

notes from the composers

I

(composing together...)

...we are not a team, though we have been collaborating in multiple ways for the last eight years. the pieces recorded on these two dvds are fruits of convergences rather than of mergings. Russell and I first met to upgrade and remaster Black /Noise III and music / consciousness / gender. Dorota and I met to co-edit The Open Space Magazine. Dorota, with her chopinesque polish-french poet-philosopher-musician biography, composed a bilingual, bitextual, polish-english, wordpiece, Poppies, in the course of listening to and playing ("...my chart shines high where the blue milk's upset..."). Russell composed an intensely intimate monotonic videoportrait of Dorota as she spoke the text of Poppies. Thinking of ("...chart...") as the background. She spoke it again in the Open Space studio where I recorded and mixed and edited a soundpiece converging her bitextual readings with each other and with the Michael Fowler recording of "...chart..." (Sarah Rothenberg's superbly icecold recording was a powerful contender but enfn was less expressively congenial for the project than Michael's irresistible romanticism.) Group Variations, having weathered multiple incarnations starting from its chamber-ensemble origins, got Russell filming semi-grungy stainedglass windows in Milagros in Tivoli New York near where we all live. Because he really didn't dig listening to it by itself, I think (though to be honest I really did suggest the project to him). Not to preempt anyone's experience, but I take it in as a trip into multiple rhythms

of color, literal and virtual times cohabiting but not necessarily cohering. As producing a multiplicity transmuting what's problematic about each of the surfaces alone.

Downtime. composed originally for Michael Fowler and his percussionist partner Stuart Gerber, had to be reconceived for piano and MIDI percussion because of Stuart's other commitments; it's been interestingly played by several excellent pianists (after being issued on CD in a purely electronic performance): Piotr Grodecki nobly gave the first live performance in Krakow in 2006. Michael played it in Sydney in 2009, and in 2012 Ian Pace did a transcendent performance with Russell's astonishing video piece at the Sonic Arts Research Center in Belfast, another live performance at City University London, and a studio recording in London with my old friend and colleague Newton Armstrong at the audio controls.

--ben boretz, august 2008; revised January 2013

II

3 Pieces

The three video pieces on this DVD are collaborations with the composer Benjamin Boretz, over a six year period. From 'Group Variations II', through 'Poppies' (which itself began with a detailed collaboration of Ben's music and Dorota's writing) to 'Downtime', I was trying to let the music and/or text inform the visual in an allusive rather than an illustrative way. The challenge was to find a principle of construction that neither mimicked, nor ostentatiously avoided the music's own structure. To find a valid, but independent, way of

building the video pieces compositionally.

These pieces are all experimental in the most basic sense in that I did not know what I was doing until it was done. The conclusions I was led to by these pieces have informed all of my work in recent years. The first point being to use a very limited range of visual elements, varying them with distance and movement/stillness (including the mixing of video with still photography); secondly - not to be afraid of blackness or blankness, to integrate silence; finally, though it may not seem so at first glance, to eschew any video effects, or to use them very sparingly (the very last image of 'Downtime' is a notable exception to this 'rule'). In each of these pieces there was an attempt to get it right 'in camera' and thus to include as essential the element of performance inside the piece, the idea of playing with a limited set of the unadulterated real.

My first thoughts, with 'Group Variations' were of architecture, both figuratively in terms of setting a supporting structure for the images, and literally by using strict elements of architecture and light (stained glass windows in a 19th century church in Tivoli, NY) as the only visual elements of the piece. I discovered that this works most successfully when the light is considered almost in the abstract.

'Poppies' is based on two interpenetrating texts by the poet Dorota Czerner which were then recomposed by Ben using his piece ("...my chart shines high where the blue milk's upset...") as recorded by Michael Fowler. All the images are fragments of Dorota's face and body, lit solely by candlelight. It's a very dark piece, which somehow plays off 'visual silence'. Again, the most successful images are those which tend to abstraction, even though they are rigorously 'real'.

'Downtime' was commissioned for a performance 'live with midi percussion' at Queen's College Belfast, with Ian Pace at the piano. This version uses a specially recorded studio version by Ian. I wanted to use a very limited palette for this piece, tending to monochrome, even when in full color, and – if the viewer wishes to be so amused – using preconstructed elements of a piano (i.e. wood and wires) as well as close-up details of the composer's actual piano, while playing with horizontal and vertical lines (streets, bridges, buildings) as compositional elements. The images also use moving elements of a trip to Brooklyn via Manhattan, situating not just an urban feel, but the urban background of the composer's origins. Though the visual piece is built in sections broadly corresponding to the score, care has been taken to avoid any strict correspondence. The irony being that any visual montage in time will of necessity find its own correspondence with any percussive and rhythmic section of music. These are felicities we are both happy to accept and welcome.

-Russell Craig Richardson, January 2013

Poppies

The illusion opening with substance from the first
gesture

across the space

a simple vocabulary of movement

..... their frail shadows

Origins and chronology:

I. October 2003. I first encounter Ben Boretz's thought in the form of a single ribbon of a music moving through several pages of ARGUMENT, Part II of *Language, as a Music*.

II. February 2004. Beginning to get more and more familiar with the score of ("...my chart shines high where the blue milk's upset...") as I'm memorizing it, and playing for myself.

III. February/March 2004. In parallel with ongoing sessions with Ben's piano music (but also in response to Ben's suggestion of my writing a text whose expression would be strictly framed by "thinking, that is, intellectual utterances", to the exclusion of any conscious usage of a

sensual image), I compose a diaphonic poem *Listening in Poppies, (en rouge et noir)* — a personal take on poetic image, voice and its utterance, emergence and articulation of sound, or language identity, framed within an experience of music.

IV. In 2005-2006 I record my readings of the poems, and begin to edit with Russell C. Richardson a video-piece transporting the two voices of *Listening in Poppies* into a visual medium. The resulting video performance was originated and edited by Russell in 2006. The soundtrack was recorded and composed at Open Space with the help of Ben Boretz. The piano performance of the music is by Michael Fowler, *Open Space* CD 18.

V. 2013, listening into *Poppies* from a distance I hear neither discourse, nor a lyrical poem, but an incessant tossing of sound-impressions, their horizon merged then sealed by Russell's reverie of images, luminous in their darkness, only

.... poppies I remember freckles of the wind....

-Dorota Czerner, january 2013

DVD 1, disc 1:

black/noise III
for video

composed 1999 by benjamin boretz
text: fragments from *mille plateaux*, gilles deleuze/felix guattari
sound: speaker, computer processed piano, electronic keyboards, double bass (mary lee roberts), voices (willi roberts, laurel hoyt)
dvd mastering by reuben delatour, 2003

music / consciousness / gender
for live speaker, recorded speakers, recorded sound, video images*

composed 1994 by benjamin boretz. video images composed with noel bush, performance by benjamin boretz recorded and mastered 1996 at moorhead state university (mn) by mary lee roberts.
recorded voices reading texts by bb: bb, penelope hyde, elaine barkin, noel bush, gavin russom.

music: gendermusic for computer (bb); kivapiece guitar background (mary lee roberts); lament for sarah (bb); parsifal, prelude to act III (wagner); ("...such words as it were vain to close...") (j. k. randall); coltrane/hendrix collage (bb); don't be so polite (jill borner/bb); adagietto from symphony no. 5 (mahler)

original post-production and vhs video mastering 1997 by baird winham.
dvd mastering by russell craig richardson, 2004 and 2012

*the textscore for music/consciousness/gender was printed in *audible traces* (ed. hemmesley and barkin, 1995) and *being about music* volume II (open space) and will appear 2013 as a monograph (open space)

DVD 1, disc 2

group variations
composed 2006 by russell craig richardson

music: group variations II for computer composed 1974 by benjamin boretz; re-sampled by Paul Lansky 1994 (open space cd 5); re-performed by bb 2005 (open space cd 20)
dvd mastering 2012 by rcr

poppies
composed 2006 by russell craig richardson
text "poppies", performance and reading by dorota czermer*

music: ("...my chart shines high where the blue milk's upset...") (bb, 1977); performed and recorded at taplin hall, princeton university, may 2003 by michael fowler, piano; original recording and audio mastering by mary lee roberts (open space cd 18); sound design, recording, mixing, audio mastering by bb 2006.
dvd mastering 2012 by rcr
*the text of poppies is online at www.the-open-space.org/webmag

downtime
composed 2012 by russell craig richardson

music: downtime for piano and electronic percussion composed 2005 by benjamin boretz. performed and recorded at city university, london, november 2012 by ian pace, piano. recording and audio mastering 2012 by newton armstrong.*
dvd mastering by rcr
*to be released 2013 on open space cd 30

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