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self-narrating through graphic media and notations

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**Proposal
for a Dance
Performance:
Self-narrating
Through
Graphic Media
and Notations**

Ioannis Panagiotou
PhD, Music Creative Practice
University of Edinburgh

Abstract

Proposal for a Dance Performance is an artwork for music ensemble and PowerPoint. This work aims to transform—through the use of self-referential narration—dance notation, emails, program notes and technical rides, into performing instances. The paper places the artwork in a dialogue with works by Hanns Eisler, Alfred Johannes and Johannes Kreidler, which use music notation as a conceptual visual tool. Furthermore, this paper discusses the role of music as a character in a play, a technique found in Samuel Becket's work. This combination of narration and notation is being proposed as a transdisciplinary methodology for breaking fixed notions of artistic practice.

Recommended Music to accompany this article

[‘Proposal for a Dance Performance’](#)

Ioannis Panagiotou

Proposal for a Dance Performance: Self-Narrating Through Graphic Media and Notations

I wanted to make a composition for dance, but I couldn't find any dancers, so I decided to create a work which would give musicality and motion to the paperwork that is lifeless but essential for transforming my idea into reality. The performance considers issues of narration, perception, and the ephemerality of my failure.

[Proposal for a Dance Performance](#)

Performed by the Edinburgh Contemporary (Rush Hour) Ensemble and conducted by prof. Peter Nelson.

John Konsolakis, clarinet
Richard Blaquièrè, piano
Andrew Taheny, violin
Georgina Finlayson, violin
Daniel Safford, viola
Justyna Jablonska-Edmonds, cello
Russell Wimbish, double bass

Venue: Reid Concert Hall, Edinburgh as part of Dialogues Festival 2019.

Notation and Boundaries

Wanting to create a connection with contemporary art, my starting point is film, one of the most multimedia forms of art. I analyse the relation between the visual and the audio elements, the music and the music score, and the ways they have been combined by different artists in different contexts, in order to break the boundaries between them.

One of the problems that some of the first modernist music composers tried to solve in Hollywood's film industry was the supposed superiority of the visual. Hanns Eisler, in his work *Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain*, built conceptual and non-linear relationships between his music and the film. Wind-rippled water surfaces (bars 67-68) are represented as trills in Eisler's music score where they create a visual result inspired by the scene.^[1] The way the film inspires Eisler's music affects his music score ontologically; the music notation is not only an instruction for an instrumental performance to take place but also it becomes a score-artwork with visual output.

Figure 1 Hanns Eisler: Fourteen ways to describe Rain
Pictured modified by (Eisler 1960)

The image shows a musical score for Hanns Eisler's 'Fourteen Ways to Describe Rain'. The score is divided into two systems, starting at measure 64 and 67. The instruments listed are Klav. (B) (Clavichord), Vi. (Violin), Vc. (Violoncello), and Klav. (Clavichord). The first system (measures 64-68) features a clavichord part with a trill marked 'Solo sehr rhythmisch' and 'Close staccatissimo 2nds mimic rain'. A blue box highlights the first measure of this trill, with an arrow pointing to the text 'First drop of rain'. The second system (measures 67-68) features a violin part with a trill marked 'wind' and 'staccatissimo', also highlighted with a blue box. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, p, f), articulation (staccatissimo), and performance instructions (Solo sehr rhythmisch, wind).

[1] Berndt Heller. 'The Reconstruction of Eisler's Film Music: "Opus III", "Regen" and "The Circus"'. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 18, no. 4 (1998): 550.

An example of this turn in the ontology of music scores is the gravestone of Alfred Schnittke (Fig. 2), *A very loud silence* (rest), where the composer asks for a very loud (fff) silence (rest), prolonged by an extra beat or two (the fermata overhead).^[2] He uses the music notation system as a graphic medium to tell a story about his future subsistence. Johannes Kreidler, in his series of works *Sheet Music* (Fig. 3), also uses music notation as a visual material like Schnittke's gravestone (Canvases version), and also as a medium that can perform itself (video version).^[3] Kreidler approaches his art as media art; today, boundaries between art genres are dissolving.^[4]

[2] Alex Ross. 'At the Grave of Schnittke'. Alex Ross: The Rest Is Noise. Accessed 24 March 2021. https://www.therestisnoise.com/2004/09/at_the_grave_of.html.

[3] Johannes Kreidler, 'Sheet Music'. Accessed 24 March 2021. <http://www.sheetmusic-kreidler.com>.

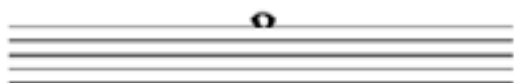
[4] Sandris Murins. 'Johannes Kreidler: multimedia music'. (2020). Accessed 24 March 2021. <https://medium.com/25-composers/johannes-kreidler-multimedia-music-6063150b975d>.

Figure 2 Alfred Schnittke's gravestone.



Figure 3 Johannes Kreidler: part of *Sheet Music* series.

Sunset



Nina Sun Eidsheim describes sound as a thick event which is better understood by vibrational practices and which appears as a form of radical materiality.^[5] This thick event cannot be divided into parts, as we tend to do when we describe and teach sound (pitch, tempi etc.) in academia. Billy Collins says: ‘we do not teach the pleasure of rhythm, the pleasure of sound, the pleasure of metaphor because these topics seem unteachable; this is why the emphasis lays on the meaning of the poem’.^[6] Following Eidsheim’s concept, music notation— being a part of the world of sound, and understood as a graphic medium—can also provide pleasure and metaphors, and can reveal stories as in Kreidler’s and Schnittke’s examples.

Self-referentialism

An important influence in my work is the use of self-referential narration by Samuel Beckett in his radio work *Cascando*.^[7] In this work, the author gave a very specific role to the music by giving instructions about its cues and duration in his script. In *Cascando* Beckett describes the process of the creation of the work in an abstract way by dividing the author’s personality into three. Beckett reveals the self-referential nature of this work in one of his letters saying ‘[i]t is an unimportant work, but the best I have to offer. It does I suppose show in a way what passes for my mind and what passes for my work’.^[8] Three characters, each an alter ego of the other, try to tell the story of a person called Woburn, who never appears in the play. The play is not about Woburn, but about the writer’s creative process.

The characters are: The Opener, the logical one who controls the play; The Voice, the most emotional part of the author who tries to narrate the story; and Music, a more metaphysical character that is like the sea in which the play floats. In the sea metaphor, I believe that self-referential narration works like a boat that guides the play and reveals the mechanism behind the work.

[5] Nina Eidsheim. *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

[6] Billy Collins, “TED Radio Hour,” National Public Radio, June 1, 2012, Accessed 24 March 2021. <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=153699514>.

[7] Beckett, Samuel. *Collected Shorter Plays*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

[8] Kelley, Paul. ‘Drama and/as the Pursuit of Narrative: *Cascando* and *Inferno XXIV*’. *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd’hui* 13, no. 1 (2003): 153.

This combination of narration and other media equally provided a sense of novelty. The play didn't seem like opera, where music is the most important part, nor like cinema or theatre, where the script seems more important than the music. In this case, music makes an equal dialogue with all the characters and media of the play.

Ontology of Notation, Self-referentialism, and Hierarchy

In this section, I explore the combination of the different components I described above through my work *Proposal for a Dance Performance*. The work was premiered at the Reid Concert Hall as part of Dialogues Festival 2019, performed by Rush Hour Ensemble and conducted by prof. Peter Nelson.

I decided to create a transdisciplinary concert video and music work which would give musicality and motion to paperwork that is lifeless but essential for transforming my idea into reality. In addition to this, I used emails, programme notes, technical riders, a smoke video, and dance notation—through the use of 'BAD aesthetic'—as part of my video projection. For Matthew Shlomowitz, BAD aesthetic is the idea that the concept and the means which are being used for creating an artwork—a Power Point file in case of my work—could create a 'bad' but charming musical practice.^[9] In my artistic practice, 'BAD aesthetic' is the output of a work which is led by conceptual and not aesthetical parameters. In my work, the concept and narrative are responsible for the aesthetic elements. For example, not being able to find dancers and not having drawing skills, I ended up creating the bad looking stick figure dance notation, which appears in the video projection of my work. Hence, I did not try to improve the aesthetic of these visuals and I let my concept decide their quality. This aesthetic provides me tools—such as humour—for finding and highlighting artistry in failure and the process of artistic creation.

[9] Shlomowitz, Matthew. n.d. 'Real World Sound in Relational Music'. Accessed 24 March 2021. <https://www.shlom.com/?p=relational>.

Stage: at least 15x15m stage with white floor and walls

Smoke: white fog

Costumes: black pajamas

Light: white spot light on the performer and the smoke

uld really work for this kind of

I would agree
ank you for accepting my proposal that Reid
Concert Hall
could really
oject. Please find attached the

and you for accepting my proposal,
would agree that Reid Concert Hall the
Technical ride

Lighting equipment

1 video projector

2 Genelec loud speakers

1 smoke machine

6 music stands

1 stage piano

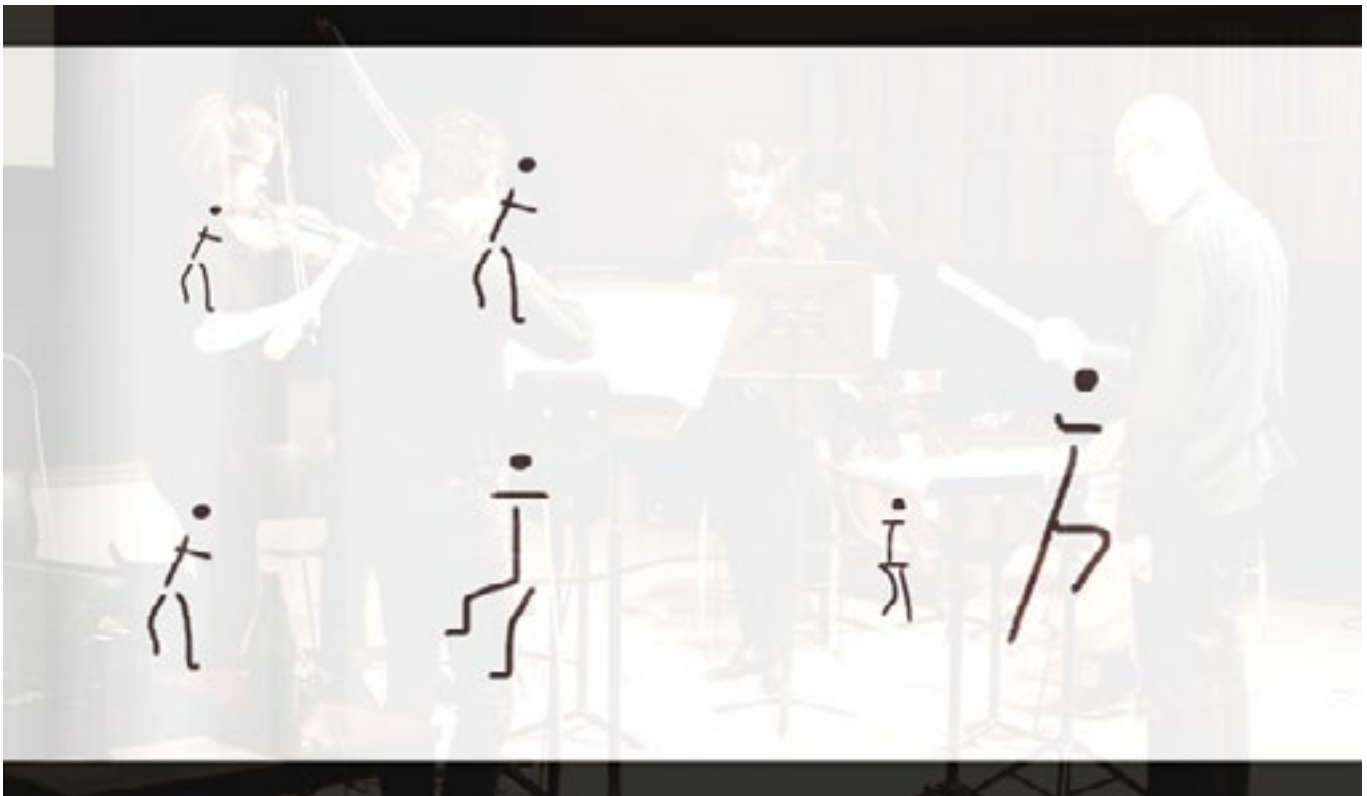


These elements, being approached as graphic media, are being combined in order to tell a story about a dance performance which is happening at the moment live on the stage, will happen in the future, or happens in an imaginary world and time. All these graphics, presented on a Power Point presentation, become living, digital matter which can perform and tell a story. The emails, the programme notes, and the technical rider, being projected behind the live musicians, become alive through Power Point's animations. Additionally, dance notation, in GIF format, starts moving and performing, while at the same time it provides instructions for a dance performance to take place.

As in Eidsheim's concept, and the works by Eisler, Kreidler and Schnittke, dance notation extends its ontology, and becomes a live presence which co-creates stories and metaphors. Notation is usually approached as a set of instructions, but in this case it becomes an active part of my artwork. Hence, a multiple ontology of text and dance notation is being created. This change in the ontology of the materials I use creates a change in the understanding of fields such as animation, dance, theatre, and music, and blurs the borders between them. This leads me to use equally all of the materials of my artistic palette.

The artwork refers to itself, through a video projected live on stage by me. The video explains the compositional process and the relationship between all the materials I used. The use of self-referential narration is the key element in this work, as it gives me the opportunity to explain the existential reason for each of the types of media I use, and the connection between them. Talking about the compositional process, and showing all the struggles I experienced in order to set this work on stage, leads me to break the hierarchy between these media. For example, although the work takes place in a concert hall, it is not being approached as a musical piece because music is a character in the story I narrate—as in *Cascando*—which has an equal importance to the video's graphics. The instructions in the projection explain when the music starts, and that the musicians should wear black pajamas. Music exists because emails, graphics, and dance notation exist too. Self-referentialism

creates a story world where all the different materials are necessary not only for their simultaneous existence but also for the existence of the artwork itself. This story world also includes the performance venue, by talking about it in the projected emails, and moving—through narration—the audience’s spot of focus, repetitively, from the video to the concert hall and the musicians.



Conclusion

This paper aimed to highlight the transdisciplinary, artistic, methodological, and conceptual aspects of my work, *Proposal for a Dance Performance*, which combines graphics and notations with self-referential narration, and sets it in dialogue with contemporary art. The methodology behind this work changes the ontology of different materials, breaking and blurring the borders between the disciplines and extending my artistic palette. The use of notation as a performance, rather than a set of instructions is in need of further artistic exploration. This can lead to breaking boundaries not only between different forms of art, but also between the artwork and the creation process.

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