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The electronic cry: Voice and gender in electroacoustic music

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VI

VOICE OR EAR?

THE FEMALE VOICE AND THE LISTENER'S POSITION

IN PAUL LANSKY'S *AS IT GREW DARK*[1]

Music technology is pervaded with metaphors of masculine power, control and mastery, such as 'master' and 'slave', 'controller' and 'command', 'trigger' and 'bang', 'His Master's Voice' or 'His Master's Noise'.[2] Whether as solitary studio composers or as composer-performers, electroacoustic musicians determine both structure and sound, composition and performance, through the smallest details. Or, as Edward Cone (1974) argues, electronic tape music may be considered as the direct and unitary expression of the metaphorical 'composer's voice'.[3]

Composers of electroacoustic music are predominantly male, yet this genre is marked by a trend towards female vocalists rather than male singers. This pattern is most noticeable in the classic concert setting. There are many compositions for live soprano and electronics that employ a modern Western classical singing style with much high-pitched and non-verbal elements, yet almost no electroacoustic compositions with a live singing male vocalist.[4] In the case of Hollywood film, opera

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[1] This chapter is an extended and slightly revised version of my article 'Voice or Ear? The Female Voice and the Listener's Position in Paul Lansky's *as it grew dark*.' In: Carolyn Birdsall and Anthony Enns (eds.), *Sonic Mediations: Body, Sound, Technology*, pp. 109-125. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008. Published with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

[2] A 'bang' is a command in Max/MSP, a software program for building patches for live electronic music that was developed by IRCAM and now sold by Cycling'74. The other terms are used widely in electronic music technology. 'His Master's Voice' is the name of the famous picture of a dog listening to a gramophone and was used by record labels including the Gramophone Company, the Victor Talking Machine Company, RCA, and EMI. 'His Master's Noise' is the title of a series of electroacoustic music released by BVHaast. For a more detailed discussion of such gender symbolism in music technology, see McCartney (1997) and Théberge (1997: 93-130).

[3] See Chapter IV.

[4] See Chapter II.

and live electroacoustic vocal music, the female voice often has the role of uttering non-verbal vocal sounds; as far as the diegesis or narrative content is concerned, the female voice is in a disempowered position or associated with death or a loss of identity.[5] Kaja Silverman (1988) explains the prevalence of the female cry and the disempowered position of female characters in classical Hollywood film as a projection of lack onto women. According to Silverman's psychoanalytic account, this lack consists of the separation of objects from the self; the division of language and being; the subordination of the subject to language, to the social order and law; the absence of the objects and the world seen on the screen and the exclusion of the spectator from the site of production. All subjects, male and female alike, are structured by these losses. However, since the male subject identifies with a position of power ('the phallus'), these losses are far more difficult to bear for the male than for the female subject. To hold his illusionary position of power, the male spectator is offered a powerful protagonist to identify with, and his own losses are projected onto the female characters.

In the following analysis of Paul Lansky's *as it grew dark*, the stereotypical reflex to project loss onto the female voice will be placed in a different perspective. Lansky's acousmatic composition consists of recorded computer reprocessing of a woman's voice without any live performance. In contrast to the function of embodied female voices in live electro-vocal music, opera and film, I will argue that Lansky's work illustrates how pre-recorded and synthesized voices in electroacoustic music are more varied with regard to gender, vocal style and the use of text.[6] I will discuss such different approaches to male and female voices in acousmatic compositions with respect to authority, loss, the cry and electronic mediation.

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[5] Regarding film, see Silverman (1988); for opera, see Poizat (1992); for electro-acoustic music, see Chapter II and III.

[6] See Chapter II and III.

VI.1.1 The objectified voice and the vocal object

Michel Poizat, influenced by the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan, makes a distinction between the objectified voice and the vocal object (Poizat 1992: 93-106). The objectified voice is a recorded voice, making it an object that is reified and can be exchanged. The Lacanian vocal object, however, is the objectifying psychic perception of the voice as a separate entity. By considering the voice as an object, it is possible to speak of a 'lost voice' or 'broken voice'. The vocal object is also an object of desire. The vocal object is the pure materiality of the voice that one is never able to hear in its pure form, since vocal sounds are infected with meaning and language. According to Poizat, the vocal object is a lost object that one desires but that is impossible to possess. It is disembodied, unsexed and infinite. The quest for the lost vocal object is asymptotic. It is never possible to possess pure vocal sound; the nearest possible is the cry or silence. To surrender oneself completely to the limitless *jouissance* of pure sound, to lawless desire, is dangerous and prohibited – one would fall outside the symbolic order, outside language (if that is even possible) into madness or death. The quest for pure vocal sound thus has to be regulated by language and rules, as for example the interplay between singing and language in the history of opera, as described by Poizat. 'Pure' vocal sound is at its most intense when contrasted with language (Poizat 1992: 45).

While Poizat (1992) deals with the objectified and recorded voice in terms of live performance, Silverman (1988) focuses on classic Hollywood cinema, in which the illusion of the reality of the world depicted on the screen is of central importance. In particular, she criticizes the ways that film theory has stressed the impression of reality and the supposed phenomenological immediacy and presence of sound and the voice for the audience. In acousmatic music, however, the recording is the art object itself and it is not derived from or suggesting a (real or imaginary) live performance.[7] The sound recording of acousmatic music is not subordinated to the illusion of the reality,

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[7] However, in electroacoustic music extra-musical associations or references to external reality or imaginary worlds will often be unavoidable for listeners and may sometimes be intended by composers. Sounds may refer to objects, movements, actions, bodies, gestures, animals, people, natural processes, environments, spaces, language(s), and so on; this is extensively discussed in various publications in the field of electroacoustic music studies. For an overview and discussion of signification in electroacoustic music in relation to compositional intention and listener reception, see Demers (2010: 21–65).

authenticity and immediacy of an original live situation; it is sound 'writing'.[8] The difference between a recorded voice and a live voice is enhanced by electro-vocal acousmatic music, which takes distortion and manipulation of the voice as its basic material. The recording medium and the studio manipulations are not hidden but brought to the fore. The technology puts a distance between voice and listener and posits a framework for non-linguistic vocal sounds that might otherwise be too dangerous for the subject. This creates a different form of regulation than the combination of singing and language as theorized by Poizat, but with a similar function.[9]

Disembodied voices are in fact the status quo in acousmatic electro-vocal music. The use of the disembodied voice of a composer, poet, artist or politician as a 'voice of authority' occurs frequently in electroacoustic music, but often with a twist, sounding distorted or ironic. The explicit use of music technology causes a distantiation of the vocal delivery that leads to a critical recontextualisation of the sound bites of politicians in works like Wilhelm Zobl's *Andere die Welt, Sie braucht es*.[10] However, technological manipulation can also lead to a cryptic, mystifying concealment of an authoritative voice within the distorted sound.[11] Michel Chion

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[8] My notion of 'sound writing' is inspired by Jacques Derrida's notion of *écriture* in *De la grammatology* (1967), 'Signature événement contexte' (1972) and other publications. See also Chapter VIII and Bosma (2006a: 111-113).

[9] As discussed in the previous chapter (V.5), Paul Griffiths argues that tape compositions with abject non-verbal vocal sounds, such as Berio's *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)* and *Visage*, paved the way for compositions that prescribe the live performance of such voice sounds, such as Berio's *Sequenza III*:

> Unless exceptional circumstances, to have a singer mouthing unintelligible syllables would be to invite the danger of absurdity. However, when the voice appears on tape this restriction is lifted, the unseen singer no longer needing to behave with rational decorum. (Griffiths 1979: 36).

[10] Zobl, Wilhelm. *Andere die Welt, Sie braucht es* (1973), on CD Cultures Électroniques 6 Prix Magisterium 19e Concours International de Musique Électroacoustique Bourges 1991, Le Chant du Monde, CM211, LDC278055.

[11] See Chapter II and III. Examples of such mystified authorative voices include the voices of Pauline Oliveros, Jerry Hunt, Morton Subotnick and David Tudor in Larry Austin's *SoundPoemSet*; the voice of composer John Cage in Joseph L. Anderson's *ChAnGE'S MUSIC*; the voice of Salvador Dali in Jonas Broberg's *Conversation in Cadaqués*; the voice of art historian William S. Hechkscher in Alicyn Warren's *Longing for the Light*; and the voice of computer music scientist Max Mathews in Larry Austin's *Max Mathews Episode*. Distorted and transformed sound recordings of interviews, conversations or monologues of these artists and scholars form the basis for these compositions. It is striking that the speaking voice of the only woman in this list of authoritative voices, Pauline Oliveros, is among the least recognisable.
Austin, Larry. *SoundPoemSet* (1990-91), on CD CDCM Computer Music Series Vol. 16 The Composer in the Computer Age II, Centaur Records CRC 2193, 1994.

(1992: 109) notes that in film the loss of intelligibility of a voice is easily heard as the interference of a technical manipulation instead of a subjective experience of a film character. He contrasts this with the visual convention that a blurring of the image often expresses a loss of consciousness of a character. Chion attributes the difference in the interpretation of auditory and visual manipulation to the fact that we are used to manipulating our own vision by closing our eyes or turning our head. By contrast, a comparable subjective change of hearing is not possible: our ears cannot close or redirect themselves in such a selective way. When we hear the transformation of a voice as a technical process these acts of manipulation bring the composer to the foreground. In the piece by Zobl mentioned earlier, this 'composer's voice', represented by the technical manipulation, turns itself against the recorded voices of authorities. Or, as in Larry Austin's *SoundPoemSet* and Jonas Broberg's *Conversation in Cadaqués*, the composer conceals the voices of the authorities of which he owns the full recordings, placing himself in a superior, knowing position in relation to the listener.

VI.1.2 Acousmatic male voices:

The objectified voice and the vocal object revisited

In acousmatic music there seems more place for male figures to be associated with loss than in classic Hollywood film, opera and mixed live vocal-electroacoustic music.[12] There is a remarkable amount of pre-recorded male(-like) voices that dwell in the continuum between language and sound. A striking sense of loss, failure, lack,

Anderson, Joseph L. *ChAnGE'S MUSIC* (1996), on CD CULTURES ÉLECTRONIQUES 10 BOURGES 1997 PRIX MAGISTERIUM ET PRIX QUADRIVIUM 24ÈME CONCOURS INTERNATIONAL DE MUSIQUE ELECTROACOUSTIQUE, Mnémosyne Musique Média LDC 278063/64, 1998.

Broberg, Jonas. *Conversation in Cadaqués* (1996), on CD CULTURES ÉLECTRONIQUES 11 BOURGES 1998 PRIX QUADRIVIUM 25E CONCOURS INTERNATIONAL DE MUSIQUE ELECTROACOUSTIQUE, Mnémosyne Musique Média LDC 278065/66, 1999.

Warren, Alicyn. *Longing for the Light* (1991), on CD CULTURES ÉLECTRONIQUES 6 BOURGES 1991 PRIX QUADRIVIUM 19E CONCOURS INTERNATIONAL DE MUSIQUE ELECTROACOUSTIQUE, Le Chant du Monde LCD 278053/54, 1991.

Austin, Larry. *Max Mathews Episode* (1988-1990), on CD CDCM COMPUTER MUSIC SERIES VOL. 15 THE VIRTUOSO IN THE COMPUTER AGE V, Centaur Records CRC 2190, 1994.

[12] For loss in relation to masculinity in film, see Silverman (1992).

disempowerment or melancholia pervades the texts on which several pieces with pre-recorded male(-like) voices are based, such as Charles Dodge's *In celebration*,[13] Howard Jonathan Fredrics' *The Tragedy of the Leaves*,[14] and *Wasting* by Brad Garton, Paul Lansky and Andrew Milburn.[15] It is remarkable that these compositions are all related to a typical American context: the American writer Charles Bukowski is the author of the text of *The tragedy of the leaves*, American sound poet Richard Kostelanetz is the author of the text of *Wasting*, and all of these composers are connected to American universities, with Charles Dodge and Paul Lansky embedded in the American tradition of computer music made by speech synthesis-by-analysis. The 'immersion in loss' contrasts with the image of the USA as the most powerful and technologically advanced nation with its emphasis on success, the power of the individual and the strength of the ego.[16] These acousmatic male voices do not evoke bliss or tragedy, which are often expressed by female roles, but rather melancholia. They are not the projection of loss onto woman, but the introjection of loss by a male figure.

In Mark Strand's text of *In celebration*, the narrator is speaking to and about a 'you', who indulges in a zen-like form of detachment or even in depressive passivity, or is perhaps in the process of dying:

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[13] Dodge, Charles. *In celebration* (1975), on CD CDCM COMPUTER MUSIC SERIES VOL. 18 THE COMPOSER IN THE COMPUTER AGE III, Centaur CRC 2213, 1994.

[14] Fredrics, Howard Jonathan. *The tragedy of the leaves* (1991), on CD CDCM COMPUTER MUSIC SERIES VOL. 20 MUSIC FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS ELECTRONIC MUSIC STUDIOS, Centaur CRC 2245, 1995.

[15] Garton, Brad, Paul Lansky and Andrew Milburn. *Wasting* (1987), on CD CDCM COMPUTER MUSIC SERIES VOL. 5 WINHAM LABORATORY AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, Centaur CRC 2076, 1990.
  Other compositions in which loss plays a less prominent role include Eugene de Lisa's *S'I fosse foco*, in which the male voice is more angry and grudging than melancholic; Michael Long's *there is a grey thing*, which is about the horror and fear of an unknown dark power; and Pablo Cetta's *You did me wrong...Que me hiciste mal...*, in which a few male voices represent death and consolation.
  Lisa, Eugene de. *S'I fosse foco* (1992), on CD CDCM COMPUTER MUSIC SERIES VOL. 16 THE COMPOSER IN THE COMPUTER AGE II, Centaur CRC 2193, 1994.
  Long, Michael. *there is a grey thing* (1996), on CD CDCM COMPUTER MUSIC SERIES VOL. 29 MUSIC FROM THE VIRGINIA CENTER FOR COMPUTER MUSIC UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Centaur CRC 2454, 1999.
  Cetta, Pablo. *You did me wrong... Que me hiciste mal...* (1992), on CD CULTURES ÉLECTRONIQUES 8 BOURGES 1994 MAGISTÈRES ET PRIX 22E CONCOURS INTERNATIONAL DE MUSIQUE ÉLECTROACOUSTIQUE, Mnémosyne Musique Média LDC 278058/59, 1995.

[16] For a discussion of 'immersion in loss', see Clewell (2004: 53).

> You sit in a chair, [...] imagining only the patience of water, the boredom of stone. [...]
> you think that nothing is good or bad [...] You've seen it happen before. [...] You want to
> wave but cannot raise your hand. [...] You taste the honey of absence. [...] It is the same
> wherever you are, the same if the voice rots before the body, or the body rots before the
> voice. You know that desire leads only to sorrow, that sorrow leads to achievement
> which leads to emptiness. You know that this is different, that this is the celebration, the
> only celebration, that by giving yourself over to nothing, you shall be healed. You know
> there is joy in feeling your lungs prepare themselves for an ashen future, so you wait,
> you stare and you wait, and the dust settles and the miraculous hours of childhood
> wander in darkness.[17]

Death, passivity, the collapse of voice and body, childhood and darkness go together in this 'celebration' of nothingness. A celebration that would remind me of *jouissance* if the text as well as the atmosphere of the composition were not so melancholic through the slow-stretched delivery of the text, the slowly gliding and falling pitch and timbre and the 'nasal'-sounding computer voice, produced by way of analysis-resynthesis of a male voice.

This composition lingers between language and sound, however, I do not hear 'the body of the voice', no grain in the vocal sounds – these have been analysed and re-synthesized with regard to linguistic and musical parameters such as formants, pitch and duration. The 'grain of the voice', however, is that which is outside linguistic and musical systems or styles (Barthes 1977b). This voice sounds more like a computer than a body. But this computer-voice sounds strangely expressive, by the musicalized, varied pitch and rhythmic contours and the sound quality of older technology (for contemporary ears).[18] As a cyborg, the male-like computer voice may cross conventional gender categories and may open up possibilities for unmasculine expressions**,** as 'sad machines', like the dying computer HAL in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).[19]

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[17] From the liner notes of Charles Dodge. *In celebration* (1975), on CD CDCM COMPUTER MUSIC SERIES VOL. 18 THE COMPOSER IN THE COMPUTER AGE III, Centaur CRC 2213, 1994.

[18] A similar phenomenon can be found in the emotionally expressive cyborg voices of Radiohead some twenty-five years later (Auner 2003).

[19] 'Sad machines' is a quote from Joseph Auner's account of the cyborg voices of Radiohead and Moby (Auner 2003). He points out that the expressivity of HAL's cyborg voice contrasts with the almost silent human astronaut Dave; and that the expressivity of the cyborg voices of Radiohead and Moby contrasts with looped, objectified human voices. Auner asks 'why the robotic voice is the only one permitted such confessional lyrics, or, for that matter, why it is that in 2001 HAL's voice becomes more and not less poignant and emotional as its mechanical and artificial characteristics are foregrounded through the sinking pitch and extreme ritardando.' (Auner 2003: 103) My take on HAL's

A step beyond the inward, self-effacing, self-critical melancholy of *In Celebration* is *The Breaking of the scream* by José Halac.[20] This composition is largely made out of male screams, combined with the reciting-singing-chanting-shouting of a poem by the contemporary Argentian poet Pablo Anadon and an Argentian folk song, a *Baguala,* probably with origins in the indigenous music of the Incas. The poem deals with loss, 'the departure of the loved one' according to the sleeve notes; but it does not only tell about the emptiness of loss but also about what remains in memory. In the process of mourning, these memory traces have an important function (Clewell 2004). 'What to do with these remains, the leaves that once were our flesh and cry on our feet like spectrums?' is being asked in Pablo Anadon's poem. Clewell finds several strategies of mourning in art and psychoanalytic theory. One strategy is to replace the lost one with another loved object, as Freud suggests in 'Mourning and melancholia',[21] or with a consoling fiction of transcendence, as found by Peter Sacks[22] in the genre of the elegy. However, unlike these strategies of substitution mentioned by Clewell, in Pablo Anadon's poem / Halac's composition, the lost one is not substituted: 'Everything remains, all our eyes ever loved everything persists, here, in our memory, in this puddle of leaves rotting and of sorrow.' Such an incorporation is often seen as a cause for melancholia or depression, when the aggression against the lost one is projected inwardly against the self. But Clewell pleads for considering another kind of identification with the lost one that does not lead to depression but acknowledges the loss and the otherness of the lost one. For this, it has to be acknowledged that the self is divided and consists of identifications with and attachments to others; one has to acknowledge 'the predicament of being inhabited by otherness as a condition of one's own subjectivity'

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voice in Chapter III is different yet related to Auner's; we both relate these cyborg voices to the destabilization of gender categories. (Both articles (Auner 2003, Bosma 2003) were published in the same year; the authors were unaware of this in advance.) I thank Joseph Auner for contacting me and referring to his article.

[20] José Halac – *The Breaking of the scream* (1999), on CD Cultures Électroniques 14 Bourges 2000 Magistères et Prix 27e Concours international de musique et d'art sonore électroacoustique Prix Magisterium et Prix Trivium, Mnémosyne Musique Media LDC 278072/73, 2001.

[21] Freud, S. 1917. Mourning and melancholia. *Standard Edition* 14: 243–258.

[22] Clewell refers to Sacks, P. 1985. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

and one has 'to relinquish the wish for a strict identity unencumbered by the claims of the lost other or the past' (Clewell 2004: 65). In *The breaking of the scream*, such a vital acknowledgement of the lost object as part of the self can be noticed.

The folk song in *The breaking of the scream* is about sexual, 'animal' desire, but with a melancholic flavour: 'I am like the old tiger', sung in a wailing way, almost like a lamentation, with sudden changes of register. The scream is a long held vocalisation on one tone with fluctuations of timbre and pitch. Although the scream is denaturalized by electroacoustic manipulation, it does give the piece a bodily impact by the 'rough' vocalising, with some raspy vocal fry, the abrupt change of vocal register into falsetto at the end of the scream, and by the central function of the scream in the musical structure, stretched, repeated and overlapping. At some points the tiger song and the scream are so much distorted that it ceases to sound vocal, but is still reminiscent of this screaming voice, retaining its impact, figuring the remains of the lost voice.

While Dodge's narrator in *In celebration* practices 'nothingness' or detachment to avoid desire and sorrow and has a voice without 'grain', without body and life, *The Breaking of the Scream* posits both loss and desire, emotion and body, as part of life. It does not connect loss and failure with a disappearance of vitality, but celebrates vitality in relation to loss.[23] Rather than indulge in or deny a fantasmatic immediacy of 'liveness' with live vocals or computer voices, respectively, this electroacoustic scream song shows that the effect of traces, distortion and distance in the 'writing' of the electroacoustic medium, is not contrary to vitality and emotional impact. *The Breaking of the Scream* belongs to a new generation, since it is exceptional that the scream, the body and the voice of this composition are male.

The creative use of the recording medium places the loss that is inherent to the vocal object in the foreground rather than projecting it onto a female character. In this sense, electro-vocal acousmatic music is not concerned with the momentary, illusionary bliss of the *jouissance* of the vocal object. Instead, the continuities, discontinuities and ambiguities between verbal and non-verbal voice sounds and non-vocal sound are openly explored.

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[23] For a discussion of the 'grain' of the voice, see Barthes (1977b).

After this discussion of acousmatic music that displays alternative male voices, I will now turn my attention to different ways of dealing with the female voice.

VI.2 *as it grew dark*: voice or ear?

With his composition *as it grew dark*,[24] Paul Lansky suggests that the stereotypical projection of loss onto a female voice may be thrown back towards the listener. Chion notes that in the case of film sound the loss of intelligibility of a voice is easily heard as the interference of a technical manipulation. This observation suggests that a distorted female voice in acousmatic music would not be heard as an abnormal vocalisation of a female character, but as an activity of the metaphorical composer's voice. Yet with *as it grew dark* Lansky suggests another possibility: that the loss of intelligibility of a voice is interpreted as a distortion of the hearing ability of the listener.

Lansky's work belongs to the canon of computer music.[25] Lansky has developed computer music software, writes about computer music and composes both for acoustic instruments and for the electroacoustic medium.[26] Lansky's computer music is often considered 'accessible' primarily due to his use of text, voice, rhythm, pulse, pitch and harmony.[27]

> Lansky employs [...] complex methods and media to create works that transcend their own technology and convey a highly personal, accessible, and even sentimental aesthetic.[28]

Many of his computer compositions include speech or speech-like sounds, manipulated with computer techniques of synthesis-by-analysis and sound processing: a recorded voice is manipulated by changing certain characteristics, for musical-compositional purposes.[29] This results in voice sounds that may or may not sound like the original recorded voice, with changes in pitch, rhythm, timbre or other aspects.

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[24] Paul Lansky – *as it grew dark* (1983), on CD COMPUTER MUSIC CURRENTS 11, Wergo 282031-2, 1992.

[25] See Dodge & Jerse (1997).

[26] See http://www.music.princeton.edu/~paul/ (last accessed 27 June 27 2011).

[27] One of his early tape compositions, *mild und leise*, was used in Radiohead's song *Idioteque*.

[28] J. Neal. Paul Lansky: biography. *All Music Guide*. http://www.allmusic.com/artist/paul-lansky-mn0000001449 (last accessed 22 July 2012)

[29] See Dodge & Jerse (1997).

The vocal source often consists of a recorded text read by the actress Hannah MacKay, who is married to Paul Lansky and who is acknowledged in the sleeve notes as a creative collaborator. The technical and musical aspects of such recorded speech manipulation are discussed by several authors with regard to Lansky's *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion*[30] and the *Idle Chatter* series.[31] With regard to *Six Fantasies*, Lansky and others remarked that he composed the 'hidden music' out of the pre-recorded text; by placing the implicit musical aspects of the text in the foreground, the listener's attention is drawn to the musical quality of the original text. Here, I will not focus on the technical and musical aspects of the speech processing in *as it grew dark*, but on the distortion of the voice in relation to the listener's position, and I will show how this relates to the original text, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). As in *Six Fantasies,* there is a strong relation between the composition and the textual source in *as it grew dark*.

'Listening' is a recurrent theme in electroacoustic music theory. An early example is Pierre Schaeffer's theory on different modes of listening. 'Deep listening' is central to the work and use of sound technology of composer-performer Pauline Oliveros:

> I learned that the microphone was hearing sounds that I missed while listening during the recording. [...] The microphone and tape recorder became extensions of my body and amplified my hearing. The tape recorder became an essential tool in my development as a composer, performer, and improviser. The tape recorder enabled me to more deeply access body consciousness through improvisation. (Oliveros 2004)

Barry Truax suggests that a sound recording device could be used as an extension of listening and compares it with a microscope or telescope. He also refers to the concept of the tape recorder as a 'sound mirror' and points out that it colours and frames reality through representation (Truax 2001: 190). Lansky uses a similar metaphor: the 'aural camera'[32] or aural 'microscope…to enrich our perspective of the "real world."'[33] But he also goes one step further when he considers loudspeakers as 'windows into a […]

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[30] Code (1990); Dodge & Jerse (1997: 240, 334–335).

[31] Dodge & Jerse (1997: 273–274).

[32] Perry (1996).

[33] Lansky, *as it grew dark* sleeve notes.

virtual reality that the computer creates' (Perry 1996: 54) rather than instruments with which the composer's voice 'shouts' directly at the listener:

> [I]f instead of a string quartet playing up on the stage you have sound coming out of a loudspeaker, you've got a real problem because you're being confronted directly with the composer's voice. In other words, you've got a situation in which you're listening at very close range to what the composer is saying. Typically, people find tape music in concerts very exhausting to listen to. My sense of the reason for this is, very often, [the listener has] very little space to maneuver. They've got very little room to tinker with the experience, they're actually being confronted by the composer's voice directly.…There's no question of interpretation, but as a listener you're being shouted at, in a sense. My take on what I've been trying to do over the years is to create in the piece itself a space that the listener can use to maneuver. (Uechi 1995)

Lansky thus tries to circumvent the idea of electronic tape music as the direct and unitary expression of the metaphorical composer's voice, which was theorized by his mentor Edward Cone.[34] To enliven the fixed nature of pre-recorded acousmatic music, Lansky intends to '[*reposition*] *the performance in the ear of the listener* rather than in the hands of the performer' (Riddell 1998) by offering complexity and ambiguity, which allows room for different interpretations at each listening session. As Lansky himself points out, 'for me, success means creating new ways of listening and hearing.'[35]

In *as it grew dark*, speaking, listening and (over)hearing are central themes. The composition consists of computer reprocessing of a reading by actress Hannah MacKay of a short section of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The recorded voice is severely distorted so that the text is scarcely intelligible. This sonic manipulation dramatizes the sound of the voice: the voice sounds as if not directed towards the listener, and the listener is put in a position of 'overhearing, or listening obliquely to the conversation', as the composer explains.[36] The text consists of Jane's description to Mr. Rochester of two dreams the preceding evening. She addresses him with 'sir' and 'you', but the contributions of Mr. Rochester to this conversation are left out in the composition. In the sleeve notes, the composer explains the omission of Mr. Rochester's voice as a consequence of this 'overhearing': the listener is not able to hear everything. To me,

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[34] See Chapter IV.

[35] David McCarthy, http://silvertone.princeton.edu/~paul/bio.html (last accessed 24 February 2008).

[36] Lansky, *as it grew dark* sleeve notes, p. 15.

however, it seems more likely that the listener would overhear parts of both voices instead of just a distorted monologue by Jane. In *as it grew dark,* however, the listener overhears a monologue of a female voice rather than a conversation. Not only is the story eerie, but overhearing a monologue is also uncanny: a person talking to someone unknown, or perhaps to nobody. There could be another function for the omission of Mr. Rochester: in the novel, he is apparently not listening very well to Jane and not taking her fears very seriously. When overhearing, on the other hand, a listener strains to make sense.

The composition consists of distorted, fragmented and repeated reading accompanied by non-vocal background sounds.[37] The piece starts with the text in which Jane describes the eerie atmosphere of the previous evening, consisting of whispery distorted voice sounds with some metallic-type resonances against a background of high trickling sounds. Lansky describes this opening section as 'colored by a high-passed signal which evokes memories of early radio transmissions.'[38] It is this part in particular that draws my attention towards the sonic quality of the text, as in 'it blew yesterday evening, not as it blows now – wild and high – but "with a sullen, moaning sound" far more eerie', 'to muffle a mournful undersound', and 'doubtful yet doleful'.[39] From 5'17 on, rhythmic sounds, like clapping, accompany the reading of the first nightmare; the voice sounds alternately distant or close. At 8'36 there are high metallic-type glissandos which evolve at 11' into warbling birdlike sounds. This forms the background of the reading of the second nightmare. The voice is rhythmically fragmented, echoed and repeated into a quasi-nervous mixture. From 16' on, the various background sounds combine with the phrase 'fell, and woke'.

In the novel, these scary dreams prefigure the terrible events that are about to happen soon: Jane's meeting with Mr. Rochester's monstrous legal wife the following night, the cancellation of the marriage of Jane and Mr. Rochester two days later, and the destruction of Thornfield some months later. The dreams also obscure the

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[37] For an analytical description of the composition, see Grimshaw, Jeremy. "*as it grew dark,* for computer synthesized tape." Review of *as it grew dark,* by Paul Lansky. *All Music Guide.* http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=42:168871~T1 (last accessed 12 January 2008).

[38] Lansky, *as it grew dark* sleeve notes, p. 15.

[39] See Brontë (2000: 281). For Brontë's/Jane's quote, see p. 476.

difference between reality and fiction. As dreams, they are not real, but later they will turn out to be a kind of premonition. Moreover, the dreams seem to be a symptom of Jane's fear and reluctance to marry Mr. Rochester at that moment. On another level, this points to the connection between the narrator/persona Jane Eyre and the author Charlotte Brontë.[40] It is as if the author sympathizes with Jane's doubts about the marriage and – so to speak – helps to avoid such an unequal marriage by the discovery of Mr. Rochester's legal wife on the wedding day. This conversation between Jane and Mr. Rochester is a crucial event in the novel, which induces Jane to become an independent woman and leads to Mr. Rochester's misfortune, his depression, the burning down of Thornfield, and the loss of his sight and his hand. As a result, their marriage at the end of the novel will have a different balance of power and dependency.

Jane has two functions in the novel: she is the narrator and a character in the story. As a narrator, she tells the story. In conversations, she cites both her own words and those of others, and sometimes she turns directly to the reader. Preceding the conversation with Mr. Rochester about the nightly events, she tells the reader that something is bothering her but that the reader has to wait until she will tell Mr. Rochester, thereby putting the reader in a position of overhearing:

> I had at heart a strange and anxious thought. Something had happened which I could not comprehend; no one knew of or had seen the event but myself: it had taken place the preceding night. Mr. Rochester that night was absent from home; nor was he yet returned: business had called him to a small estate of two or three farms he possessed thirty miles off—business it was requisite he should settle in person, previously to his meditated departure from England. I waited now his return; eager to disburthen my mind, and to seek of him the solution of the enigma that perplexed me. Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence. (Brontë 2000: 275-6)

This function of the reader as over-hearer is not only established by the Brontë with Jane as the narrator, but it is also employed by Lansky in *as it grew dark*. Lansky's piece thus can be considered as an extension of or a response to Brontë's work. For his earlier piece *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion,* Lansky took the implicit music of the text and of the vocal delivery as a theme for the composition. In *as it grew dark*, Lansky elaborated on the reader's position in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Both

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[40] It has often been remarked that there are many similarities between Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë and that this novel is partly autobiographical.

compositions take a characteristic feature of the original text as a conceptual theme for the composition, but on different compositional levels.

In the novel, both Jane's and Mr. Rochester's words in the conversation are cited by Jane-the-narrator. By leaving out Mr. Rochester's words, however, Lansky focuses solely on Jane-the-persona: that is, a scared woman's voice enclosed in the story and the piece. On a meta-level, Lansky is engaging with a woman's voice as author and narrator, while within the composition the woman's voice is confined as persona.

However, there is another kind of overhearing that is also alluded to in the text used in the composition. In the first part, Jane talks about the evening before the dreams, especially the 'sullen, moaning sound' of the wind and a 'mournful under-sound' muffled by the gale, 'doubtful yet doleful at every lull' (Brontë 2000: 281). She thinks that this 'under-sound' is a dog howling, but later in the novel the reader will come to know that this was probably the cry of Mr. Rochester's wife. Jane was overhearing this sound, which was supposed to remain secret.

These acts of overhearing raise the question of what the listener hears when listening to the distorted female vocal sounds in *as it grew dark*: a distorted voice or a distortion of hearing? The composer suggests that the distortion goes with the position of the listener, who cannot hear the full sound from a distance. However, the listener does not hear a normal voice as filtered through obstacles, because the voice is not only distorted, but it is also repeated and overlaid. Not only are pitch, timbre and loudness altered, but the temporal structure of the speech is also affected, alluding to an unrealistic situation. As an interference of a technical manipulation, it is more a mark of the activity of the composer than a feature of the listener's position, contrary to what the composer's sleeve notes suggest. Because repetition, variation and temporal layers are musical features related to rhythm, motivic variation and counterpoint, the composer's manipulations also musicalize the vocal delivery of the text. However, if we follow Lansky's intention, the temporal restructuring may suggest that the listener is in a state of half-consciousness. Like the experience of hearing sounds when half-asleep, not only is the perception of loudness, timbre and pitch distorted, but also the temporal order, which is caused by gaps in perception and the intermingling of perception and dream. Like Jane, therefore, the listener is in a similar state of uncertainty about the reality of the listener's perceptions. In any case, the temporal manipulation of the text dispenses with any illusion of reality that the recording might have sustained.

Many triangular situations can be found in *as it grew dark*, with one term missing in most of these triangles. Lansky suggests that in the Jane – Mr. Rochester – listener triangle the listener is (over)hearing Jane talking to an absent Mr. Rochester. But more triangles can be found. In Jane's description of the evening the triangle consists of Jane – Mr. Rochester – Mrs. Bertha Rochester, with Mr. Rochester as absent and Bertha as the intruder in the Jane-Mr. Rochester dyad. Another triangle occurs in Jane's first and second dream: Jane is carrying a child in her arms and tries to reach Mr. Rochester, who is going away, yet she cannot reach him. On another level, there is also the triangle of listener – vocalist – composer. Here, each term is absent as well as present: the listener is an abstract category and could be absent or present, the distorted and manipulated voice of the actress is in the composition even though she is not present herself and the composer is also absent but represented through his marked manipulation of the voice. On the level of production, there is also a triangle in which each creative figure is replacing the other: Charlotte Brontë, Hannah MacKay, Paul Lansky.

These triangles dismantle imaginary dyadic situations. Without such an intrusion, Jane would be too passionately, too closely and too dependently related to Mr. Rochester, with no legal marriage that would put their relation in the social-cultural order and without any proper position in the social-cultural order herself. It is the law, Mr. Rochester's marriage with Bertha Rochester, that comes between Jane and Mr. Rochester. On the level of the composition, an identification of the listener with the voice is impossible because of the position of 'overhearing', the absent Mr. Rochester to whom the voice addresses herself, and the distortion of the voice. The acousmatic medium thus does not function as a 'mirror' in the sense of offering a one-to-one relationship between listener and sound or a narcissistic mirroring of oneself in a voice with which one identifies. It also does not function as a 'window' that would give direct, unmediated access to a (virtual) reality. But it does encourage the listener to reflect on her position. The triangular structures dismantle the illusion of directness and immediacy that has often been ascribed to the voice in Western culture and that has been criticized by Derrida (1967) and Silverman (1988), among others. Since the stereotypical discourse on the voice is strongly gendered, casting the masculine voice as meaning and the feminine voice as body, it is significant that the basis for *as it grew dark* is a novel by a female author who explores the complex relations between

body and mind as well as other dualistic oppositions from the point of view of a female protagonist (Shuttleworth 2000).

VI.3 The electronic cry

Superficially, *as it grew dark* might seem to conform to the stereotypical gender pattern of having a male composer with the female vocalist/protagonist uttering non-verbal voice sounds. This is reinforced by the composition's focus on Jane-the-protagonist and its omission of Jane-the-narrator. By thematizing the listener's position, however, the tacit habits of projection and introjection are problematized. Lansky's intention to disrupt the listener's hearing instead of the vocalist's voice is countered by the temporal manipulation of the reading and the absence of Mr. Rochester's voice. Rather than foregrounding the listener's 'overhearing', the composition exposes the composer's manipulations of sound. Nonetheless, the composition, the composer's programme as well as Brontë's text, along with the acousmatic medium, highlight the possibility of an alternative configuration of gender, voice and technology.

The electroacoustic mediation and the absence of (the illusion of) live performance disrupt standard investments in notions of immediacy and presence in relation to the voice. With electro-vocal 'writing' (*écriture*) such as in *as it grew dark*, the listener is invited to reflect on the listener's position, which disrupts the stereotypical habits of projecting loss onto the female voice and of indulging in the tragic, blissful, overwhelming and non-discursive female singing body.

The electroacoustic medium disrupts the social conventions of Western score-based art music, although it developed out of this tradition. Traditional roles and events, such as composer, performer, listener, music publisher and concert, change or even disappear in the realm of electroacoustic music. While the position of the composer has become even stronger in acousmatic music, this development might (paradoxically) diminish a defensive projection of existential loss onto the female voice.

In contrast to the triangular relation of composer – performer – listener in score-based music, the usual situation in acousmatic music is the configuration of composer – electroacoustic apparatus – listener.[41] Both composer and listener are in an intimate relation to the electroacoustic apparatus because the sound of the composition depends

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[41] As electroacoustic material, slices of tape or digital audio files, pre-recorded sounds become part of the apparatus, and the producer of the sounds (the vocalist, for example) disappears. It is not by accident that the original sources of the sounds are often not credited by the composer (see for example Chapter V).

on the audio equipment. The composer is in close contact with the equipment while working with it intensely over a long period of time. The possibilities and constraints of the technology are crucial for the composition, and the creativity of the composer emerges from interaction with the technology. Technology is an important part of the discourse of electroacoustic composition. The listener only has access to the composition via audio equipment, and the quality of this equipment determines the sound of the composition. Since electroacoustic music contains uncommon, unknown sounds that are not easy to discern or recognize, the listener is uncertain whether hearing the composition, the audio system or the listener's own musical-perceptual auditory capabilities. For both composer and listener, audio equipment is an extension of the self that confuses the boundaries between human and machine and subject and object.

The listener's uncertainty about the source and quality of the sounds might even blur the boundaries between subject and object, confuse identification and disturb the usual habits of projection and introjection. Is the listener hearing a defective voice, a compositional process, or a hampered ear? Sounds without a clear source can be attached to different imaginary points of reference and are open for interpretation. Verbal and non-verbal voice sounds and non-vocal sounds belong to different perceptual categories. Since the continuities, discontinuities and ambiguities between such categories involve perceptual switches, the listener is ultimately confronted with the listener's own auditory perception. By breaking up language into sound, electro-vocal acousmatic music opens the ears of listeners to the sound in language.