

Joseph Klein

Cornell Set

Four poems with computer music

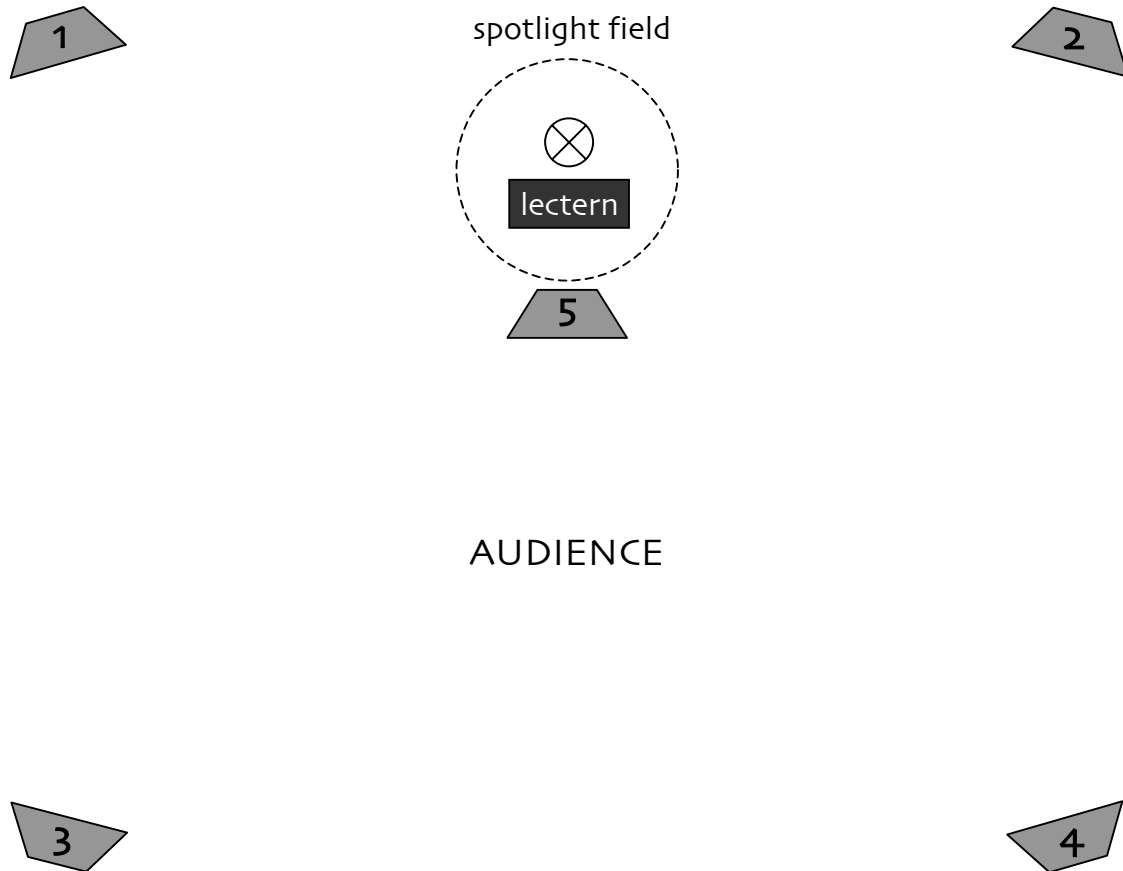
(2011)

This work was made possible by a generous commission from the Creative Writing Program and the Department of English at Cornell University

Duration: c. 8'

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Cornell Set is a poetry recitation with 4-channel computer music environment. The work may be performed by either a male or female reader, who is to stand at center stage behind a lectern. The lectern should be of fairly substantial size, allowing only the performer's head and upper torso to be seen by the audience. The hall should be dark with only a single spotlight illuminating the performer and lectern. The spotlight should be directed from above at a sharp angle (60 to 80 degrees) in order to create a tight focus on the performer, yet without creating dramatic shadows on the performer's face. The performance set up is as follows:



Additionally, there is an off-stage audio technician (optimally, seated in the center of the hall), who is responsible for running the computer music and monitoring levels between the performer and the computer music.

The performer's voice must be amplified but not processed, and the signal should be bused to channel 5; if only four speakers are available, the signal may be bused to channels 1 and 2 instead. The microphone should be placed unobtrusively, and must not block the performer's face from the audience's view. It is important that the text be clearly understood throughout the entire work, without requiring any unnatural projection on the part of the performer. Any necessary adjustments may be made by the technician at the mixer, and should be subtle.

The performer should enter the stage once the hall is dark and the spotlight faded up. At the conclusion of the work, the performer should remain motionless at the lectern

as the spotlight is slowly faded out; the house lights may be raised once the applause begins.

The computer music consists of individual soundfiles that are triggered by the audio technician, and may be run using either Max/MSP or pure data software; the system used by the composer was programmed by Andrew May using pure data, and is available upon request.

The score consists of the text with cue indications (in blue) for the technician and other performance indications (in red) for the reader. In the poem "In Mid Autumn," one of the computer music tracks plays continuously throughout, and approximate timings are indicated in the left margin to assist the performer with the pacing of the reading; thus, it may be necessary for the performer to use a stopwatch during this movement. If a stopwatch is used, it is to be started precisely as the title of each poem is read. It is absolutely critical that the stopwatch not make a sound—such as a beep or chirp—when activated! This feature must be disabled prior to the performance.

Although it is important for the performer to adhere to the cue indications in red, a natural-sounding reading of the text is critical, with slight fluctuations in the relationship between the text and the music to be expected between performances. In order for the performer to practice the pacing of the text along with the music, however, a 2-channel fixed media version of the computer music—with and without the text included—is available.



PROGRAM NOTE

In the spring of 2010, I was contacted by poet and Cornell University English Professor, Alice Fulton — whose poems I had set to computer music several years earlier — about undertaking a similar project with the second-year MFA poetry students in Cornell's Creative Writing Program. A dozen poems were submitted for consideration, from which four — each by a different poet — were selected for this collection. The poems were chosen for their contrasting content and style, allowing for a variety of approaches in the computer music setting as well.

Specific references in the text provided the impetus for many of the processed sounds (e.g., cars and dogs in the Pityk poem, birds and rain in the Garcia poem); in some cases, the text reading itself provided the source material (this occurs in each setting, though the computer music in the Atsitty poem is based entirely on a reading of the text by the poet). For the most part, the computer music is cued off of the text, though the Rogers poem also includes a continuous track of gongs and street sounds throughout.

Cornell Set was commissioned by the Creative Writing Program and the Department of English at Cornell University. The work was first performed by poets Tacey M. Atsitty, Clayton Pityk, Benjamin Garcia, and Elizabeth Rogers on 15 April 2011 at Cornell University.

All texts used with permission of the poets.

I. Gorge Dweller: Evensong I
(Atsitty)

II. Elegy for a Car
(Pityk)

III. What Was Broken
(Garcia)

IV. In Mid-Autumn: Shanxi Province 2007
(Rogers)

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NOTE: In this poem, pause approximately 1-2 seconds between each line of text and 4-5 seconds between each stanza; listen for sonic cues associated with each line.

Gorge Dweller

Evensong

I.

- ▼ 01 At the throat of this tree you see me kneel,
- ▼ 02 steep into leaves and pockets of shale.
- ▼ 03 my voice hollows out veins in roots.

- ▼ 04 *I look to you to see you: fallen mouth from the sky.*
- ▼ 05 Up where lips round off over descant—
- ▼ 06 steep into leaves and pockets of shale

- ▼ 07 open: rain-beaded blossom. Uvular angles.
- ▼ 08 Where rocks fall out of themselves, utter
- ▼ 09 up where lips round off over descant.

- ▼ 10 *I want to go back to ruth, mouth ever so filled*
- ▼ 11 to the lips before the fall. Word spill,
- ▼ 12 where rocks fall out of themselves: utter

- ▼ 13 a prayer. Both limb and leaf bent skyward.
- ▼ 14 and the calm before collapse. Creek-cut
- ▼ 15 at the lips before the fall. *A word-spill*

- ▼ 16 *from leaf tongue, Father.* From the cracks
- ▼ 17 and the calm before collapse. Creek-cut
- ▼ 18 in the throat of this tree. You see me kneel,
- ▼ 19 my voice hollows out veins in roots.

— Tacey M. Atsitty

Elegy for a Car ▼ 01

▶ *Pause c.15 seconds*

Vultures with beer bellies pick and prod
at a heap with gas-tinged beaks. ▼ 02

▶ *Pause c.11 seconds*

The beast on cinderblocks
sits in the sun that's thick

▼ 03
like the sound of kicking
a big dog in the ribs. The drum
boom muted by fur.

▶ *Pause c.8 seconds*

▼ 04

A father and son's stroll through the mud
to the dripping carcass, menaced
by mustaches that,

▼ 05
with a drop of gasoline, could cut,
could clean a car part for a jewelry display case. ▼ 06

▶ *Pause c.10 seconds (cue: crystalline sound)*

▼ 07 Time rears its fangs more openly here.

I can see the upper gums, my God.

— Clayton Pityk

▼ 01

What is Broken

▶ *Pause c.10 seconds*

▼ 02

It rains & rains, the wind
rocks a branch,

the branch

taps the chain link fence,
chiming at each flick:

thing, thing, thing. ▼ 03

▶ *Pause c.5 seconds (cue: thunder and third metallic strike)*

Discarded, as of no worth,
like a human-▼ 04

touched hatchling

brushed from the limb on which it was born.

▶ *Pause c.6 seconds (cue: bird sounds)*

Maybe you've taken one in before,
kept it

on peanut butter & millet.

▶ *Pause c.6 seconds*

▼ 05

Shut up in a box, for its own sake
and to keep it

from taking a shit

on all the things

you love to love. ▼ 06

▶ *Pause c.8 seconds (cue: fluttering wings)*

You're happy to see it go,
proud even.

▶ *Pause c.6 seconds*

All the while,
thinking you had fixed
something you had done,
but had not.

— Benjamin Garcia

In Mid-Autumn

Shanxi Province 2007 ▼ 01

▶ *Pause c.30 seconds (cue: eighth gong strike)*

▼ 02
~ 0:35 The moon was not

the moon

but it *was*, it *was* moon ▼ 03

yes, and cake,

yuè bǐng. ▼ 04

▶ *Pause c.9 seconds (cue: follow processed “yuè bing”)*

~ 0:56 *bing*, I cried.

▼ 05
ice

or *sickness*

depending, *sweet*

heart, you are still where

you are. the kitchen ▼ 06

~ 1:11 again, the cricket’s

vibrato in the sink.

the onion turned,

blushed

▼ 07
by the window.

~ 1:24 Sick, a hush

slides on bathroom

▼ 08
tile, blue

and white,

ice

alone

finds its way

to bed. ▼ 09

▶ *Pause c.8 seconds (cue: follow low-frequency rumble)*

~ 1:46 *you*, I said. ▼ 10

moon

or breathing

you. Come,

draw the circle. Reach

north, where I stand. ▼ 11

▶ *Pause c.4 seconds (cue: follow low-frequency rumble)*

~ 2:03 Night

is the syrup,

cupped between our hands.

— Elizabeth Rogers