



Attempting to invoke a three-way correspondence between sound, image, and text, here are two texts to consider in relation to the piece 'Angela Davis' from Peter Ablinger's *Voice and Piano* series. The first, on this page, was written by Ablinger himself for distribution to audience members when the piece is performed live, the second text I wrote as a response to the work you can hear.

The Recording of Angela Davis is from *Angela Davis Speaks*, 1971, Folkways Records.

Information is redundancy:

Tautology - according to Wittgenstein – tells nothing about the world and does not hold any relation to the world. I hold the opinion, however, that tautology is the basic principle of language, respectively the basic principle of the relation between language and world. Every description, explanation, analysis, definition is doubling, repetition, redundancy in exactly the same way tautology is all that. Something similar holds true for information: Information is not what stands out of redundancy. Rather information is not even possible without redundancy. The concept of redundancy is related to the concept of a "frame": repeating something means, grasping it more intensely, fixing it, cutting it, framing it. This, too, holds true for "meaning": Meaning and doubling or emphasizing are almost synonymous, in any case. (Translation: Christian Scheib)

Voices and Piano, originally written for Nicolas Hodges, is an extensive cycle of pieces, each for a single recorded voice, mostly of a well-known celebrity, and piano. The cycle is still in progress and should eventually include about 80 pieces/voices (around 4 hours of music). The work is always meant to occur as a selection from the whole. At present I like to write works where the whole should not be presented at once. The whole should remain the whole, and what we hear is just a part of it.

I like to think about *Voices and Piano* as my song-cycle, though nobody is singing in it: the voices are all spoken statements from speeches, interviews or readings. And the piano is not really accompanying the voices: the relation of the two is more a competition or comparison. Speech and music are compared. We can also say: reality and perception. Reality/speech is continuous; perception/music is a grid which tries to approach the first. Actually the piano part is the temporal and spectral scan of the respective voice, something like a coarse gridded photograph. Actually the piano part is the analysis of the voice.

Music analyses reality.

- Peter Ablinger, edited by Ruth Duckworth

Peter Ablinger has been working as a freelance musician since 1990, taking up the position of Research Professor at the University of Huddersfield, U.K, in 2013. His work has been presented at festivals throughout the world. He has himself initiated numerous festivals and concerts, also founding the music group Ensemble ZwischenTöne in 1988. As a conductor, Ablinger has worked with 'Klangforum Wien', 'United Berlin', and the 'Insel Musik Ensemble'. He has been based in Berlin for over thirty years.

Acquaintances, but with one having studied the work of the other, a sound designer and a musician (a specialist in accompaniment and background music) are in the middle of a conversation in a foyer prior to an evening speech scheduled as part of the inauguration of a new political party.

Sound Designer: I'm perplexed by the decision to have a pianist provide background music here. A presumptuous conceit dragging us towards the period of the architecture and a disconcerting decision in terms of our being here for this event, don't you think?

Musician: Yes, I know, I know. It does affect an air of sophistication, a yearning for situating music as an atmosphere responsive to one's desires. Yet, the thing is, in assuming such superiority, the power of atmospheres and the conditions from which future decisions will emerge are overlooked; customary inhibitions steer towards existing ends.

Sound Designer: But could we pose the question 'who is instrumentalising who?' Maybe the atmosphere is a modality for contestation, its regulation also an opportunity for subversion somehow?

Musician: I think it goes both ways. One can, I think, trace some mutualities or co-dependencies. Having worked as a background musician, like the pianist here, and as an accompanist for a soloist in other forums, I think there are a set of interrelations co-conditioning this event and the accompanist, if we were to think of the pianist here as accompanying us as we speak. Of course, when specifically accompanying another person it's different, the dynamics of the situation change. It is no longer a matter of being a central part of an atmosphere of an event but more the inducer of an atmosphere for a central focus, a soloist, for example.

Sound Designer: Ok, I see the co-dependency relationship there. But, I wonder, is it a symmetrical co-dependence? It's probably different for the two examples of accompaniment... Obviously, the historical figure of the virtuoso looms large here doesn't it, but thinking of accompaniment as, very generally, a means of being with someone somewhere is perhaps a perspective from which to think.

Musician: Absolutely. And the different modalities of 'being with' from which to consider accompaniment is starting to draw in some of the richness I find so compelling about the work of accompaniment. In terms of co-dependency, starting with the concert-type form, there's always talk of 'sensitivity', the word to which accompaniment is held accountable. You might hear of a soloist being sensitive to a piece of music but the accompanist must be both sensitive to the music and the soloist, even if these sensitivities are temporally displaced, rehearsed sensitivity to the music... etc.

Pianist (in a relaxed tone): Thank you. So, those were American railroad work songs I've adapted for solo piano. Unfortunately you didn't hear the lyrics, but the railroad workers used to sing them to the rhythm of their work to keep up their spirits but also to express their opinions of their white bosses. The bosses didn't mind too much as it maintained production.

[pause]

Pianist: Right, anyway, something now for those of you who know the history of song. These are some old Haitian chants I've again arranged for piano. Quite enchanting, if you know what I mean (chuckles). Following those, I'll improvise relatively freely for a while and see where that takes us. Again, thanks for listening and I hope you all have a galvanizing evening.

Sound Designer: And here the soloist is the public! And perhaps they are at the top of the hierarchy also?

Musician: Most definitely! The music here has to be sensitive to the public.

Sound Designer: So, an accompaniment in a situation like this could potentially go into some quite riotous territories should the accompanist and public ensemble veer in tandem that way! I wonder how the public in a concert situation feed into the hierarchy of sensitivity? They don't just witness an autonomous process unfolding onstage, their presence affects the things on stage too.

Musician: True. That's something to think about, but just to go back to what we were talking about before, if accompaniment is to be hyper-sensitive to its surroundings and to a given script, how can it be the one that instigates an atmosphere? What, in the synthesis, emerges also?

Sound Design: Perhaps it's something to do with the co-dependency, that relationship enabling a symbiotic hyper-sensitivity of both actors, the accompanist and the soloist. But, things could go another way, an accompaniment having such an autonomous coherence as to potentially undermine or even critique a soloist, or would this be regarded as insensitive?

Musician: Hmm, a critique from the synthesis of atmosphere. I suppose it would also depend on the piece of music, but if we're holding on to some kind of agency in this synthesising of an accompanist, it would have to be possible. Maybe we could better think this if imagining a recording situation. What, for example, if one was to accompany a pre-recorded soloist? Does the accompanist then become the contextualiser, using the soloist as material? 'The situation' would be the place of recording, with the spirit of the soloist recording perhaps inverting things temporally, but how does as an atmosphere inducer or conductor work in the isolated environment of a recording situation with only a recording for company? That's requiring a recalibration of one's senses isn't it.

Sound Designer: Right! But, of course, there's the process of post-production where one can further induce an atmosphere by tweaking the mix, reorganising the spread of the sound across the audible spectrum, and perhaps even adding certain sound effects.

Musician: It's a whole other thing, right?!

Sound Designer: Yeah, I think so. The temporal displacement requires an inducement of atmosphere exclusively from the sonic materials.

- Johnny Herbert, 2015

Presented by Stiftelsen 3,14, PARABOL situates an adjacent ambience and mode of address in dialogue with the gallery's exhibitions.

Organised by Johnny Herbert