

***In Emptiness There is Truth***  
***(Call No Man Happy Until He is Dead)***  
**By Andrew Leslie Hooker**

A site-specific soundwork commissioned  
for the 2010 edition of the Ravello Festival

**La Follia Dell'Arte**

This infinite space, whose foreground has always got to be filled with some rubbish or another, so as to describe its dreadful depths. What would we poor human creatures do if one weren't always ready to summon up an idea of Fatherland, Love, Art, Religion – to cover up just a little bit of the dark, black hole, this sense of being abandoned endlessly in eternity. This loneliness.  
–Max Beckmann, 1915

The image of (a) Man alone, screaming at an impenetrable, uncaring, Godless emptiness has been and of course still is one of the most hardy motifs within the 20th/21st century cultural canon, acutely observed and dissected by variously disciplined artists such as Samuel Beckett, Ingmar Bergman, Bèla Tarr, Francis Bacon, Scott Walker and so on. However, one of the most potent and humorously poignant images of this perennial, existential dilemma is offered by Virginia Woolf who, floundering in clinical conditions of pathological mania, would immerse herself in the fanciful whims of a small dog in order to escape the burden of being human for an afternoon. Thus transformed, her concerns would shift for example from Adolf Hitler's imminent invasion of Poland to whether or not to chase butterflies around an English Summer's garden.

Hence (regarding the sound design of this audio installation and CD), the pitiable, mongrel-like whimpering and strangulated moans, growls and splutterings of an isolated human voice (provided by Japanese percussionist and improviser Seijiro Murayama) futilely attempting a kind of 'duet pathétique' with *all* the collected ghosts of a history of denial (or to be more exact, the criminal consequences of that denial), with all the repercussive screams that, when considered through the kaleidoscopic lens of Guglielmo Marconi's acoustic fantasies, have been saturating the firmament in ever-ascending torments since the dawn of mankind and now hang suspended, magnificent, in Victorian Gothic veils of wretchedness, inexorably dripping glittering shards of regret into the foggy airs that surround us (here symbolically collapsed into a spectral backdrop of layered feedback signals and lower-case sonics, apparently without beginning or end).

Yet in fact, delicately encrypted within the trembling, mirage-like play between lone voice and massed frequencies and in complete contrast to any recognition of inherent shame, lies a radical paradox of the most intricate design, an absolute negation of Beckmann's 'infinite space' seemingly based upon Neo-Darwinian principles of non-random predominance (i.e. the Nietzschean 'Superman'). For slowly revealing itself with increasing lucidity is the sense of an impotently malevolent complicity with the actual causes of such overwhelming misery, an attempt to saturate a

blackier-than-black dread with inexhaustible patterns of such ferocious violence as to be almost gloriously spiritual in its devotion, even though undertaken with an absurdly corporeal voracity.

Consequently, when the above hypothesis is brought into relation with the universal *we*, it could be said that the *follia* intrinsic to the human condition (that is the volition to survive under the cognizant burden of inherited disgrace) remains explicit vis-à-vis this supposedly hostile emptiness through farcical extremities of nefarious blood-lust. Ergo, we remain alive by way of, indeed because of, a set of diversionary tactics delineated, refined and codified *via* those same extremities of bloodlust. Within this scenario, it is *we* that sire the ghosts and in effect, according to Stendhal, it is *we* that are charged to redeem them.

In the very same way as impressions of God (s) are unimaginable without an anthropomorphic act of 'scaling down', the concept of *vacuus infinitus* itself remains intrinsically incomputable within the psychological limits dictated by being human. It is a terrifying, mythical and mystical construct in which for the major part it is only possible to interpret through elaborately organized meta-systems founded upon basic moral laws (e.g. religious, cultural, economic, humanistic et cetera) and therefore less traumatic to embrace with a kind of so-called 'blind faith' (contrary, I might add, to the Kierkegaardian 'leap'), as of course fundamentally it exists beyond the total sum of human experience and demands to be essentially and 'officially' contextualized. From time to time however, when filtered through seemingly banal, transient material stimuli – sunlight reflected in a rock pool, the way in which a mother's hand rests upon the body of her new-born child in discarded and forgotten photographs, et cetera (and yet at the same time not actually these, but the cerebral trills of them) – 'the dark, black hole' may become faintly tinted with slight traces of a lyrical resonance that within the thematic confines of this discourse could very well be specified as 'unnamable', in that although originating most definitely in this world it has at the same time absolutely no place in this world at all, refuses classification (unlike 'the void'), and is consequently far more deserving of belief simply by virtue of its purely transcendental or truly incomprehensible nature.

Therefore, in relation to this soundwork, the extended overtones created by the clashing frequencies of the 'ghost chorus' could indeed be read as faint glimmerings of a sublime imperative. This imperative, brought into harmonic relief by means of the intervallic 'beatings' of voice and 'voices', admits the possibility of a transfiguration of the criminal void by means of a deliberate intensification of those glimmerings into an immaterial, abstract reality completely removed from any form of social/political/temporal control. It is almost as if by charging a terrifying, 'physical' emptiness with an implicative, narcissistic terror, the means of negotiating the far greater terror of a 'metaphysical' infinity, i.e. non-existence, is manifested as a form of rhapsodic contemplation aimed towards interiorising and indeed occupying the void, leading ultimately, and of course theoretically, to non-action.

Thus considered, the more pathetic characteristics of the lone voice (solitary, but prophet-like) offer a possible interpretation, *via* the portal of this theoretical non-action, of an ecstatic longing for a kind of 'post-biological redemption'. 'Self-murder' then as an allusive, evolutionary side-step towards Plato's miracle of not being born at all, an act of eradicating the void altogether by withdrawing from the physical world, in effect

from the 'I' (à la Murphy) and merging with the *dreadful depths* of the *nihil zero* itself. Accordingly, if the above is deliberated under the faded radiance of a material, post-modern humanism, the conclusion still remains: either *we* can regard the world with love, or *we* can regard it with hate. The choice, in the end, is ours.

Nevertheless, logically and paradoxically so, in order to realize this Panglossian amplification into emptiness, we are obliged in fact to live, and live to the full. Yet to live, of course, is to suffer and to suffer horribly; perhaps the only absolute path towards enlightenment and sublimity (according to Burke, Kant, Heidegger et al). And so it goes, around and around in fearful symmetry, for both the relatively enlightened and the most definitely unenlightened. One mob raging at the void with blood-thirsty abandon, and the other whimpering at that same void, haunted by guilt and subtle intimations of physical beauty masquerading as poetic form (by definition insubstantial and therefore unattainable in any 'true' sense), crushed by a great apprehension of that which must be sacrificed, and indeed further tortured by their lack of courage to make that sacrifice. The final act in front of which all must be forsaken in order to, well, disappear.

Andrew Leslie Hooker, Bologna, 17 April 2010

Revised Sasso Marconi, August–November 2012