

THE GLOW WITHIN OUR STEPS

by

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ABSTRACT

The Glow Within Our Steps is a multimedia interactive gallery installation in conjunction with a 45-minute aural, video, and choreographic performance designed to take place within an installation space. The performances documented in the dissertation took place on May 1st and 2nd, 2013 in The Gallery in the Duderstadt Center on the campus of the University of Michigan. The audio component, crafted to permeate the space, was a combination of slowly developing synthesized ambiences, sampled orchestral strings, quick tempo electronic dance music, vocal incantations, and live acoustic performance of a contrabass and violin duo. The space was outfitted with a custom-designed octophonic speaker system, creating an immersive aural environment. The doors, windows, and walls were covered in thick black fabric, and lighting was tightly controlled so as to create an ambiance independent of time of day or external disturbance. The room was also populated with ten free-standing, wheeled, battery-powered lamps of varying heights resembling glowing white rectangular columns. Gallery visitors were encouraged to move these lamps around the room, to photograph their interactions with them, and to post images online. In the center of the space, a ten by ten foot area was surrounded by semi-transparent sheer white fabric panels stretching from the ground to the ceiling. Within this square a white shag rug served as an irregular screen surface for video projection of slowly moving sea-foam visually processed to the point of abstraction.

The installation and performance make use of a minimalist geometric aesthetic to highlight the evocative power of contrast between fundamental experienced parameters: light/dark, sound/silence, flux/stasis. By highlighting the site-specific nature of the installation and performance, as opposed to creating a self-contained musical work which could, with relative ease, be mounted and performed elsewhere, the conscious decision was made to emphasize performance over text. Thus, the primary dissertation document is a video of a live performance, a decision which captures the dynamic and highly experiential nature of the project, along with the numerous sensory elements which are difficult, if not impossible, to instantiate into traditional music notation or even meticulous and descriptive prose.

CHAPTER I

Supporting Documentation

And in Heraclitus name,
There is no Amen,
Only ever-flowing rivers
Whose changing waters eddy 'round
Feet, set amidst wetted
Rocks and mud,
The sands, and tides,
The crags, the floods, the surges,
The storms
All dust among us
And distinction is dissolved,
Lines are crossed,
And borders are merged,
So that we, too, become glistening
Corpuscles in the firmament,
Sharing umbra and scintillations
In the swirled encircling arms of galaxies,
Twinkling islands, and vast cerebral waters¹

-Samuel Richards

The Work-Concept

The philosophical and aesthetic concepts underlying this project have their roots in a challenge to the conventional work-concept which has operated in western classical music for over two centuries. This work-concept typically entails a series of assumptions about what musical “works” are, how composers make them, with what intentions they are generally created, and what traditions they are expected to be participating within.

¹ Poetic sketches by the composer written at the project’s inception.

Ironically, musical performance itself, a practice which a laymen would most readily associate with “music,” is rarely accounted for in such a work-concept, and, instead, musical compositions (in score form) are revered as objects (“masterworks”) which have been created by composers (“masters”).² Nicholas Cook has written that “we are led to think of music as we might think of poetry, as a cultural practice centered on the silent contemplation of the written text, with performance (like public poetry reading) acting as a kind of supplement.”³ I have here sought to invert this hierarchy, highlighting a performance as the central component of this document, and here providing a mere textual supplement as a philosophical justification, which may be contemplated silently at the reader’s leisure.⁴

The origins of this work-concept are quintessentially Beethovenian, in that, while there are nascent examples of such a work-concept weaving through European musical culture prior to the early nineteenth century, it was romantic idealism and its devotees which strategically lionized the authenticity of independent authorship and artistic genius which culminated in the concretization of such a work-concept, along with its widespread cultural implementation as *the* modus operandi for conceptualizing music as “works.” Lydia Goehr, in her seminal monograph on the subject, *The Imaginary Museum of*

² “In short, we seem to have forgotten that music is a performance art at all, and more than that, we seem to have conceptualized it in such a way that we could hardly think of it that way even if we wanted to.” Nicholas Cook, “Between Process and Product: Music And/as Performance,” *Music Theory Online* 7, no. 2 (April 2001), 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ Here invoking Arnold Schoenberg’s famous diatribe against performance is more than apropos considering the cultural position his presence continues to exert within the musical academy: “[M]usic need not be performed any more than books need to be read aloud, for its logic is perfectly represented on the printed page; and the performer, for all his intolerable arrogance, is totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print.” Dika Newlin, *Schoenberg Remembered: Diaries and Recollections 1938– 1976* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1980), 164.

Musical Works, carefully analyses and critiques this traditional work-concept, reminding her readers, for example, that “Bach did not intend to compose musical works. Only by adopting a modern perspective—a perspective foreign to Bach—would we say that he had.”⁵ Despite such a disjunction between Bach’s cultural practice and our own, and the concepts used to justify those distinct practices, contemporary composers nevertheless, lay claim to the partaking of a tradition which its many predecessors would fail to recognize.

As an artist, or, rather, one who traffics in artistic experience, I consider this traditional work-concept a burdensome anachronistic conceptual rubric. As a composer, more specifically, my artistic output often does not take the form of a traditionally notated score; instead, I often work with electronically recorded sources, which I then proceed to mold and shape into recorded media that can be played back independently from or used in conjunction with other visual media, choreography, film, etc. These practices inadvertently (and on occasion, intentionally) problematize the conventional work-concept due to the somewhat ephemeral nature of audio recordings in comparison to the conventional cultural clout and hierarchical prestige of musical scores, which can be printed and bound as books, volumes, and “opuses,” immediately granting them lasting authority within the tradition-centered discipline. Recordings, on the other hand, rob the historian or analyst of the *visual* musical artifact, in that the “music” is not read,

⁵ “At the end of the eighteenth century, changes in aesthetic theory, society, and politics prompted musicians to think about music in new terms and to produce music in new ways. Musicians began to think about music as involving the creation, performance, and reception not just of music per se, but of works of such. . . We assume, further, that the tonal, rhythmic, and instrumental properties of works are constitutive of structurally integrated wholes that are symbolically represented by composers in scores. Once created, we treat works as existing after their creators have died, and whether or not they are performed or listened to at any given time.” See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works : an Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2-8.

or easily quantified via a familiar viewable notation, but reenacted upon playback, and heard. Whereas a score may idly sit and be seen, a recording, without auxiliary methods, provides no alternate means of ingesting its contents other than to re-“perform” it by rendering it into sound.

Considering this, one of the purposes of this dissertation is to explore, and perhaps further problematize, the notion of the conventional musical work-concept by means of the activities I regularly engage in as an artist and composer, namely, the creation of recorded music, aural environments, video projection, photography, dance, and gallery installation. This eclectic profile of artistic production allows me to investigate the notion of a work-concept as a macro or meta-subject, while simultaneously exploring numerous other micro-aesthetic and philosophical particulars, including, but not exclusive to, linear narrative, assemblage and collage, cultural and aesthetic ramifications of multimedia, and the differences between inhabited spaces and meaningful places. The musical performance consisted of a montage-like series of musical and aural glimpses or suggestions, accompanied by choreography and multimedia, which, assembled together, generate a forty-five minute narrative which interrogated the relationship between the individual and the group, the relationship between performers/authors and the “audience,” along with the sometimes arbitrary lines drawn between artistic “works” and their reproduction and performance.

The “work” itself was ephemeral, in that, although there was meticulous video and audio documentation of the performance itself, as an installation it was dismantled after only a week, and would be recreated only with great difficulty in other venues in the

future. As such, and perhaps mimicking the ephemeral nature of many earthworks,⁶ there will be no authoritative musical *Werktreue*, or meaningful notion of being “true” and “faithful” to the “work” in its future reproduction.⁷ The “work itself” in this case was experiential, fluid, transitory, unfixed, and subject to both physical and cultural erosion. Gallery visitors and audience members were encouraged to physically explore it, reconfigure its component parts (lights, etc.), document it themselves via their own means (photography, video, etc.), and craft their own meanings within and on behalf of the charged space I created for them to occupy. The “work-itself,” if we are to focus on physical artifacts, was physically dismantled and no longer exists; the music, made freely available to audience members to download, may be listened to separately from its originally intended context, but in order to avoid any whiff of intentional fallacy, I created the installation, the music, and the performance with the acceptance that it was an

⁶ The work of artist Robert Smithson, who is responsible for coining the term “earthwork”, has long inspired me to explore the implications of impermanence as it is applied to music, along with the concomitant western obsession with capturing, recording, documenting, and thereby fixing the fleeting so that we may study, appreciate, revere, and canonize it. Many early earthworks or land art created in the deserts of the western United States were ephemeral, and the “works themselves” no longer exist, but, rather, we are only left with photographic and video documentation of those works, much like *The Glow Within Our Steps*.

“Critics, by focusing on the ‘art object,’ deprive the artist of any existence in the world of both mind and matter. The mental process of the artist which takes place in time is disowned, so that a commodity value can be maintained by a system independent of the artist. Art, in this sense, is considered ‘timeless’ or a product of ‘no time at all’; this becomes a convenient way to exploit the artist out of his rightful claim to his temporal processes.” See “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects” from Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings*, The Documents of Twentieth-century Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 100.

⁷ The notion of being “true” to a work, or *Werktreue*, was generated by E.T.A. Hoffman, who, as writer and perhaps most famously as a music critic who penned a lengthy and extraordinarily influential review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, has served to shape the ways in which academia conceptualizes music and the discourse which surrounds it. See Scott G Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) or Lydia Goehr, “Being True to the Work,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 55–67 for an exploration of how E.T.A. Hoffman's writing has shaped the academic musical thought of the past two centuries.

“open” work.⁸ The documentation provided here in support of my dissertation is not authoritative as much as it is merely a glimpse into a kind of happening in which I played a particularly significant role.

Artist’s Statement

“The rituals that once conveyed an inner reality are now merely form.”⁹

-Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

My artistic interests are eclectic and range across the spectrum of media and medium. In an average working day I feel compelled to write poetry, film video, capture photography, write music, record found sounds, muse about morality, improvise choreography, and also regularly assume the roles of both teacher and student. Over the course of my academic studies these seemingly disparate creative inclinations have become subdued, supposedly in the service of pursuing an identity that has naively been conflated with my chosen discipline: I am studying music composition, therefore I am a composer and, above all else, I must compose. This conclusion, however, is based upon a false premise: that what one does is what one is. As a result of the focused nature of my studies, I have learned to suppress my natural creative impulses to pursue other artistic forms, and I have done this supposedly in the service of my formal academic studies and the sense of identity associated with it.

Only recently, however, have I come to the realization that I am not what I do, but, rather, I am a being that does things. This relocation of my identity, away from my

⁸ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁹ Joseph Campbell, Bill D Moyers, and Betty S Flowers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 106.

actions and into myself, pragmatically disassociates my creative actions with my sense of self worth. The moral imperative generated by my internal need to constantly do those actions most closely associated with what I am, has, over the past decade, become increasingly problematic, in that I not only regret *not* composing, but my self-worth has become confused and resultantly deflated anytime I that am inclined to pursue *other* artistic forms. The catch-22 of these self-generated ethical dilemmas is that I am sickened if I do not engage in music composition, because I am denying my moral imperative to *do* what I *am*, and I am similarly disheartened if I *do* compose, because, at a much deeper and honest level of my conscience, I regret not having the courage to pursue my variegated creative inclinations. The ultimate result is that I feel repressed and defeated by the very morals which I subconsciously constructed in order to validate both myself and my artistic endeavors.

Additionally, I have become increasingly disenchanted with concert music culture. The rituals associated with composition, performance practice, and the culturally reinforced divide between them have lost much of the meaning which I once granted them, and the conservative tendencies of the musical institutions which host and purportedly support such art seem bent on perpetuating such traditions, rather than challenging them; ironically, this is a position which invalidates and subverts extremely creative work outside of established norms, as well as undermines one of the fundamental purposes of education and the arts themselves, which is to engender critical thinking, as opposed to the thoughtless adoption of tradition.

I have previously harbored reactionary tendencies, butting ideological heads with the institutions and the practices themselves. Subversion once seemed to be the only way

to manage the seemingly disparate objectives of myself, my colleagues, and the organizations of which we were all a part. Conceiving of my dilemmas in such terms, however, unnecessarily pitted myself against an imagined army of stubborn foes, a narrative which wasn't conducive to productivity, or my emotional and creative health. I have since attempted, and largely succeeded, in transforming this external battle into an internal, and highly personal, quest. Challenging tradition remains an objective, but only if it is accompanied by communication, mutual understanding, shared aesthetic experience, and, ultimately, meaningful ritual.

In addition to my draw towards multi-disciplinary work, and my interest in reexamining tradition, an additional aesthetic practice which has informed my work is the art of assemblage. I have become increasingly interested in the process of storytelling. Forming sensical narrative, and ultimately meaning, from disparate facts, events, or aesthetic experiences, is a fundamental tool we use to parse the enormous variety of information that we encounter and perceive. Storytelling, thus, functions on both a macro and micro level, as our minds seek to reconcile our expectations, desires, and fears, with both the sensory content we encounter, and the stories we are told. Viewed in this way, collage, then, is not merely a messy conglomerate of disparate chunks of media, but, rather, it is a medium which highlights the process of storytelling itself; through the chaos of information, distinct shapes surface, and threads of narrative coalesce via the will the artist, and the perception of those who experience it.

While my aesthetic interests are varied, there are common themes that attract me to particular subjects and media, e.g. texture (timbre), process (development), and shape (gesture). In other words, my artistic inclinations are not merely the result of a scattered,

unfocused, indecisive mind; they are, instead, the result of my penchant to recognize patterns (or metapatterns), and easily draw relationships between divergent contexts, media, and mediums. As a result of the internal creative and emotional conflicts I have described above, I feel I have never fully embraced my tendency to leap from one medium to another, let alone fully combine all of my concomitant interests into a single narrative, or story.

Due to recent discoveries about myself and my work, as they are articulated above, I have designed this dissertation in order to both experiment with, potentially remedying, my internal creative conflicts, as well as problematize, and hopefully mediate, the differences between concert music traditions and other forms of artistic presentation, participation, and consumption. *The Glow Within Our Steps* encompasses all of the above expressed concerns and interests, and because one of my objectives was to embrace my natural processes for art-making, as opposed to indulging fears, hesitations, or reservations, my intention and hope was that creation would flow more easily, more honestly, and more courageously than I suspected it ever would, ideally resulting in working habits that were more prolific, and, hopefully, more compelling. My objective was to embrace my inclinations, follow my impulses, and prolifically make artistic works of all kinds. Deliberation, meta-shaping, and transforming the components of the work into a coherent and lengthy narrative was a process that was primarily reserved until after the process of content creation was well on its way, so that it did not interfere with or mute the impulsive nature of creation which I wanted to embrace as a characteristic feature of this project. By so doing I have reversed the polarity of my habitual creative process, allowing my art-making to shape my decisions about my artwork, as opposed to

letting my decisions about my artwork dictate my art-making. Ultimately, I intended to create a unique experience for the performers and the audience, blurring artificial boundaries between the stage and the audience, and indulging in a creative practice which was, for me, relatively foreign. Out of all of the assembled and sculpted components, I hoped to create a meaningful shared experience for all who participated; I intended to approach ritual.

Program Note

The following statement was written by the composer and provided as a “program note” to audience members who attended the public performances of *The Glow Within Our Steps*:

In retrospect, my life has largely operated somewhere between two interdependent axioms. The first, after Heraclitus, is that the only thing that is real and true is change itself. The second is that meaning is made, not found.

Considering the proposition that change is the only constant, I value activities which manufacture meaning, thereby temporally fixing the fleeting moments of our lives by affording us the luxury of locking onto sentimentality in midst of an endless flux; I value the phenomenological emphasis on subjective experience as opposed to the ostensibly objective things which populate our experiences; I value events, rites, and rituals that transform the otherwise mundane into consecrated endeavors; I value the surface formality of activities because, in the end, it is only our instituted formalities which separate the ordinary from the extraordinary; I value the process of meaning making, because if we excel at generating meaning for ourselves, we can then craft and

share unique meanings with those around us. Assuming control over meaning allows one to overflow with optimism in the face of struggle, to exert patience in trying times, or to express compassion as opposed to passing judgement. Making meaning in our human sociality requires an empathic imagination.

The Glow Within Our Steps explores this. Here is a gallery, in a building, but I have strived to make it something more. With invocations of light and darkness, sound and silence, flux and stasis, I have endeavored to highlight the contrasts of simple things in order to generate a psychological place for the profound. We fill this space with our own meanings, and, ultimately, our own experiences. We are the ones who are capable of transforming a vacuous space into a meaningful glowing place. There is a *Glow Within Our Steps*.

A Description of the Project

A component of *The Glow Within Our Steps* was an installation which concomitantly served as the venue for specific performances. It was installed in The Gallery in the Duderstadt Center on the campus of the University of Michigan, and was open to the public between April 29th-May 3rd, 2013. The performances were on the evenings of May 1st and 2nd, and each performance lasted approximately forty-five minutes.¹⁰ These performances included electronically reproduced as well as live music, choreography, video projection, and staging. I installed eight full-range floor-standing

¹⁰ At this juncture it is worth noting that my decision to use past-tense is one filled with tension, in that while this document and the accompanying video is an instantiation of my art in the present, I also want to emphasize the transitory, ephemeral nature of its creation and the resulting limits of being unable to directly engage it. This dilemma highlights the passive yet persistent role that grammar plays in structuring our conceptualization of musical works and their accompanying aesthetic implications.

speakers in the space allowing me to truly immerse the gallery visitors and audience members in musical and aural environments, productively defying the conventional division which exists between the performers and the audience when utilizing the normative proscenium stage. A stage, for example, places the instruments and sound sources in a very particular siloed place, generating a socially divided assembly of observers (audience) and participants (performers).

The meticulously produced performances which took place within the unique installation I created, rendered a gallery, which functions during the day as a somewhat passive environment, into a dynamic performance venue, imposing a sense of plural meanings and functionalities upon those audience members who also had the opportunity to visit the space during normal gallery hours. The performances incorporated choreography as a significant component of narrative, kinetic, and visceral exploration, taking full advantage of the many mobile, wheeled, iconic light stands as props in the space, which effectively gave the dancers the ability to directly transform the mood and ambience of the space throughout the performances. I collaborated with Maxx Passion and Brittany Whitmoyer to generate the choreography, who, in turn, were also keen to emphasize the conceptual and choreographic contributions of the dancers in the performance.¹¹ One of the particular choreographic techniques that was explored was “flocking,” or the clustering of dancers into larger meta-structures which behave as consolidated, unified groups. This technique reflects the concepts of assemblage, or making larger meaningful structures out of smaller, much less meaningful components, that I explored in the design of the space itself, the multiplicity of loudspeaker playback

¹¹ See Appendix A for a full list of personnel which directly contributed to the installation, production and performances.

systems I constructed, and the methods I implemented in the processes, production, and performance of the music.

In addition to the electronically reproduced sound and music, there were live musicians which contributed to the public performances: Adrienne Pope (violin), and Elizabeth Soukup (double bass). As immersive as the aural experience was, their role was double-coded, invoking an austere irony of classical musicians wielding traditional instruments having been “inserted” into a largely synthetic and non-traditional space, but also nodding to their cultural clout, their technical skill, and stunning musical and aesthetic presence they provided during their performances.

Precedent for such performances is relatively easy to find in the traditions of performance and installation art albeit much more difficult to find within the tradition of academic classical music, a discipline whose modes of presentation have almost exclusively operated within the performative bounds of a “concert.” Early examples of sonic installations include Edgard Varèse’s *Poème électronique*, in which a large pavilion was designed through which the audience would walk as music was played back through a complex system of loudspeakers, augmented sensorally with changing colored lights in the space. The ambient soundscapes and video painting of Brian Eno have also served to influence the aesthetic trajectory of this project. Other artists’ whose work that has been influential include the *De Stijl* canvases and aesthetic objectives of Piet Mondrian, along with the work of Do Ho Suh, Yayoi Kusama, Ai Weiwei, Christo and Jean-Claude, Bill Viola, Robert Smithson, and Tara Donovan.

A Description of the Music

The music consists of a montage-like presentation of somewhat disparate episodes, which, fused together, create a narrative arc over the course of a quarter of an hour.¹²

During the installation, the electronically produced music was played and looped during gallery hours, creating a shifting environment which had the potential to feel radically different depending on how the timing of the gallery visit corresponded with the location within the looped audio. Alternately, during the public performances, this electronic playback via loudspeaker is bookended by live performance on double bass and violin, instruments which also serve to provide brief interludes or complementary timbral suggestions over the course of the performance. What follows is a prose description of each of these episodes as they were utilized in the public performances of *The Glow Within Our Steps*. The names of each episode were not given to the performers or the audience, and were given and used by the composer for the purposes of reference and description. Indeed, in the performance itself, the relation of these episodes to one another was hardly one of beginning and ending, but via crossfades, acoustic reinforcement, and choreographic narrative, many of the seams between the distinct and neatly listed episodes below were intentionally blurred in order to contribute to a continuous performance experience:

1. “Prelude.” Before the opening electronic track, the production is prefaced by this carefully guided three minute improvisation by the double bassist and violinist.

Emerging from silence, the violinist exerts an unusual amount of pressure through her

¹² Note my shift here to the present tense in order to address the music directly, indicating an exigent conceptualizing shift present in our culture’s discourse of how recorded media can be easily reproduced, re-“played”, and re-instantiated into the present.

fingers, across the strings, while slowly creaking them across the fingerboard. This is done in conjunction with the bassist slowly bowing across the bridge of her instrument, generating an air-like tone, not unlike an instrumental whispering. These sounds slowly transform into more reedy harmonics, which more closely resemble specific pitches, or hints of what is to come. As the following track begins to fade in over the top of these potentially eerie, yet evocative sounds, these harmonics meander through incarnations of what I am choosing to call the “Don’t Cry Theme” (Figure 1). The repeated electronic elements fading in the following track resemble a modal center of c-minor, a tonal area which the violin and bass gravitate towards in their placid trajectory towards the mantra-like repetition of the “Don’t Cry Theme”. As the “Don’t Cry” track approaches the 2’12” (2 minute 12 second) mark, the violin and bass lower in volume, fading away from foreground prominence, overcome by the loudness and presence of the electronic track.

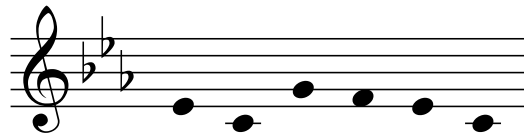


Figure 1. The "Don't Cry Theme"

2. “Don’t Cry.” As described above, this track begins with a slow fade-in (~ 2 minutes) over the top of the music provided by the violin and bass. It consists of a quickly repeated rhythmic figure played back via FM synthesizer suggesting a c-minor triad in conjunction with an additional nervous repetitive figure alternating irregularly between the 1st and 2nd scale degrees. At the 1’ mark, various distant groans, howls, and low-frequency moans begin to punctuate the already existing rhythmic momentum,

eventually giving way to a kind of feral duet between such thumps and the mercurial jabs of a higher-pitched synthesized timbre. This “duet” leads to a surging transitional climax beginning at 2’11”, resembling an amorphous swelling men’s choir convolved with a gritty rush of white noise. This heralds the entrance of numerous repetitive vocal lines, similar in character to the repetitive opening to the track; feverishly chanting syllables of “ma” and “na”, they intertwine, overlap, throttle each other forward, and revolve around the implied c-minor tonicity. At this juncture the overall texture of the music is thickened with numerous acoustic clicks, filtered synthesizers, evolving noise walls, and low-frequency rumbles, all of which gradually subside at the crucial entrance of a singing, singular, solo voice, sounding as if it is being radioing in through a noisy analog crystal set, fused with sandy, occasionally growling 21st-century digital noise. It is a recitation, an incantation, an invitation, and an expression of comfort: “Don’t cry. Don’t cry. Don’t cry . . .”

“You brought me
Sleeping darling
Home to you

Taken down the dark
and outside the leaves
are hushed

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

Warm like night
And sweet like day
I'm calling you.

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

I can't believe
Here and now is all
To you and us and we and all
Here, we make it

Now, we make it
Then, we make it
It is us.

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.”¹³

The non-vocal elements of the track proceed to fade out over the recitation, leaving only the noisy, darkened, impure voice, whose sound is eventually “turned off” following its exhortations, only to be immediately followed by the prolonged inhale of the following track.

3. “Just a Breath.” The prolonged inhale that begins this track is only the beginning of a fastidiously choreographed breath-filled episode, interspersed with sounds of shuffling feet and ambient sound which, in comparison to the noisy renditions of the previous track, slowly becomes purified and increasingly intimate over the it’s meditative respiring course. It is wet with reverb, occupying an unnatural yet welcoming space—a space of solitude. After a distinctive relaxing exhale, the next track begins to fade up as the methodical sequence of breathing and footsteps continues.

4. “Invocation.” The relaxing exhale of the previous track is immediately followed by a deliberate, directed respiration, summoning a low and rich pedal tone into being beneath it. Its increasing presence and momentum forward is accompanied by a weighty low-frequency rhythmic pulsation, resembling an abstracted cosmic heartbeat, characteristic of both mystery and power. This growing sound is overwhelmed, though not overturned, by the intense crest of a passing nebulous wave of highly distorted

¹³ Written by the composer.

metallic aural grit. In a Doppler-like manner, its nature transforms as we navigate through it, ebbing away into the sea beyond us. It has left us with a bubbling school of contrapuntal chanting voices, like a vocal detritus of souls rising to the surface of our sensory experience, and it is through their eddies that a vinyl-ridden orchestra of strings profoundly hums through a series of rolling, reverberating, distinctively-voiced minor chords. A handful of distorted waves continue to pass us as the strings deepen in pitch and character, like a submerging leviathan who graced us with an uncanny intimate moment of sight and sound.

5. “Post-Invocation.” Post-invocation we are left in a glassy calm where the violin and bass once again feel compelled to speak. Their voices are high and singing, flageolet and hollow, suggesting a wide-open space that can now be occupied by sound and light. Their suggestive flourishes, reaching from progressively smaller intervals to a common tone, summon the larger peaceful strings into being, which occupy the acoustic background of the next track.

6. “Holy Places.” The violin and bass have invoked a larger thread of harmonic-playing strings into the space, which fades up over their own efforts to match in both character, pitch, and timbre. This lengthy track (nearly nine minutes in duration) occupies an aural Elysium field of ambience and respite. What distorted grumbling unrest there was before is now past, as high clusters of singing string harmonics are lightly brushed with deep, powerful, yet harmless bass-heavy resonances. Additionally there is a monophonic celeste-like tone which hovers above the texture, slowly instantiating a

simple melodic line across the aural background. A misty mark tree occasionally twinkles through the space, and after eight minutes of floating stasis, “All Around Preface” rises, intruding on and overcoming what rest there was.

7. “All Around Preface.” This short track resembles an out of kilter, encroaching Leslie speaker; it noisily whistles along with the frightening amount of rumbling energy, increasing in tempo over the course of two minutes as an incessant clicking rhythm becomes matching its growing momentum becomes more present in the mix. This two minute acceleration from virtual stasis is accompanied by grinding, thumping, banging improvisational outbursts from the violinist and bassist, becoming ever more aggressive and raucous in preparation for the energy present in “All Around,” at which point the instrumentalists abruptly stop playing.

8. “All Around.” The rising tempo of the “Preface” acts as an inertial introduction to the pace of “All Around”, reeling at 142 beats per minute. What clicking there was before has now explicitly emerged as an incarnation of a hyper-rhythmic teletype, the rapid ticking of which serves as an iconic concrète foundation from which the club-style thumping bass beat springs. Despite the brief high-energy nature of this track (2’37”), there are several transcendent moments which materialize, hearkening back to the celeste-touched repose of “Holy Places,” but are nonetheless here charged with significantly more harmonic potential and activity in the musical arrangement. Swirling, morphing synthesizers punctuate these moments, along with acoustic piano flourishes,

and hints of breathy noise, all indicating that we are not too far away from our timbral roots from whence we came.

9. “Don’t Cry - Reprise.” The final “ding!” of “All Around” signals the return of a repetitive contrapuntal vocal sea, although this time it is more present, more austere, and serves to introduce a reprise of the vocal incantation originally found in “Don’t Cry.” Whereas the voice original appeared as a distant, noisy, crackling signal radioing in from afar, this time it is crystalline and lucid, like a collective unconscious becoming articulate and externally manifest:

You brought me here
to speak with tongues
of light and sound
to recall the fire

Here
to believe and bless
watch and observe
touch and affect

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

We close our eyes
and clasp our hands
and more
to think and be

There is a glow within our steps
to help us parse
and pray
and see
and love

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.
Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

Again we are left with the comforting double exhortation of “Don’t Cry,” but not until we are told that there is indeed “a glow within our steps”. All of this is accompanied by a deep bass fundamental pedal, and much higher supporting stoic strings.

10. “Ω Up and Out.” Across the final suspended cymbal of “Don’t Cry – Reprise,” an aching beautiful string harmonic pitch a tri-tone away triumphantly rises out of the narrator’s wisdom and rippling aural manifestations. There is a return of the holy celeste, accompanied by muted brass swells surging and supporting it in the background. The airy synthetic sounds invoke a choral timbre, which is soon validated by a reverent reinforcement of reassuring united human voices, coalescing around major chords, and buttressing the reverberant bell-like tones above it. After a bit of tritone-oriented harmonic planing, there is a distinctive chord progression outlined by the synthesizers, strings, and voices, all in the support of melodic dyads materializing out of the celeste. Over the course of two minutes this intimate grandeur fades into the distance, leaving an awe-filled space that is filled with the sounds of the live instrumentalists.

11. “Postlude.” In the “Prelude,” the violin and bass moved from hollow bridge-bowing air and wooden creaks to pitched mantra-like incantation. Now, they operate in reverse, invoking the celeste-laden melodies, vocal chanting, and “Don’t Cry Theme” that we have heard throughout. These pitched memories, like the “Ω Up and Out” before it, fade into the distance becoming less distinct, more abstract, and eventually coalescing into a rosin, wooden, breath. Eventually, there is silence.

CHAPTER II

Primary Documentation

The attached DVD contains video and audio documentation of the *The Glow Within Our Steps* installation and public performance.

APPENDIX A

List of Personnel

Given the collaborative processes I engaged in in order to create *The Glow Within Our Steps*, it is a challenge to determine the exact nature of each and everyone's contributions, let alone articulate specific attribution to particular components of the project. With this brief qualification, I present the following list of personnel along with their approximate roles within the project's production.

Concept, Director, Music, Sound Design, Video Editing, Gallery and Prop Design

Samuel Richards

Choreography

Maxx Passion, Brittany Whitmoyer

Dancers

Lynsey Colden, Allie Harris, Madeline Rager, Nola Smith, Stefania Spadaro-Bliss

Musicians

Adrienne Pope (violin), Elizabeth Soukup (double bass)

Gallery Design, Artistic Direction, Production Support

Daniel Richards

Technical Director, Production Support

Greg Corey

Publicity, Marketing, Graphic Design

Christine Richards

APPENDIX B

Choreographic/Movement Score for Performances

The following choreographic/movement score was written by Maxx Passion, one of the choreographers with whom I worked in order to create *The Glow Within Our Steps*.

“Prelude” and “Don’t Cry”

The musicians have begun making sound with and on their instruments as the performance begins.

Two minutes go by, and five dancers dressed in black, wearing shoes and socks enter the space one by one. They walk through the gallery and through the audience towards the assembly of musicians and lights stands. Five of the lights are brighter than the others. The dancers sit and remove their shoes and socks as pedestrians, and place them under the slightly-dimmed light stands. As they finish, four of the dancers walk to the lit rectangle and stand against two of its sides, facing out. One dancer enters the center of the rectangle and lies down on the carpet.

First music cue (approx. 1:40)

The four dancers slowly step away from the sectioned-off and lit center rectangle.

Second music cue (approx. 2:40)

Dancers are forcefully drawn back to the rectangle as if a magnetic pull has taken over their bodies.

Third music cue

The dancers run to two of the walls of the gallery and use the wall as their partner, giving it their full weight, pressing forearms, knees, heads, feet against the wall aggressively trying to re-enter the space they once were embedded in.

The dancer in the center has been finding her way to standing. Butoh slow. It takes her the full length of the previous tracks.

“Just a Breath,” “Invocation,” and “Post-Invocation”

The sound of breath is heard over the music. The dancer in the center is reacting with jittery, alien in the belly awkwardness that finally settle into a wind-blown gestural sequence that finds moments of stillness and moments of reverberation.

The wall dancers are completing an indirect pathway toward another wall. They are never walking in a straight line, when they come across a person (audience member or fellow dancer) they find stillness. An active moment of stillness with the dancer fully taking in the experience. The participants are invested in the moment for as long as it takes to

resolve, and then the dancer begins to move again, indirectly making their way to a new wall. This mapping sequence happens up to three times, but is dependent upon the number of audience members that occupy the space.

Music cue

Dancers begin to accumulate at the lit rectangle. One dancer enters the lit area and catches the center dancer mid swoon. They engage in a swoon-fall-catch duet.

Three dancers meet outside the area of light and find their way to the floor, using each other's bodies as leverage. They share weight with one another the way they had used the wall previously. Once on the floor they alternate between creating a tight-knit writhing group and solo moments of floor exploration. The group slowly orbits the lit space in the center.

“Holy Places”

When the three dancers have made their way around the circle they find stillness in a heap on the floor. The two dancers who have been swoon duet-ing in the center exit the lit rectangle through two different curtained sides. They build the heaped floor dancers to standing by manipulating each limb and torso in a utilitarian, focused manner. It is not warm, it is not cold, it is a task. Once all five dancers are standing they explode to the light stands that have been living around the musicians, and each dancer grabs one of the bright light stands. On a breath cue, they burst from their stationary positions into the

space to a predetermined place in the gallery, leaving the dimmer light stands surrounding the musicians.

For one minute the dancers explore the lights with limbs, heads, torsos, feet and hands while keeping the light stands stationary.

Chime music cue.

For two minutes the dancers rotate the light stands and various speeds, still exploring new ways to interact with the fixtures.

Chime music cue.

The dancers begin to catapult themselves with their lights through the space. The full group of lights and dancers move throughout the space, weaving in and among each other and the audience—schools of fish that assemble and disassemble themselves in and around the space finding moments of stillness and full-throttle motion until the end of the music section.

“All Around Preface”

As the music changes, the light stands are left out in the space and the dancers begin a running/walking/darting/weaving pattern in, around, and through the center lit rectangle that is now being projected upon with black and white abstractions. As the curtains are

manipulated by the movement of the dancers, they catch the projection and it becomes suspended in the air.

“All Around”

There is a gradual energy shift as the music swings into a heavily beat-driven track, and the dancers spot around, in, among the musicians. They start a series of awkward, nervous tic like movements. At times one dancer will “infect” the others, and they take on her short tic for a few seconds until it breaks and they return to their singular awkwardness.

“Don’t Cry – Reprise” and “Ω Up and Out”

The dancers break the movement. Break character. End the tic sequence. They locate their shoes and socks and Butoh walk to a light stand. When they arrive, they break character again and sit. Put on their socks. Put on their shoes. And walk to the door, exiting the space and leaving the door to the gallery open. The music continues.

APPENDIX C

Hardware and Software Used for Production of Electronic Score

Hardware

Mac Pro (Early 2009), 2.93 GHz Quad-Core Intel Xeon, desktop computer
Korg N1, 88-key MIDI controller
M-Audio BX8a, powered studio monitors
Dayton Audio B652, passive bookshelf speakers
KLH L652B, passive bookshelf speakers
Aiwa SX-ANV8000, passive bookshelf speakers
Dayton Audio SUB-1200, powered subwoofer
Shure SRH840, headphones
Apogee Duet (Firewire), stereo audio interface and preamp
Focusrite Saffire Pro 40, 20 in / 20 out audio interface and preamp
Audio-Technica MB4000C, small diaphragm cardioid condenser microphone
Audio-Technica P650R, small diaphragm cardioid condenser microphone
Studio Projects C3 matched pair, large diaphragm variable pattern condenser microphone
Studio Projects B1, large diaphragm cardioid condenser microphone
Studio Projects C4 matched pair, small diaphragm cardioid condenser microphone
M-Audio Microtrack II, portable digital audio recorder

Software

Logic Pro 9, digital audio workstation
Melodyne, pitch correction
Audio Damage Axon, neural pattern drum sequencer
Audio Damage Eos, algorithmic reverb
Audio Damage BigSeq and BigSeq2, step sequencer and filter
Brainworx bx_control V2, listening tool, stereo spreader, mid/side mixing tool
Voxengo Elephant, intelligent limiter
AudioBro LA Scoring Strings, orchestral string sample library
ProjectSam Symphobia, orchestral effect sample library
ProjectSam Symphobia 2, orchestral effect sample library
ProjectSam TrueStrike, orchestral percussion sample library
FabFilter Pro-C, compressor
FabFilter Pro-L, limiter
FabFilter Pro-Q, equalizer
FabFilter Saturn, saturation and distortion
FabFilter Timeless, delay
Native Instruments Classic Piano Collection, acoustic piano sample library
Native Instruments Absynth 5, FM, subtractive, granular, and sample-based synthesizer
Native Instruments FM8, FM synthesizer and filter bank
Native Instruments Kontakt 5, sampler
Native Instruments Kore Player, effects module
Native Instruments Massive, wavetable synthesizer
Native Instruments Reaktor 5, modular software music studio

iZotope Alloy 2, channel strip
iZotope Ozone 5, mastering and dithering
Octogris, octophonic panner
PSP Vintage Warmer 2, tube emulation limiter
Audio Ease Speakerphone, speaker and environmental emulation

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