

The Mind is the Cave

dedicated to Clemens Gottschling

(2017)

For the performer:

The performer represents a human being in the act of communicating with an alleged presence. The piece needs to be set in a place with a largely resonant acoustics, such as a church or a wide industrial site. The ideal environment in which the piece should be performed would evade the traditional setting of the concert hall, and be evocative of a more mystical, or even spiritual atmosphere. In case of a performance in a conventional music place (presenting drier acoustics), an electronic reverb effect should be applied, placing a single microphone in the proximity of the bell of the horn in the final standing position (occurring in the third page of the score).

Either in a reverberative environment or with an artificial reverb effect, the projection property of the instrument will fill the space with the longer echo, besting the untrained voice of the instrumentalist, which will lack the necessary projection to reverberate in the space (in the dry acoustics scenario, because it is far from the microphone). Thus, various degrees of "size" of the sound source appear throughout the piece. This is because the degree of sound projection varies sensibly, starting from the pure voice hummed outside the instrument, to the voice sung inside the instrument, up to the open horn played *cuivré*. Only the highest degrees of projection will resonate in the environment, creating the illusion of a reply to the player's act that manifests itself only when the horn is played. The primary condition for reverberation is the full free sound of the horn.

The instrument assumes the role of a magical device which, in the mind of the protagonist, puts the human in touch with a responsive entity. It is vital that the player listens carefully to the reverberation and paces the piece accordingly. The action of listening should be evident in the acting throughout the whole piece, making the idea of a conversation plausible. The piece will then change pace from site to site, because the "reply" is effectively a second part performed by the space and the performer should dialogue with it.

Such an attempt to communicate with this invisible entity resembles in many aspects a religious ritual. So the voice of the performer continually seeks to harmonise with the divine, bouncing between two opposite and yet complementary approaches. His chant includes both the pure countertenor voice coming from the Gregorian tradition and the guttural creaky sounds at the bottom of the voice range alluding to the "oms" used in Asian meditation. The suggestions generated by the mind lead the character into a circle of growing fear for communicating with something undetected. Towards the end, the horn seems to capture the performer's voice inside its pipes, engaging in a chase of glissandi. The piece ends with a muted scream inside the instrument: the mouth is eventually freed once the echo of the instrument disappears, leaving only the reverb of his loud, clear voice. The dialogue ultimately remains a mere illusion in the mind of the performer because it is, after all, only the acoustic reflection of the sounds that he produces – perhaps the Man realises it in the end.

The audience is the spectator of the psychological deceit of which the Man is victim. For this reason, the staging can evade the traditional division between scene and stalls: the final position where the performer plays should be at the spot of bigger resonance in the hall. This might well be at the very centre of the space. The natural reverberation comes from the walls. If an artificial one is necessary, place the speakers surrounding the audience. The digital effect should be a mere long reverb (the length of which can be decided by the player, being preferably lasting at least five to ten seconds), with no perceivable delay of the attack. At the beginning, the horn should rest in a visible and elevated place, not far from the final playing position. The player should approach it at an angle that makes the act in the first system of page 2 visible. Alternatively, the scene can also be staged in a different way – for instance, the reverb might come from a recess that represents the Cave; there the performer acts and plays, and the audience is witnessing the scene from afar. Any different staging is welcome, as long as it serves the main idea of the piece.

What the Man's mind mistakes for an actual speaking entity, is assimilable to the shadows described in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave." What men perceive as sounds are vibrations coming from their surroundings, always transformed and interpreted by the mind. Extensively, everything perceived by our senses is not an accurate account of the world around us but is information continuously filtered by our imagination. Humankind is still unable, in many ways, to escape the Cave. It is both our blessing, for it helps us to reach the sublime land of creativity, and our doom, because it keeps us from distinguishing between reality and our hallucinations.

The man wanders in the allegorical cave

Enter the hall from a remote door, mumbling the fragments gently and repetitively like a litany

Gerardo Gozzi

(voice)

[m] [a] [m] [e]

Gradually add the new elements (they do not always need to be sung in the same pitch)... ..keep interchanging the fragments, progressively diminishing the frequency of the initial ones...

[e] [a] [a] [f] [e] [n][o] [e] [i] [m] [a]

Approaching the magic instrument

When approaching the horn, the voice becomes lower and broken like speaking in an emotional state while trying to control the tone...

...until the voice does not come out anymore

[e] [e] [m][o] [t][e] [o]

[o] [r] [a] [t][o] [i]

[a] [æ]

[o] [n] [e]

Press the hands against the body and slowly bring them to the mouth, then press the palms against the lips to to firmly cover them

fff *fff*

mp *f* *pp cresc. molto*

Beating the fists on the belly

Theatrical capture the sound produced by the voice with the hands and carefully bring it to the bell of the instrument, as if holding something precious

(voice)

(horn)

The initial attempt to operate the magical device

Use the rests to move towards the final standing point (in the next page) – take more steps during the longer breaks

ppppp *dolce p* *mf* *p* *p* *ppp*

[o] [a] [o] [a]

1/2 valve

(still singing inside the horn)

p *ppp* *ppp*

bend up to E₂ half stopped, s^r sounding I.

p *mf* *mp*

[o] [a] [a]

cuivré *ord.*

mf *poco dim.* *poco* *ppp* *mp* *poco* *pp*

f *mp* *f*

[o] [o] [a] [a]

f *mp*


p *f*

*B*₂

p

Pull the horn abruptly off the mouth (keeping it open), theatrically listen to the surrounding space, then sing again

inside the instrument "fff"
ah!
+ stopped horn



Fall down on the knees, like a sign of resignation

Keep pressing the fist against the body and move the hand towards the forehead while looking upwards

Beating the right hand fist on the chest

Like a spoken litany

[u] [a] [e] [o] [n][e] [u] [o] [o] [a]

(mp) poco

F1 F13 B3 B12

p

p poco p

[a] [o]

stand up!

Bell facing up (in case of digital reverb, towards the microphone)

legato

mp, morbido

mp

1/2 valve

pppp

p

The whole body is almost immobile, like handling a fragile object

mp (inside the instrument)

p

poco

[o] [e] [n][i] [f] [a] [o] [a] [a]

1/2 valve

B23 F13

1/2 valve

mp

5:4

p