I call him.”

Throughout all of these sub-sections the rhythmic activity of the vocal text setting contributes to the same immersive quality of staggered swells. Just as the swells are rhythmically staggered so as to aurally conceal beat recognition, so too is the syllabic setting of the text.

The harmony in “Psalm 4” also acts as a textual and sectional demarcator, which at the same time signifies immersion. In both the string quintet and the vocal quartet, lines move in and out of aggregate harmonic clusters. In the first sub-section, these clusters can be interpreted as a IV-I harmonic movement within the tonal center of G. Figure 6.7 shows a harmonic reduction of the different aggregates that can occur in the vocal quartet of the first sub-section.
The IV-I progression (especially IV-I6) perpetuates stasis through the cyclic nature of each triad’s natural inclination to resolve into the other, especially when added seconds and sevenths are used in the IV chord without the third. This causes it to possess three common tones with the I chord, in effect burying the I chord within the IV chord, and letting most of the pitch material of both chords remain at stasis between changes. This could also be analyzed as a single I chord vacillating in and out of 4-3 suspensions, strengthening the idea of stasis in that the entire section would consist of a single chord (see Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8. The IV-I harmonic oscillation.

The fact that “Psalm 4” relies heavily on the IV chord with added second and seventh to activate stasis is important to the piece, as the opening passage of stasis in the strings consists of this specific harmony. In this way, the opening acts as a harmonic foreshadowing and microcosmic illustration of the entire piece’s harmonic function.

This same chord returns at rehearsal C, albeit transposed to its chromatic mediant and voiced differently. Here the strings do not hold the stasis as long as before, and at m. 89, the dynamic swells return; however, the single note that had filled the swell in “Meditation” and had transformed into neighbor tone movement in the
beginning of “Psalm 4,” has now incorporated each of these elements within groupings of dynamically swelling sextuplets oscillating between repeated neighbor tones (see Figure 6.9).

*Figure 6.9. “Psalm 4” swelling sextuplets mm. 89-94.*

The scheme of tonality also directly correlates to the demarcation of the beginning sub-sections of “Psalm 4.” The first sub-section centers its tonality around G, although the lowest note of E is held as a pedal tone at the opening until m. 23 in the double bass, creating an ambiguity between the implied tonalities of E minor and C lydian. As the text changes to the next couplet at m. 32, the tonality centers on C major with a harmonic progression more rhythmically defined by the entrained movement of the double bass and cello, resulting in the implied progression of I, vi (m. 35), I 6/4 passing chord (m. 37), IV (m. 40). At m. 42 the third sub-section begins with new text and a tonal ambiguity occurs similar to the beginning from mm. 42-46. This ambiguity rests on a cluster chord consisting of the pitches G, A, B, C, and D in the strings, which belong to both C and G major tonalities. It isn’t until the violin II plays an F# leading tone at m. 46 that the listener feels the tonality has shifted to G. This tonal schema is a macro-extension of the I-IV-I micro-harmonic oscillation as it moves from the tonal centers of G to C and back to G.
The only movement between the IVadd2add7 (no third) - I6 oscillation in the key of G consists of one m2 neighbor tone between C and B natural (see Figure 9). The counterpoint of the beginning sub-sections of “Psalm 4” is largely based on this single neighbor tone movement of seconds and their inverted intervals of sevenths that the IVadd2add7 - I6 progression contains. At the beginning of the piece, almost every instrument (including vocalists) enters at either a second or seventh apart from another instrument entering near it. For instance, the viola in m. 2 enters at a M7 below violin I and a M2 below violin 2. At m. 3 the double bass enters at a (octave displaced) m7 below violin 2 and at m. 4 the cello reinforces this interval within the octave at a m7 against the bass. Also, the bass vocalist enters the texture at m. 5 a M7 from the soprano and a M2 from the cello (see Figure 6.10).  

Figure 6.10. “Psalm 4” contrapuntal 7ths and 2nds.

The return to a IV chord stasis right before rehearsal C also employs this counterpoint, as the cello plays a G#, which is a M7 from both the double bass and viola entrance. The violin II also enters at a m7 from the F# in the violin I.
In the beginning sub-sections of “Psalm 4,” the linear movement of this interval of a second becomes accentuated through the dynamic swells, and in particular the movement between the specific pitches of C - B and B - C (the only neighbor tone movement of the IV - I6 oscillation) is repeated most often. The vocal lines do not swell, but almost all of them oscillate between neighbor tones for the duration of the entire first section of the piece (until rehearsal B). For instance, at the opening the soprano oscillates between A and B, the alto between G and F#, the bass between C and B while the tenor holds a D. At almost every swell that the strings play during this opening sub-section, the movement from C to B or B to C is employed, with the exception of the movement from G to A in mm. 21-22 in the viola and D to C at mm. 25-26 in the violin I. When the swells return at m. 44, more variation of pitch space is used but the intervals of a second remain a motive. Figure 6.11 shows an arhythmic harmonic reduction of the opening measures of “Psalm 4” and highlights the neighbor tone movement within the counterpoint. The clear note-heads show the harmonic reduction of the strings and the black note-heads the reduction for the vocalists.

It is interesting to note that the vocalists are immersed tightly within the string’s orchestration in terms of pitch space, with most of the strings at higher frequencies above the voices. This orchestration contributes to the same sense of immersion present within the elements discussed above, further creating a womb-like environment: a sound that surrounds the specifically human timbre of the voice.
Water sounds are first introduced in the electronics in synthesis with the
sextuplets beginning in m. 89 of “Psalm 4.” The sextuplet swells begin to occur more
and more closely together creating a sense of tension until the climax of the piece
occurs at rehearsal D, as the vocalists sing, “Let the light of your face shine on us.” The
sound of a waterfall parallels this climax in the electronics and continues to resonate
until the next section at rehearsal E. The dynamic swell gesture at the opening of the
“Canticle of Simeon” takes on more of the morphology as sextuplets are played with
swelling single notes in the strings and more variance of water sounds are
acoustically mixed in synthesis with these swells (mm. 1-9). As the swells move
back into polyphony (as in “Meditation” and “Psalm 4”) from the opening homophonic
texture at m. 10, a new morphology takes place: the swells become microcosms of
varying polyrhythmic textures that form the basis of the rhythmic material of the
“Canticle of Simeon.” Such polyrhythm can be said to enable the Buberian non-
conceptual encounter of “I-Thou” reciprocity.
CHAPTER 7
THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SIMULTANEITY

Each swell of the strings in mm. 12-21 of the *Canticle of Simeon* moves into the acoustic space at varying rhythmic values over minimalistic, repeated note gestures, until each respective part locks into material that bears polyrhythmic variance vertically (variance between parts) but continues within its figure linearly (see Figure 7.1).

*Figure 7.1. “Canticle of Simeon” mm. 12-21.*

Here the parts align in dynamic homophony until at m. 24 rhythmic augmentations begin to occur at different times within parts, as the pitch materials do not vary but are “stretched out” through time while the vocalists’ material changes into speech (Figure 7.2). This “stretched out” material functions as a transformative passage (rehearsal A - m.43) that moves the music into the next section. This section (m. 43-rehearsal C) is marked by both transformations of rhythm that occurred in the transformative passage: vertical polyrhythm of a duple and triple subdivision of the beat, as well as each part linearly oscillating between these two subdivisions over time in hocket. In effect, this causes the parts to horizontally hand rhythms off between each other so that one part almost always holds a different subdivision of the beat than the other. This primarily occurs between the viola, cello, and bass in this section (Figure. 7.3).
Figure 7.2. “Canticle of Simeon” mm. 24-28.
A macro-extension of this polyrhythmic technique occurs at the climax of “Psalm 4” (m. 101), in the form of a polycyclic harmonic gesture (see Figure 7.4). This same passage is reprised at m. 103 of the “Canticle of Simeon” with different text. From mm. 101-105 in “Psalm 4” the vocalists sing three linearly repeating harmonic cycles. This is not only a harmonic repetition but also a strict pitch repetition within each part, respectively. The first two cycles are five and a half beats long and are sung homophonically to the text “face shine on us.” The first cycle ends at beat two in m. 102 while the second cycle begins at the “and” of beat two. The second cycle ends at beat three of m. 103. Here the tenor and bass break away momentarily from the cycle to repeat the text “shine on us,” while the soprano and alto sing “let the light of your,” in preparation for the third cycle beginning on beat two of m. 104. This third cycle slightly augments its rhythmic content, providing small variations from the first two cycles, yet its pitch content remains fixed. After completing these three cycles, the vocalists move into a more polyphonic texture.

Surrounding these three small cycles in the vocalists’ part, the cello and double bass move together rhythmically in open quartal and quintal harmonies. Even though these two instruments are synced rhythmically, they too are performing cyclic pitch progressions that vary only slightly. The cello’s cycle consists of the dyads A-E, B-F#, and either C#-F# or C#-G#, moving up by step. Its first cycle is rhythmically synced with the vocalists first cycle. Its second cycle is transposed up an octave and adds the dyad E-B at the end of the cycle, compensating for the vocalists’ digression. Yet, its third cycle begins to rhythmically phase out of sync by the value of one eighth note on the
“and” of two at m. 104. It then repeats its original three-dyad cycle with rhythmic variation.

*Figure 7.3. “Canticle of Simeon” polyrhythmic switching between parts mm. 51-58.*
Figure 7.4. “Psalm 4” polycyclic harmony mm. 101-112.
Its third cycle, from m. 106 to beat three of m. 108, adds two more dyads to the original cycle, until from beat four of m. 108 to m. 112 it varies the order in which the dyads of previous cycles were played (see Figure 7.4).

At the climax of m. 101, the double bass begins the longest cycle, not beginning again until m. 112. Within this succession of dyads, the bass references fragments of the cello’s cycle. For instance, the cello’s three-dyad cycle is played beginning on beat two of m. 103, beat four of m. 108, and beat one of m. 111.

On the “and” of beat one at m. 112, both the cello and the double bass begin to repeat the beginnings of their respective cycles in the original pitch space that occurred at the climax of m. 104. This is phased one eighth-note value off from an important moment in the vocalists at m. 112, when they sing the word “joy” homophonically. The importance of the text is signaled by the return to original cycles in the cello and double bass yet the phasing between the two bodies of instruments adds subtle changes of variance in the polycyclic system suggesting that each cycle morphs and “becomes” something a bit different each time it is played. The linear transformation of something new within the cyclic system of returning to the beginning is referenced in this technique. This parallels the Compline ritual dynamics of a return to the “encounter” of the womb through the transformation of death.

Understanding a similar use of polyrhythm in a ritual context helps explain how this phenomenon can engender “encounter.” In his book, The Dancing Prophet, Steven Friedson tackles the question of how music works to construct a clinical reality for participants of a Tumbuka healing ritual in northern Malawi (Friedson 1996, 135-139). He analyzes a standard drum pattern of vimbuza drumming, which forms the backbone
of musical experience in the ceremony. The pattern falls within six divisions but Friedson remarks how the principle drummer always operates from a pattern that divides the six parts into three groups of two. Variations are played from this pattern by silencing certain parts of the six part grouping within which other drummers will interlock. Along with the drumming, singers sing and clap within a call and response duple framework that divides the six parts into two groups of three.

Friedson understands vimbuza musical experience as something that projects a way of being-in-the-world. The music of this particular ritual is not contained within a world and abstracted from it but is a “music for being” (a term he derives from John Blacking) in that music and world are given together. He ties this “equiprimordial” understanding of music and world in vimbuza ritual drumming to the physicality of the “twoness” of hands that are required to drum and which can in turn create auditory perspectives of “threeness.” Therefore, sound and motion are interconnected and such motion is made aural through the “polymetrical structures of shifting rhythmic perspectives” between “twoness” and “threeness” (Friedson 1996, 134). It is this phenomenological shifting in perspective that creates “imaginative variations” (the phenomena can be imagined as twos, threes, fives, tens, 5+2, etc) that can open up participants’ experience to a “fulfillability” of their ontological actuality; an opening up of their way of being-in-the-world to vary and shift. Because the aural is tied to the physical, one’s physical way of being is opened to variance and shifting as well. It is this opening that in Friedson’s view causes the vimbuza spirits to possess participants and dance. If the particular drumming mode of polymetrical activity is not performed successfully, the spirits will simply not come.
Friedson remarks that it is this polymetrical activity that both splits apart and brings together boundaries of “phenomenological possibilities.” They mediate that which separates object from subject, spirit from human, subject from subject, “I” from “Thou;” (Friedson, 169) the boundaries of encounter. Such oscillation of stabilizing and destabilizing the phenomenological boundaries of the other—opening the other to a kind of “fulfillability”—is what Buber touches upon when he describes the “You” as filling the firmament; the “You” that is “neighborless and seamless” (Buber 1970, 59). As Edward Foley has articulated, sound’s nature in itself perpetuates a phenomenological presence that is borderless, (a borderless-ness derived from the aural “ambivalence of content”), therefore the shifting of perception in phenomenological sound experience further accentuates the variance of being-in-the-world.
CHAPTER 8
THE LOSS OF PERSPECTIVE

Other contemporary works have been written that seek to engender such a shifting in perspective. The contemporary composer John Luther Adams has written a piece whose title explicitly references the non-conceptual encounter with the Divine; *Clouds of Forgetting, Clouds of Unknowing*. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a book written by an anonymous 14th-century Christian mystic who describes a (metaphorical) cloud of unknowing existing between humanity and God that cannot be penetrated even by contemplating certain attributes of God. All such conceptions (although good in themselves) must be “put down and covered with a cloud of forgetting” in order to penetrate the darkness of the “cloud of unknowing” (Wolters 1961, 60). In his book, *Winter Music*, Adams says, “to find communion [encounter with the Divine] we must lose perspective” (Adams 2004, 112). He defines perspective as a removal from experience; a way of abstracting the immediate affect of lived experience into the conceptual. He relates his compositional intent in *Clouds* to his experience of a stark, simple painting of the Antarctic Ross Ice Shelf. A “continual shifting” in perspective occurs between the “vertical and horizontal, here and there, near and far” due to the painting’s blurring of foreground/background perspective while viewing it (Adams 2004, 113). This loss of perspective contributes to the creation of a “presence that demands our participation” (Adams 2004, 113). For Adams, this presence is engendered by a “sonic geography” that surrounds the listener, not a piece of music that strives to keep the listener’s interest. In this way, the listener becomes immersed within a musical...
“landscape,” an environment that does not create boundaries between the listener and the music where one listens to it, but an environment where one is within it.

Figure 8.1 shows an example of Adams’s use of polyrhythm in the piece. This is only one page of an hour-long orchestral work wherein polyrhythm is found on every page. Polyrhythm’s ability to blur boundaries forms the backbone of Adams’s piece. This contributes to the phenomenological “unknowability” Adams wants to engender in order to create a sense of presence. Clouds differs from the vimbuza ritual in that the boundary between spirit and body is blurred through a second technique of “harmonic expansiveness” in which the listener finds him or herself immersed.

This is actualized through the use of John Cage’s gamut technique (used in his prepared piano pieces of Sonatas and Interludes), wherein the harmonic and timbral palate is limited to systematized cells of pitch and rhythm (Adams 2004, 79). Adams superimposes these cells on “expansive harmonic clouds of the same tones” as the music progresses each gamut of limited intervalllic material over the complete spectrum of equal-tempered tuning, expanding from the m2 to the octave. A musical perspective of figure and ground⁴ fade as “expansive scales of time and space” are explored (Adams 2004, 116). Thus presence is engendered through the phenomenological loss of foreground/background harmonic perspective as well as through the perceptual loss of an undifferentiated pulse through polyrhythm.

⁴ Adams relates the terms “figure and ground” to the Western understanding of melody and harmony. He describes “figure” as becoming “ground” through “dense clouds of expanding, rising lines” (Adams 2004, 114).
Figure 8.1. Clouds of Forgetting, Clouds of Unknowing p. 7.

Adams 1995, 7

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Adams’s technique for achieving such a loss of perspective is similar to that used in *Into Your Hands* in that polyrhythmic activity occurs within stases of sustained cluster chords, usually orchestrated as bodies of sound within instrument groupings. For instance, in Figure 8.1 the two sustained sonorities occur primarily within the strings as a unit (along with the piano and celesta), then within the winds as a unit as the polyrhythmic activity moves inversely between units. A similar sense of polyrhythm occurs within sustained sonorities at the beginning of the “Canticle of Simeon” mm. 1-11 as Figure 8.2 shows.
Figure 8.2. “Canticle of Simeon” mm. 1-11.
CHAPTER 9

THE SIMULTANEITY OF MEANING: SOUND

Loss of perspective also occurs in the simultaneity of semantic meaning produced by two specific elements, which tie symbolic meaning to sound in *Into Your Hands*. These are the use of acousmatic sounds that are charged (sometimes purposefully by the composer, sometimes culturally, or experientially) with layers of associative meaning, as well as the symbolic meaning of the text.

John Young in his article, “Imagining the Source: The Interplay of Realism and Abstraction in Electroacoustic Music,” describes how sonic metaphors link “extrinsic associations” of sound “by virtue of some shared morphological or behavioral characteristic” (Young 1996, 80). This occurs through a continuum that each piece sets up and manipulates according to its own values between the auditory “reality” of sounds and their morphological abstraction. Young discusses Trevor Wishart’s work *Red Bird* as a prime example of how symbolic meaning arises out of a sound’s transformation across the reality/abstraction continuum to that of another sound. For instance, at the beginning of *Red Bird*, a prisoner’s scream is transformed into a “convoluted form of birdsong,” finally morphing into a single bird’s voice (Young 1996, 82). Young comments: “The transformation produces the metaphor scream-is-bird and challenges us to resolve this surreal transfiguration by virtue of a unifying symbol” (Young 1996, 82). The linear juxtaposition of the two sounds is mediated through transformation to create a symbol in itself, but listeners bring their own associative meanings to the sounds, as well creating an almost infinite array of manifold meaning, albeit rooted in the symbolism the work has generated within itself.
*Into Your Hands* does not utilize the explicit transformation of juxtaposed sound through a morphology of their spectra as in *Red Bird*, but it does juxtapose sound through vertical simultaneity of occurrence in an effort to produce symbolic meaning. The transformation and juxtaposition of water and dry sound throughout the work has already been discussed above. At the opening of the “Canticle of Simeon” (see Figure 8.2) the water sounds that had previously been associated with the dynamic swell gesture in “Psalm 4” are mixed with dynamic swells in the electronics that play both the water sound of “Psalm 4” and the sound of water drops hitting a colander, acoustically layered. This is also mixed with the gesture of the dynamic swell in both the acoustic instruments and the electronics. As discussed above, the acoustic instruments metaphorically “die” and fade out into the sound of water droplets in the electronics at the end of the “Canticle of Simeon.” Therefore, the sonic metaphor can be taken in many different ways: as a foreshadowing of death, as a reinterpretation of “let the light of your face shine on us” (the text at which water swells were introduced in the electronics in “Psalm 4”), as both of these at the same time, etc. This only scratches the surface of what meaning might be extrapolated from this one section. Furthermore, a listener might mix his or her own associative meanings of the water sound and “walking-dry sound” in the piece. For instance, one might have taken long walks through a pasture on a regular occurrence with a good friend who died by drowning. This could add yet another layer of significant meaning to one’s experience of the piece.

In his work entitled *Night Peace*, John Luther Adams uses a similar transformative timbral technique to that found in *Red Bird* and *Into Your Hands*, albeit
his use is relegated to the acoustic arena. The entire piece can be analyzed as the
development of one melodic cell, which is shown in Figure 9.1.

*Figure 9.1. “Night Peace” melodic cell.*

Figure 20 shows how the material opens the piece in the solo timpani, developing
fragments of the cell. The harp begins to develop the material within a quicker pattern
of sixteenth-notes at m. 9, and soon fragments of the cell are developed through
specific sections demarcated by the orchestration’s timbre. For instance, at rehearsal A
the cell is mainly developed by the choir, at rehearsal B the harp and vibraphone then
develop it, at rehearsal C the beginning instrumentation of timpani and harp return to
develop the cell amidst sustained chords in antiphonal choirs, and at rehearsal D the
soprano finally states the cell exactly as the timpani did at the beginning of the piece
(see Figure 9.2). Thus, the opening material passes through a large timbral continuum
of abstraction, transforming the cell from the lowest frequencies of the timpani—
muddied and inhuman—to some of the highest frequencies of the clearly human
soprano voice.

Adams also uses the contrapuntal technique of layering fragments of the cell
between voices in the choir. Figure 9.3 shows an example of how the choir in one of
the middle sections breaks apart intervallic fragments of the cell and sings these
different fragments in vertical simultaneity. This can be compared to the melodic
fragments sung between parts in the beginning section of “Psalm 4.” Each voice
linearly repeats fragmentary intervals while these fragments are layered in simultaneity between parts.

*Figure 9.2. Night Peace cell in timpani and in soprano.*

Adams 1977, 1          Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Adams 1977, 18         Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
There is no text tied to these specific phenomena but the symbolism of the title relates directly to the subject matter of the Compline ritual discussed above, as it relates “peace” as well as “night” to death. A single melodic cell brought through fragmentation and ultimately transformation can suggest a similar function as the ritual context of *Into Your Hands*: the ontological transformation of life to death to new life. Perspective is lost in *Night Peace* through timbral shifts and arhythmic fragmentation.

Therefore—particularly when drawing from multiple sound source phenomena (as *Into Your Hands* does through its use of both acoustic and electro-acoustic techniques)—the simultaneity of meanings that can occur are infinite. It is not the sonic metaphors in themselves that engender encounter but the phenomenological
experience of their simultaneous meaning. Such an infinite simultaneity of meaning can occur with sound because of and through its non-conceptual nature. In this sense, meaning wed to sound does not inhibit encounter, but can create more potential for it.

The ritual theorist, Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah has developed a theory entitled ritual involution to explain ritual's efficacy of engendering the supernatural through repetition and redundancy of spoken text or musical fragments. His theory offers an explanation of how feedback with the supernatural is experienced in the highly repetitive Sinhalese exorcism rite that is filled with “sequencing rules, the recursive as well as cumulative repetitions, the interplay of variations, accentuations,” etc. (Tambiah 1985, 152). Tambiah uses Peircean semiotics to explain how such a high amount of redundant sequencing can cause a complication in the ritual’s meaning because he views ritual in general as bearing a “duplex existence...that symbolically...represents the cosmos and at the same time indexically legitimates and realizes social hierarchies” (Tambiah 1985, 155). This is described - in Peircean terms – as an indexical symbol (Tambiah 1985, 155).

In Peircean semiotics a sign can relate to its object - the meaning that the sign references - in three ways: as a symbol, an icon, or an index. A symbol relates to its object by a culturally agreed upon “semantic rule” (a prime example of this is language) (Tambiah 1985, 156). An icon relates to its object through a resemblance between them (Jim Hendrix’s representation of bomb sounds on his guitar in his rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner”). An index relates to its object through an existential co-occurrence. We have already discussed an example of indexical meaning in the hypothetical situation of a listener who associates his or her own meaning to a particular
sound. The sounds do not bear similarity to the meaning of her relationship with a friend, nor are they a culturally agreed upon meaning. They were existentially experienced and the sounds thus existentially “tie” themselves to and become a sign of the object of that relationship.

*Into Your Hands* explicitly uses the tintinnabuli technique of the composer Arvo Pärt beginning at rehearsal B of the “Canticle of Simeon” in violins I and II. Tintinnabulation refers to the sounding of bells, which are - in Pärt’s technique – equated with any voicing of the tonic triad played linearly (Hillier 1997, 92-93). There is a “two-part texture” inherent to this technique where one voice plays the line of tintinnabulation (the T-voice) and another voice (the M-voice) plays a diatonic melodic line moving mainly by step (Hillier 1997, 92). In the “Canticle of Simeon” the violin I plays the T-voice outlining a falling G# minor triad while the violin II plays the M-voice also descending in overall movement. Each part operates within sequences that are differing in length respectively. The T-voice’s sequence resets on the second beat of m. 57 while the M-voice’s sequence resets on the fourth beat of m. 58 (see Figure 7.3). Pärt’s technique is widely imagined by listeners to engender the sacred and has been called a “holy minimalism.” Tinntinnabuli was used in *Into Your Hands* as an exploration into such an indexical meaning of Part’s sound phenomena. If his technique engenders a “return to the icon” as Paul Hillier has described, then the purpose of its use in the “Canticle of Simeon” is to summon this indexical meaning that might exist in listener’s minds.

Hillier also has commented that Part’s technique “serves the need for a sense of ritual” (Hillier 1997, 17). Part’s technique is pregnant with potentialities for ritual
involution due to its high amount of redundancy. This redundancy allows space for duplex (or multi-layered) meaning to exist simultaneously in the same way Tambiah’s ritual involution engenders the multi-layered meanings of symbol and index.

For Tambiah ritual meaning moves in two directions at once: towards the “semantic direction of cultural presuppositions” (the symbolic) and towards the pragmatic dimension of the “interpersonal context of ritual action” (the indexical) wherein meanings are understood through what happens and the relation of these occurrences with each other (Tambiah 1985 …). This bears similarity to the simultaneous function of the existential happenings of sound wed to its culturally symbolic meaning. It is this simultaneity that can engender supernatural encounter.
CHAPTER 10

THE SIMULTANEITY OF MEANING: TEXT

Text is another symbolic element tied to the sound phenomena of *Into Your Hands* that explores a phenomenology of simultaneity. This occurs especially in “Psalm 4” where each individual vocal line operates as an autonomous linear idea that is redundantly repeated. When juxtaposed simultaneously (when the voices sing together) two phenomena occur: 1) each part’s textual meanings fall in line to complete the other’s ideas and/or 2) an experience of meaning immersion is engendered through the overlap and dissonance of meanings with each other. For instance at the opening of “Psalm 4” the soprano’s linear sequence is “Have mercy, have mercy, have mercy, hear me, have mercy, have mercy, hear me, etc.” The alto’s linear sequence is “from anguish you released me, from anguish you released me, anguish you released me, hear me, etc.” The tenor’s linear sequence is “O God of justice answer me, O God of justice, O God of justice answer me, etc.” The bass’s linear sequence is “When I call, when I call, when I call (8x), answer me, when I call, etc.” The women’s differing sequences are both interrupted by the same phrase “hear me” and the men’s sequences are both interrupted by the phrase “answer me.” Thus there is simultaneity occurring on multiple levels: the simultaneous linear ideas between parts, movement of the phrase of sequence interruption between women and male voices, and the immersive effect of these phenomena experienced horizontally. For instance, Figure 9 shows the vocalists in m. 8 of “Psalm 4” articulating “mercy,” “anguish,” “O God,” and “When” all at the same time. The semantic meanings of the individual lines as well as
the indexical meaning of an immersive experience simultaneously operate in the same way as ritual involution.

In the next sub-section (mm. 30-40) the text operates between parts as a completion of the other’s idea. The bass continues to statically repeat “When I call,” but the tenor contrastingly sequences his idea from what he was singing before—from “O God...” to “O men.” The soprano completes the tenor’s thought (“how long”) and the alto finishes it (“will your hearts be closed”). In both of these sections, the soprano performs a wilting-like gesture, repeating her text on a falling M2 which semantically paints the sighing sequences of “have mercy” and “how long” appropriately.

At rehearsal B of “Psalm 4” the vocalists isolate certain rhythmic micro gestures that they had been singing in the sub-sections before rehearsal B (see Figure 10.1). For instance, at m. 64 the sixteenth-note rest, eighth-note, sixteenth-note gesture in the soprano references the dotted eighth-note, sixteenth-note gesture that repeatedly occurred in the tenor line at mm. 45-51. The triplet in the alto occurred in both the alto and soprano parts between mm. 37-53. The tenor part divides the beat between a strict eighth-note sub-division which occurred most explicitly in both the tenor and bass parts of the first sub-section: mm. 6-25. The bass sings two successive sixteenth notes, which can be interpreted as a permutation of dividing the beat by a sixteenth-note sub-division as the soprano has done. Each of these motivic characteristics are then switched between parts and in some cases slightly developed in the following measures, as a kind of rhythmic stretto. This same principle occurs at m. 133 to the end of the piece.
This stretto functions as simultaneity in a similar way to that of polyrhythm, but the text associated with it adds layers of juxtaposed meanings similar to that discussed above regarding acousmatic sound. At rehearsal B the text, “Make justice your sacrifice and trust in the Lord” is vertically broken among parts so that justice and sacrifice occur together during the first two entrances (mm. 64 and 65). This could engender an indexical/associative meaning that justice and sacrifice must be realized together—that
one is not actualized without the other. Each entrance also gives three of the singers
the text as it is read linearly and one singer either foreshadows a text from the next
entrance or lingers on the text from an entrance before. For instance, at the first
entrance three of the singers sing “justice” while the alto foreshadows “sacrifice” and
this principle is reversed at the next entrance. The alto then lingers on sacrifice in the
next two entrances while the other parts move through the text. The words of “trust"
and sacrifice” are then troped in a similar manner from mm. 69–72, making a possible
interpretation of the trope read “trust in trust” or “trust in sacrifice which is trust.” This is
a microcosmic realization of the many layers of meaning that Into Your Hands seeks to
engender through the wedding of sound to the symbolic.

One more way Into Your Hands ties symbolic meaning to sound is through the
changing of the vocalist’s contrapuntal texture together with the changes of perspective
from first to second person in the ritual text. Whenever the ritual text speaks in the first
person, a polyphonic texture is used that highlights the individuality of each part. This
takes place during the entire first section of “Psalm 4” until m. 101, when the vocalists
declare in the second person, “Let the light of your face shine on us,” and the texture
becomes homophonic (see Figure 7.4). It gradually returns to a more polyphonic
texture, while at m. 107 the text reads, “you have put into my heart....” The next time
the quartet sings in strict homophony is at the opening of the “Canticle of Simeon,”
when the text reads, “protect us Lord as we stay awake” (see Figure 8.2). Just as in
“Psalm 4” the contrapuntal texture largely does not change until the text clearly moves
into a section where it shifts perspective at m. 51: “Into your hands I commend my
spirit.”
The homophonic texture at the opening of the “Canticle of Simeon” is sung in largely open fifth parallel harmony, a drastic change of harmonic counterpoint from the rest of the piece. There are not many instances of the second person perspective in the ritual text. The instance in “Psalm 4” seems obscured by the fact that it is buried within the psalm text. The antiphon of the “Canticle” by contrast begins the central text of the ritual and is spoken/sung out of silence. The dynamic of this timing highlights the antiphon’s emphasis on the collective. The parallel harmony of this opening passage is meant to relay this sense of change in the ritual, since most of the ritual tends to be highly introspective.
CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

In order to propose a case for how the Divine can be encountered through the music of Into Your Hands, I connect specific musical phenomena to an understanding of human ontology. The following is a summary of these connections, starting from the fundamental and moving to the particular.

Humanity’s being is rooted in encounter. Encounter is rooted in musical ritual and one way the Divine is mediated is through the dyadic coordination of reciprocity between the human other, inherent in all ritual. The ritual of Compline is rooted in the exploration of participants’ fundamental transformation of being: death, and therefore a contemplation of the ontological substance of what death ends: life. Encounter and being are symbiotic; there is no being without encounter and encounter does not exist without a reciprocity of being. Therefore Compline ritual dynamics (due to the fact that in this study, Compline is a musical ritual) particularly embody this symbiotic relationship of being and encounter. The fundamental encounter of being (the locus of this symbiotic relationship) is that of the mother/infant relationship beginning in the womb. The sound of the intermingling of being and encounter is the first sound heard at the dawn of every human’s beginning: water (the amniotic fluid of the womb). The dynamic swell gesture of Into Your Hands is associated with water through immersive techniques such as its polyphonic movement between parts. Other immersive techniques are used in the contrapuntal, harmonic, and rhythmic elements of the piece to enhance a womb-like environment. Many of these elements bear a sense of simultaneity in common which phenomenologically explores the boundaries of encounter through the shifting
and loss of perspective. This loss of perspective (the general affect of the techniques of immersion representing the environment of the womb) removes one from the particulars of experience. This removal aids in the potential for non-conceptual encounter due to the fact that “possessing” nothing of the other is a fundamental element of encounter. Meaning derived from the symbolic wed to sound is one such simultaneous element that the swell gesture highlights as it transforms over time through the piece, engendering a snowballing effect of meaning due to the indexical relationships it forms with the differing sounds it is juxtaposed with.

The shifting and loss of perspective both create the potential for variance in the ways of being-in-the-world. In the Christian tradition, the Divine is the source of being, therefore varying the boundaries of being implies an encounter with Him who creates those boundaries. Death is the ultimate transformation and variance of being in the Christian tradition therefore the loss of perspective that Into Your Hands engenders adds to the contemplation of being’s boundaries already inherent in the ritual of Compline.
REFERENCES


