

Strange Autumn

An Attempt at an Interpretation

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Introduction

Wieland Hoban's bilingual poems are infested with paradox. They evade the space of one language or the other or both. Where are they then? Imagine a bilingual edition of a volume of poems. Imagine the original poem (conventionally on the verso page-side) and its translation (on the recto side) both sliding into the seam between the pages—or a poem resulting when both verso and recto meet, original and translation pressed against each other. Such reflects the structure of the poetic space, but in either case, the possibility of reading is no longer available. Likewise with Hoban's poetry, any attempt to disentangle one language from the other in order to circumvent the semantic cancellation of the two languages, presents only another implacable uncertainty in its place. Despite these perplexities, the poetry manages to penetrate into the interior of the conundrum we call existence, and like a house of mirrors, acquires its illusory dimensions and volume from the accumulation rendered by a multitude of false reflections. One might then begin to understand my interpretation of the poetic space at hand. To translate this into a piece for reciter, percussionist, and live electronics was the task of *Strange Autumn*. The piece was commissioned by the Bludenzer Tage Zeitgemäßer Musik 2004 "Unter Strom" Festival in cooperation with SWR's Experimentalstudio of the Heinrich-Strobel Foundation, Freiburg and premiered by members of Ensemble SurPlus. *Strange Autumn* was begun in 2003 and written during the first year of the ongoing occupation of Iraq by US-led coalition forces.

Formal Organization of the Poems

Strange Autumn is organized into two parts. Part I is subdivided distinctly into two movements: 1a: *Leaf-Wort* and 1b: *Blatt-word*. Part 1a sets the original bilingual poem while 1b sets the same poem translated. Consequently, they are "photo-negative" translations of each other. Each of these subparts is followed by a short movement break. Part II is a meditation on the three poems of Hoban's triptych *Interiors* and is presented as one continuous movement: 2: *Der Würfel*, *Die Zwiebel*, and *(The Etching)*¹. The title of *The Etching* I have placed in parentheses as its text does not literally appear in the piece (while the texts of the first two poems of the triptych do), rather a structure that is described in the last poem is interpreted wholly through sound. The time scheme of the piece in its entirety is given as follows:

Section:	Poem:	Time in Section:	Time in Piece:
Part 1a:	<i>Leaf-Wort</i>	0'00" to 2'16"	0'00" to 2'16"
Part 1b:	<i>Blatt-word</i>	0'00" to 2'04"	2'16" to 4'20"
Part 2:	<i>Der Würfel</i>	0'00" to 9'02"	4'20" to 13'22"
	<i>Die Zwiebel</i>	9'02" to 12'50"	13'22" to 17'10"
	<i>(The Etching)</i>		

¹ "The Die, the Onion, and (The Etching)."

In order to gain an introductory grasp of the inner working of the poems, the opening of *Der Würfel* is offered (here the individual lines arranged between slashes to conserve space).

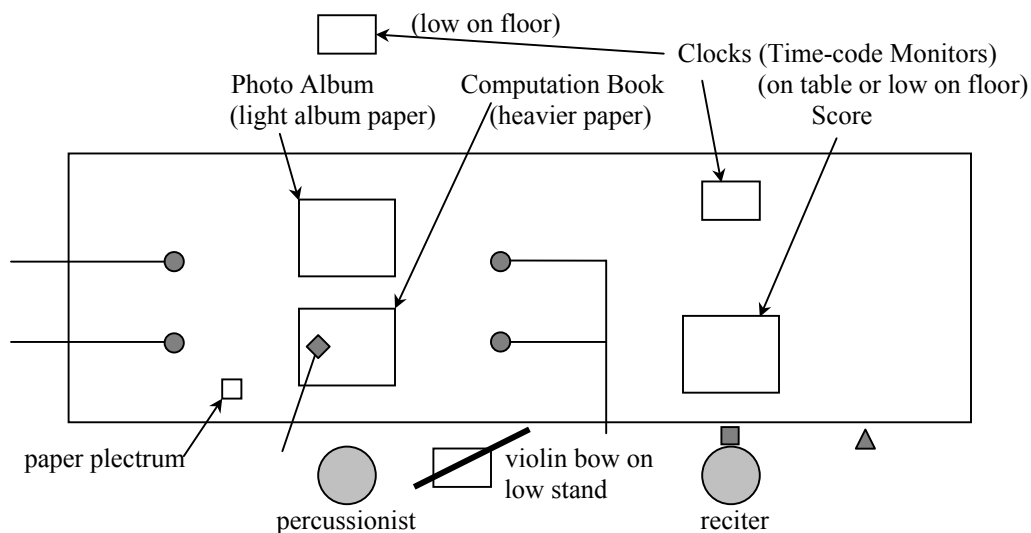
Würfel-hand / in der Hand / the hand / in the hand / der Würfel / how it holds /
 noch nicht / does it hold / what I know / ist er geworfen / I cannot / know / noch
 nichts / or does it hold / ist gewagt / that / which I / can hold / in my hand / and
 know / siehst du / wie er schwebt / as I cast / in meiner / Hand / it / into the /
 future / hebe ich ihn / is it water / into which / I cast / oder hebt / er mich /
 whatever my / hand / no longer sees itself / holding / is it / wird der Wurf / das
 Werfen / the falling / that I / am holding / wird es / or throwing / ein Ent- / or
 casting / oder Weg- / ...

If one disentangles and extracts the English thread, one obtains: “the hand / in the hand / how it holds / does it hold / what I know / I cannot / know / or does it hold / that / which I / can hold / in my hand / and know / as I cast / it / into the / future / is it water / into which / I cast / whatever my / hand / no longer sees itself / holding / is it / the falling / that I / am holding / or throwing / or casting / ...” Such notions as “the hand in the hand” (presumably here not necessarily referring to two literal hands) or “does it hold what I know I cannot know” or “is it the falling that I am holding” are but a few examples of what I am meaning by that dogged inexplicability whose face recurs whenever pursued with ambitions for certainty.

Forces and Staging

The stage itself reflects the poetry’s bilingual symmetry. The following setup was discovered to be optimal.

Example 1: Stage Setup From Performers’ Perspective



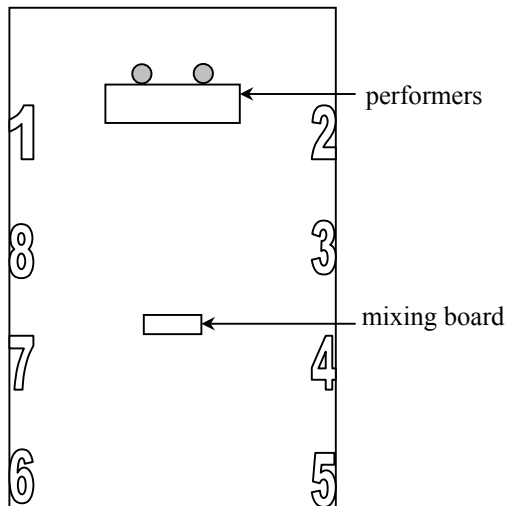
circular microphones = lavalier

diamond microphone = contact microphone taped to inside front cover near spine

square microphone = headworn

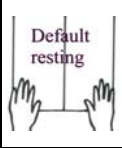
triangular microphone = optional “distant” vocal microphone, large diaphragm

Example 2: Loudspeaker Setup in Hall

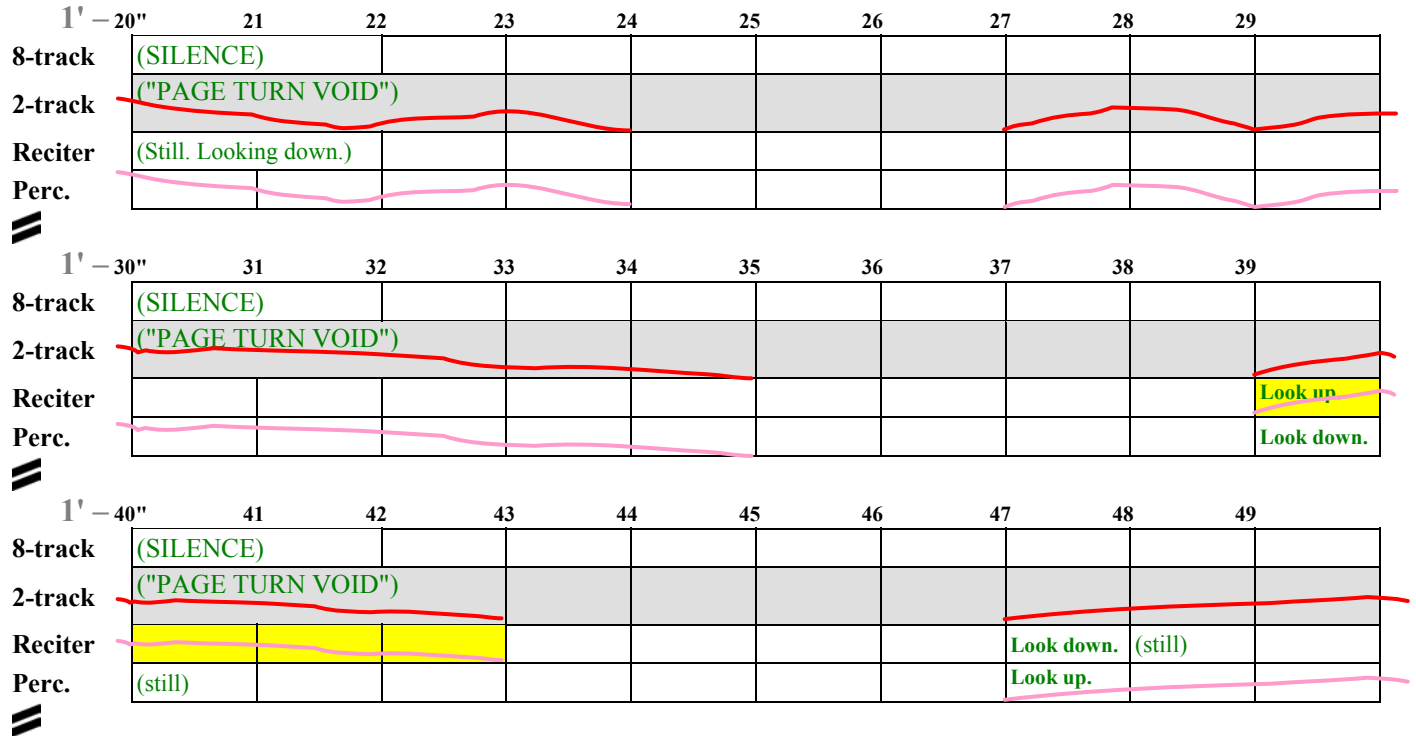


The percussionist, here Olaf Tzschoffe of Ensemble SurPlus, sits with Wieland Hoban, the reciter and poet himself, at a large table, both performers gazing into the space of the audience. They never look at each other, as if they are one and the same witness of the same mental phenomena, and therefore cannot witness each other.² On one occasion, their gazes are directed into the space above the audience, to the sound of turning pages, pre-recorded, and distributed through the hall via the eight-speaker setup. It becomes clear they do not witness the same thing, as they listen to and ignore different sounds. The last page-turn in this sequence, however, is discerned by both suggesting in fact some common awareness.

Example 3: *Strange Autumn*, Part 2: *Der Würfel, Die Zwiebel (The Etching)*, 1'10" to 1'49"

	1' – 10"	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
8-track	(SILENCE)									
2-track		"PAGE TURN VOID" →								
Reciter	water into which I cast?	<p>Still. During the "Page Turn Void," look up into the space above the audience, and with eyes and head movement restricted to about 2-3 cm total, follow the page turns in the hall space WHEN NOTATED. Between page turns, read the space as if it had large virtual pages. This activity should not appear contrived or theatrical. It should hardly be noticed, as if the performer is simply listening to the spatialization of the sounds and following it subconsciously with the eyes while waiting for a cue. Gesture and expression should be identical with that of percussionist.</p> <p>Looking down</p>								
Perc.		<p>During the "Page Turn Void," look up into the space above the audience, and with eyes and head movement restricted to about 2-3 cm total, follow the page turns in the hall space WHEN NOTATED. Between page turns, read the space as if it had large virtual pages. This activity should not appear contrived or theatrical. It should hardly be noticed, as if the performer is simply listening to the spatialization of the sounds and following it subconsciously with the eyes while waiting for a cue.</p> <p>Follow with eyes</p>								

² With the second performance in the Theater Freiburg, Ullo von Peinen substituted for Hoban. Older than Hoban and Tzschoffe, von Peinen's presence re-interpreted the roles far more emphatically as time-displaced subjects of the same individual, here a younger man and a man toward the close of his life.



Generally, the percussionist looks at his books as he performs, which are his instruments, the pages and covers either turned tenderly, flipped frenetically, bowed, plucked, or inscribed on in various ways. One of his two books is a photo album that possesses Spinnenpapier (“spider paper”),³ a glassine tracing paper embossed with a classical spider web pattern used as interleaving, that crinkles as the pages are turned. At certain times, he is directed to turn these pages as if “trembling like a palsied 90-year-old.” The other book has heavier paper and is used both for its sonic qualities and the sculptural/visual shapes resulting from its manipulated pages. The reciter sits and delivers his poems, accompanies, or occasionally lip-syncs with pre-recorded versions, fragments, or cropped phonemes of his recitation that are scattered throughout the space like autumn leaves. The live electronics were designed by Michael Acker of SWR’s Experimentalstudio in Freiburg. This consisted generally of an eight-channel speaker setup controlled by the Experimentalstudio’s Matrix-Mixer, regulating spatialization, live processing, and pre-recorded playback, including halaphon spatialization, the Eventide Orville Effects Processor as a phonemic fragmenter, Max/MSP patches for cross-synthesis and jitter patches, as well as a reverberation unit. It is worth noting that the eight-channel speaker setup has two distinct sub-structures: the full eight-channel spatial structure with eight distinct tracks, and a two-channel stereo structure that utilizes either the front two or front four speakers closest to the performers on stage, with only two (left and right) distinct tracks. These two spaces are designated as “storm” (8-track) and “stage” (2-track) respectively.

³ “Spider paper ... has been used since the end of the 19th century as interleaving in photo albums. It is unclear just why spider paper in its classical form, with images of more or less large spiders that are regarded by many people as repulsive, has been used continuously until today in the aesthetics of photo albums. Alternatively, there is also glassine interleaving with linen embossing.” From “Spinnenpapier,” in *Wikipedia: die Freie Enzyklopädie*, <http://lexikon.freenet.de/Spinnenpapier>, accessed October 7, 2005. [Author’s translation from German.]

“Bilingual Space” – Strange Doubling

Drawing on the metaphor of a bilingual edition of a volume of poems, a precise observation of a specific paradox in the spatial structure of such a book is illuminating. For when turning pages, there is an instant when the translation (recto) comes into view before the original (verso), thus reversing the order of their conception. The question arises if a translation can be more “original” than the original, that is, can it possess some quality that seemingly precedes the original. There are a number of moments in *Strange Autumn* that investigate the worlds of live and pre-recorded recitation in an analogous relationship. Since both live and pre-recorded recitation transmit from the same speakers, there is an ambiguity that everything live could be pre-recorded and everything pre-recorded could be live. This allows for a potentially catastrophic mismatch between the location of the live signal agent (here the lips of the reciter) and the actual perceived location of the signal in the space.

Example 4: *Strange Autumn*, Part 2: *Der Würfel, Die Zwiebel (The Etching)*, 0’20” to 0’39”

	0’ – 20”	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
8-track										
2-track	wa	n				(ɛ)			no t ö	
Reciter	wa <i>cropped</i>				lip-sync: exact (z)				n <i>(cropped)</i>	
Perc.	3 rd circle begins here									3 rd circle ends here
	LH: _____									_____▶
	RH: _____									_____▶
=										
	0’ – 30”	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
8-track										
2-track		na					Würfel-	hand / (in der Hand) /	the hand	
Reciter					↑ "breathless"					
Perc.	4 th RH circle begins here									4 th circle ends here
	LH: hold still									_____▶
	RH: _____									_____▶
=										

Consequently, there is no explicit division between the live and pre-recorded worlds. A pre-recorded sound may appear to emanate from the live reciter, as he lip-syncs on occasion and unpredictably. Pre-recorded sounds are imitated live on stage (for instance, by exaggerated and sudden cropping and curtailment of phonemes), and the attempt to feign or mirror pre-recorded qualities helps to assure a consistent confusion. Thus, the space effected by the loudspeakers encircling the audience is both an external extension of that which is on stage as well as an internal world in its own right. While this is an apparatus by which contradictions between worlds arise, the structures of both external and internal space are evident and distinct. This onion-like architecture reflects the poetry’s own internal and external incongruity; in fact, the fourth poem is entitled *Die Zwiebel* (“the onion”). Translation, with its proliferation of versions, results from the multiplicity and distinctiveness of perspectives on the same objects, viewed through the near-transparent layers of the onion-like space. On account of this near-transparency

and the likelihood of false reflections (for here we view objects as if inside the onion's "house-of-mirrors" structure, and not external to the onion), translation transpires fraught with mistranslation, inversions, subverted assumptions. For example, a real-time fragmentation program that captures specific consonants while eliminating vowels of a live recitation, and distributes these phonemes erratically in the eight-channel space around the audience, is superimposed on a recitation of the same text pre-recorded, but fragmented and distributed only within a stereo field. Thus the continuity of the live recitation is far more spatially erratic than the continuity of the pre-recorded, which subverts the expectation that a live human reciter is more capable of resisting the effects of the technology than a disembodied pre-recorded reciter.

One Witness as Two

These labyrinthine entanglements tenaciously circumventing a locus for certitude and explicability are at the heart of Hoban's poetry, and consequently, an unremitting evasion must be maintained in the interplay and flux of what is original and translation, live and pre-recorded. There is still one additional facet to the bilingual structure that requires consideration, and that is the relationship between the reciter and percussionist-inscriber. While they are separate entities, perhaps two manifestations of one and the same witness—both enduring the same internal subjective phenomena that the poems elicit, the two have radically different means in which to address their circumstance. The reciter has spoken language, the percussionist has writing—inscribing. When at the end of the piece, recitation erodes to such an extent that it fails to find the source of the poetry ("the water," as the poem suggests), the percussionist manages to persist a bit longer, to discover a seemingly provisional position of transcendence. He no longer has bow or pen as stimulus on the book's pages, but rather a paper plectrum. He is directed to scrape the edge of the pages so delicately as to produce the minute scratching of a caterpillar eating a leaf. It is the sound of paper on paper. Nonetheless, it is also not his writing that finds the source of poetry, some wellspring within the interior of all the erroneous interiors that the poetry posits. Ironically, the sound of water—here droplets—appears through the "false medium"—not live, but through the pre-recorded tracks, and moreover, are glazed with a sickly artificial reverb (a metallic hue). Despite this artificiality, the narrative trajectories of the piece converge on this epiphany, the only possibility of an authentic moment—one of truth in this exhibition of mirrors: errors, distortions, and paradoxes. Yet it could only be via these circuitous fictions that such an epiphany materializes. At length, both reciter and inscriber have nothing more to say, nothing more to inscribe, have come to their end, and sit, eyes shut, and only listening. At this moment, it becomes clear, it is no image nor sound, no letter nor phomeme, no word nor utterance invented, that would disclose "the water," but rather this listening: the listening to one's own speechless condition, one's own unwritten existence, itself inscribing onto space and time, just before the piece—the world—must end.

A Marionette-effect

There is a noteworthy moment of freakish coordination between the two normally estranged performers. This cannot be heard on the sound recording, but must be observed live on stage.

Example 5: *Strange Autumn*, Part 2: *Der Würfel, Die Zwiebel (The Etching)*, 6'30" to 6'49"

6' – 30"		31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	
8-track	("HEAVY STORM")										
2-track	(SILENCE)										
Perc.	(Still)	Watch percussionist out of corner of eye and coordinate exactly! Lip-sync AFAP			(mmm)	(mmmm)	(mmm) <i>simile</i>	(mmmm)	(mm)	(mmm)	(mmmm)
	"Purr." Hold bow at 45 degree angle, tip point upward. Raise bow a bit off cover's edge and allow bow to bounce while applying short downbows (a lateral stroke when the bow falls) with some pressure causing a short purr or roll. Start passage bow's 1/2 point & end at 7/8 point.			irregular lengths							
										

6' – 40"		41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49
8-track	("HEAVY STORM") (No flies)					(Break in storm begins)				
2-track	(SILENCE)									
Reciter	(mmmm) (mm) (mmm)	(mmmm) (mmm) (mmm)	(mmmm) (mmm) (mmm)	(Still)						
Perc.			Drag end of bow's turn-screw along tabletop, lengthwise and back as if the arm is a vast windshield wiper, simulating the sound of a marble rolling along the table-top and back.	(avoid click when placing bow on table by placing on fleshy pad of finger first.)						
			(table)						
	like a cat's purr		now near the tip (7/8 point)							

One must recall that both performers never look at each other and seem to possess no awareness of the other. This sudden moment of uncanny coordination is achieved by reciter observing the bouncing bow of the percussionist from the very edge of his peripheral vision, as both gaze forward into the audience. The effect is eerie. The audience has no inkling how the percussionist's bow is able to activate invisible strings attached to the reciter's jaw in order to produce the identical movement of the bow's bounces on the lips of the reciter. What is made apparent is a liaison between recitation and inscription, uncovered here in the vestiges of music, after the latter has been all but abandoned. This is the translative realm littered with the wreckage and debris of music's residuum.⁴ The percussionist exists somewhere between musician and scribe: he bows books. Should someone inform him that books are not instruments? His violin bow, however, is the only vestige of or clue to his original identity. He is also a reader, but one who cannot find the page he is searching for. His search is composed and frenzied at the same time (Part 1b, *Blatt-word*), as if his desperation has been ritualized, as if he's searched for his place an infinite number of times: a master of not finding. By puppeteer, he could well be the poet controlling the reciter's lips. This would unleash a notion of puppet and puppeteer at this significant moment in the work, which further mirrors the incertitude of precedence between original and translation. The marionette-effect, however, is meant to expose quite deliberately the presence of hidden strings, deceptive devices, and contrivances in the house-of-mirrors. It is

⁴ The notion of a residuum of music is related to my idea of "broken instruments," particularly "non-Western" instruments in the hands of immigrants. Immigration often leaves musical instruments in disrepair. The infrastructure, institutions, expertise, and even materials to repair these instruments are very often unavailable in the newly adopted countries. Performing on cracked or dismantled instruments, or using makeshift or substitute materials can give rise to radically different sounds and techniques. Taken seriously, the new context can guide one wholly toward an aesthetic of instrumental deconstruction and/or reconstruction.

meant to unveil the house's fabrication. Thus, there is a suspicion that the percussionist is paradoxically the actual poet-puppeteer at his strings, which makes the poet-reciter (Hoban, the real-life poet) his true victim. One then understands the ritualistic composure of the percussionist throughout the piece, but especially in the beginning: as if conducting "a Japanese tea ceremony."⁵

Resolution and the Multi-Faceted Eye: C Algorithms and C-sound Files

A brief discussion of the inner workings of the material and the manner in which much of this material was derived can offer a nuts-and-bolts explanation of the deconstructive processes with which the piece involves itself. This can be accomplished best with a specific example, one that discloses the resolution of fragmentation and discontinuity that is occurring in order to pulverize a given sound sample sufficiently. In example 6, one sees four lines of code extracted from an C-algorithm which creates a jitter-effect on a given sample, here a 22.8 second recording of the sound of page-turns with the spider paper interleaving of the photo album, as referred to already in example 3. The algorithm will "shatter" the sample into minute fragments (DOTCHUNKs) and between these, will determine likewise bits of silences (SPACECHUNKs). One can see that these fragments and silences will be in the range between 0.000000 seconds to 0.100000 seconds, thus creating the right jitter-effect. A higher resolution will be too continuous. In examples 7 and 8, one can see that the jitter is furthermore exacerbated by discontinuities in space through both the volume, p4, and the stereo pan position, left and right as p7 and p8 respectively. Reverberation levels of the fragment are also shifted (p13), though in this example, the levels are negligible. This fragmentation algorithm was also incorporated into the real-time Max/MSP fragmentation patch, thus live recitation is similarly treated. The 22.8-second sample, at this resolution of fragmentation obtains 475 segments, the first ten given in example 8. Thus the jitter-effect creates the illusion of a considerably palsied hand that turns the pages. Still, a more fitting explanation might consider the page-turns themselves being viewed through multi-faceted, compound eyes, like those of an insect. This would better account for the precision of the jitter and the resolution of the fragmentation, as each facet or ommatidium of the compound eye is responsible for one unique sample at a specific time and in a specific point in space.

Example 6: Essential lines of code from a C algorithm used in *Strange Autumn*, "Page Turn Void," Part 2: 1'01"

```
#define DOTCHUNK 100
#define SPACECHUNK 100
list[counter].isustain = (rand(0) % DOTCHUNK)/1000.0;
interstice = (rand(0) % SPACECHUNK)/1000.0;
```

Example 7: A sample csound orchestra file used in *Strange Autumn*, "Page Turn Void," Part 2: 1'01"

```
instr 23; fragmenter with reverb
```

⁵ The idea of puppeteer became most striking in a process of reconstruction of words by reordering individual phonemes from pre-recorded recitation. By collecting thousands of samples of the phonemes of a language spoken by a reciter, or for that matter analyzing and synthesizing his speech, one could theoretically have him say anything, including, strangely enough, variations on the recitation of his own poems.

```

ivolume = p4
ituning = p5
isfnum = p6
ileft = p7
iright = p8
ibegin = p9
iattack = p10
isustain = p11
irelease = p12
iresonance = p13
ioright = p14
ioright = p15
irevleft = p16
irevright = p17

```

```

k1          linseg 0.0, ibegin, 0.0, iattack, 1.0, (isustain - (iattack + irelease)), 1.0, irelease, 0.0
asamp1 asamp2 loscil k1, ituning, isfnum, 72
ar1        reverb asamp1, iresonance
ar2        reverb asamp2, iresonance

        outs  asamp1*ioright*ivolume*ileft, asamp2*ioright*ivolume*iright
        outs  ar1*irevleft*ivolume*ileft, ar2*irevright*ivolume*iright
        endin

```

Example 8: The first 10 of 475 lines of a c-sound score which creates the jitter-effect on a 22.8 second recorded sample of spider paper page-turns used in *Strange Autumn*, “Page Turn Void,” Part 2: 1’01”

```

fl 0 0 -1 ".../strangeautumn/PageTurnVoid/SpiderPaperPageTurnsSample01.wav" 0 4 0

;p1      p2      p3      p4      p5      p6      p7      p8      p9      p10     p11     p12     p13
i23      0.000000 20.000000 0.719000 72      1      0.238000 0.437000 0.001000 0.005000 0.055000 0.005000 0.297000
        p14     p15     p16     p17
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;

i23      0.065000 20.000000 0.950000 72      1      0.612000 0.853000 0.056000 0.005000 0.000000 0.005000 0.142000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.146000 20.000000 0.921000 72      1      0.945000 0.285000 0.056000 0.005000 0.097000 0.005000 0.180000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.222000 20.000000 0.655000 72      1      0.906000 0.457000 0.153000 0.005000 0.023000 0.005000 0.381000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.262000 20.000000 0.778000 72      1      0.446000 0.590000 0.176000 0.005000 0.040000 0.005000 0.087000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.269000 20.000000 0.611000 72      1      0.617000 0.456000 0.216000 0.005000 0.067000 0.005000 0.033000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.347000 20.000000 0.887000 72      1      0.597000 0.584000 0.283000 0.005000 0.012000 0.005000 0.111000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.425000 20.000000 0.629000 72      1      0.404000 0.279000 0.295000 0.005000 0.005000 0.005000 0.388000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.474000 20.000000 0.676000 72      1      0.331000 0.264000 0.300000 0.005000 0.014000 0.005000 0.136000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
i23      0.502000 20.000000 0.652000 72      1      0.404000 0.337000 0.314000 0.005000 0.056000 0.005000 0.098000
        1.000000 1.000000 0.100000 0.100000;
...

```

Real-world Sound Objects: Flies and Sandstorm

Strange Autumn, though perhaps not entirely conscious on the part of the composer, offers one possible solution to the problem of real-world sound objects and their tendency to become overly

referential to other such instances of similar objects or associations in an increasingly saturated genre.⁶ This nonetheless demands concentrated focus on the part of the listener, for admittedly, a surface listening will only invoke the more obvious associations, and these (often visual with real-world sound objects) can lead one away from the actual material at hand. A more analytical listening can glean the material to disclose relationships that contradict the assumptions implicit in these associations, and the distance between a conclusion based on visual affiliation on the one hand and the actual material construction on the other becomes an integral part of the listening experience itself. Inarguably, this perceived variation occurs whenever one re-listens or even reevaluates a work; still, with real-world sound objects, the potential misguidance of a sound functioning as an index for associations is undeniable. The positive aspects of this seem to have been exploited in obvious ways throughout the history of electro-acoustic music. The images conjured result in something cinematic. The negative aspect is a certain suspension of disbelief, which analytical listening could remedy. The result is not only new composite images, but also constructions that exhibit contradictions among their constituent parts. By so doing, the mixing process of real-world sound objects maintains irreconcilable strata of behavior, and one could argue that any synthetic construction, no matter how bent on lyricism, need not eradicate the resistant qualities of sampled objects. This is due to their unique movement or location in space. Allow me to explicate through example.

Beginning at 10'24" in *Strange Autumn* and stretching to 13'22", one encounters a section of turbulence that for practical purposes could be described as a storm. Though comprised of hundreds of samples from a multitude of sound sources, two sampled objects with distinct identities are nonetheless foregrounded: flies and surging sand. On first listening, one most likely perceives this sandstorm with flies swarming in it. It is entirely conceivable that both the sand taken up by wind and the flies in flight belong to one heterogeneous storm. On closer inspection that takes into consideration the spatial relationship between these two objects and the movement within each object's space, the image of flies suddenly appearing from and disappearing into the sand itself becomes imaginable—a strange species of burying fly that seems to hover and flicker on the surface of the windswept sand. Yet, this burying is instantaneous: the flies seem to appear and disappear in thin air.

This “slight-of-hand” is achieved by creating a disparity between the two objects' spatial realms and the continuity of movement within, while creating an associative link that contradicts this disparity. Thereby, the composite association (here storm with sand and flies) with the assumption of flies flying in the same wind through the same forces as the sand—is decoupled from its actual spatial configuration—fixed locations and traversal between two locations in a stereo field. These two spatial structures must be understood through their distinct microphone configurations in the recording setup:

- 1) directionally-focused stereo recording, where the two microphones are a few inches apart and directed at a single sound source (here, a fly trapped in a mesh sack, able to buzz sporadically, even occasionally at some length, but not able to fly freely about the studio recording space);

⁶ For a discussion of real-world sound objects, see the author's “Klang: Sound Composition Pulled ‘Inside Out’” in *The Foundations of Contemporary Composing*, edited by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2004), 173-186.

- 2) stereo-emphasized stereo recording, where the two microphones are approximately four feet apart and directed at two endpoints along a continuum (here, sand or pebbles sliding from one end of a five-foot closed tube to the other end and back).

Thus the two very different spatial configurations create distinct boundaries of behavior and movement. Samples of the fly flying freely about the studio were also recorded, but not used. The sound of the trapped fly was much more “aggressive” than the buzzing of the free flying fly, and by being trapped, its buzzing was limited to a short duration, thus onset and sudden offset could emphasize the cropped nature of the sample more than its continuity. Furthermore, a free flying fly enacting a writing or calligraphy in space would resemble more an elegant cursive than that which the jittery, palsied hand of a 90-year-old would produce.⁷

Consequently, the fly actually completes no sustained traversal through a space. If it did, it would have coordinated much more with sand pouring through a five-foot tube. The fly therefore is fixated in space for the duration of its short buzz. It might manifest itself in various specific locations, but never traversing between any of these various locations—always fixed as a point-marker in space. Despite all this, the fly can still effect many of its common associations and responses from the listener. For instance, when a fly is distant, it may be noticed by the listener, yet it is not intrusive. Within a certain proximity, however, the fly becomes more than merely audible—it may trigger a reflex response, one associated with the response of a pestering insect, and so the listener listens differently, engages other faculties. Such a response can be retained even with the buzz of a trapped fly, though the idea of being irritated by the sound of a trapped fly in the same way that one reacts to a free flying fly may seem absurd. The listener cannot see that the fly is trapped in a mesh sack. The listener assumes a free flying fly. Furthermore, it is the sandstorm itself that persuades—convinces the listener that the flies, too, are in motion. If the listener gives into these assumptions implicit in common-sense visual associations instigated by real-world sound objects, then, as with any line of expectation based on conjecture, one parameter can explicitly contradict this, and the composite image gives birth to, in this case, a strange new species of fly: flies that hover and flicker—that seem suddenly to appear from and disappear into the windswept sand. By decoupling two facets of one perception, the associative image is made incongruous and alien to itself while managing to avoid commonly-used transformational processes and estrangement such as spectral morphing, cross-synthesis, or time expansion.

A Covert Subtext

Layers of concealed intertextual reference proliferate *Strange Autumn*, hidden to the extent that some remain entirely “invisible” to the audience directly. This was inevitable. Any labyrinthine structure must contain passageways that are never entered, never seen. It is moreover a refutation of a general assumption concerning electronic music as a necessarily positivistic enterprise, where intention is coupled with the demand for visible/audible demonstration. Thus a concept of “secret pieces”⁸ is formulated here as concealed and embedded subtexts. These subtexts are

⁷ For extraordinary examples and drawings of the jittery “calligraphy” of 1) fly “lip prints” and 2) fly “choreography” as it eats on various concentrations of sugar solutions or with different effects of light or gravity, see pages 22 and 27-29 respectively in V.G. Dethier’s *The Hungry Fly: A Physiological Study of the Behavior Associated with Feeding* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976).

⁸ This notion of “secret music” was inspired by a category of classical Japanese music known as *hikyoku* (“secret pieces”), best known in the context of the *Heikyoku* (*The Tale of the Heike* in song/narration with biwa

nonetheless accessible to the performer as well as the musical analyst. One such subtext is an offshoot on the idea of spider paper as the “page-web” that catches the incoming fly.

Needless to say, the trapped fly has a number of possible meanings. It is first a reference to Paul Celan’s poem “Bakensammler” (“Beacon-gatherer”) from his *Lichtzwang* collection, after which one of Hoban’s own musical composition for cello solo takes its name. In Celan’s poem, it is “den einen anfliegender Wortstier”⁹ (“the one incoming word-bull”) that is guided in by the beacon-master. In contrast to this precision intrinsic to Celan’s language-shaping, albeit one that admits in a plethora of possible meanings,¹⁰ is the less discriminating (but in the end, no less selective) spider’s web. The latter catches (and misses) arbitrarily, not only the intended prey (such as flies), but anything that might drift in on the wind, including leaves and debris. This relates well to an algorithmic composition whose chance output is then gleaned for useful material, and in the case of the uncommon and arresting, caught and worked in. What is remarkable about these chance accidents is always relative, as what is celebrated in one context is not in another. Nonetheless, the attempt to optimize the web in order to trap an object of potential significance requires ceaseless revision and modification of the algorithmic programs.

Therefore, “leaf-Wort” as a bilingual construction is more the *translator’s* “word-bull,” or for that matter, that of the mis-translator who awaits the fruits of his inaccuracies. This in turn relates to the line “a leaf, treeless,” quoted from another of Celan’s poems, “Ein Blatt”¹¹ (“A leaf” or “A page”) from *Schneepart*, in the first of Hoban’s poems found in *Strange Autumn*. “A leaf, treeless” is an example of how perspectival translation—and in particular its inversive variant—works, not here between languages, but rather between relating objects. This becomes clear when one ponders the more obvious and antecedent formulation, “a leafless tree,” and matches its inversion, “a leaf, treeless,” with another line from Celan, this time from his acceptance speech for the Georg Büchner Prize entitled “The Meridian: “a man who walks on his head sees the sky below, as an abyss.”¹² Here, the shock of an inversive translation awakens one to its existential implications. The Celan poem in its entirety reads:

A leaf, treeless
for Bertolt Brecht:
What kind of times are these,
when a conversation
is well nigh a crime
because it includes

accompaniment) attributed to Shinano Zenji Yukinaga and Shobutsu, ca. 1200. There is moreover a reference to these pieces in Masaki Kobayashi’s film, *Kwaidan* (1965), based on the collection of Japanese tales recounted by Lafcadio Hearn that includes “The Story of Mimi-Nashi-Hoichi.” Here the blind biwa player is coaxed to perform the battle scenes of the doomed Heike clan at Dannoura for an audience of those vanquished, now ghosts, that appear only to him. The image of a musician in ecstatic performance before an audience of no one but lingering absences appears almost as a photo-negative to pragmatic, audience-oriented composition. One can conclude that a single listening of a performance is only one glimpse at a piece.

⁹ Paul Celan, “Bakensammler” from *Lichtzwang* in *Gesammelte Werke in Fünf Bänden: Zweiter Band, Gedichte II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), 244.

¹⁰ See Winfried Menninghaus’s *Paul Celan: Magie der Form* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), 29-31 and 154-155.

¹¹ Paul Celan, “Ein Blatt” from *Schneepart* in *Gesammelte Werke in Fünf Bänden: Zweiter Band, Gedichte II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), 385.

¹² Paul Celan, “The Meridian” from *Paul Celan: Selections*, edited by Pierre Joris and translated by Rosemarie Waldrop (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 161.

so much that is said?¹³

Indeed, Celan's "A leaf, treeless" is "for Bertolt Brecht" and is itself a reference to Brecht's poem, *An die Nachgeborenen* ("To those born later"). A leaf—that is a page—which is treeless is one that has no "Gespräch über Bäume..." ("talk about trees..."). The three oft-quoted lines from Brecht's celebrated poem are "Was sind das für Zeiten, wo / Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist / Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!"¹⁴ ("What times are these, when / A talk about trees is almost a crime / Because it implies silence about so many horrors!"¹⁵) The flies viewed from this Brechtian angle reclaim a most obvious association: they are the flies about corpses, and they should bring home the stench of corpses with them. Moreover, it is the sandstorm that locates them: a storm in the desert. These decaying bodies appear to arrive at such close proximity to the listener (due to the extremely close microphone positions on the flies), that it is as if one is attempting to come closer, in fact, cannot come close enough. Yet the cold truth is that we do not know the dead, so they remain corpses. Thus, *Strange Autumn* is "marked by its own January 20th," (a reference in Celan's "The Meridian" to the Wannsee Conference, January 20, 1942, where the administration for the "final solution of the Jewish question" was planned). That is, if every poem is so marked, as Celan suggests. This return to the surface does not in any way dispense with the opposition between the political necessity for semantic utility and language "für-sich-Sein" ("to be for itself"), rather it exploits the incompatibility for the sake of its own dimensionality. Indeed, it would be criminal to speak about trees, or flies for that matter, in these times, under the present regime in the United States. It was my hope that a swarm of flies, in a concert hall, could induce not only a conceptual index to a recoiling, but also a highly visceral sensation of it. It is to infect the listener comparable to the reciter/poet who becomes "fly-infected" through the cross-synthesis program that interfuses swarm and recitation.

Thus, the subtext in its covertness returns the message not deeper into further hiding, but towards a political surface, and what better place to hide than in plain view, fully visible on that surface. This is how mirrored reflections work: any object that seems real is illusory, and any object that one would disregard as deceitful is true. This is a way *Strange Autumn* negotiates between the Brecht and the Celan, language as the vehicle for the message-content and language for itself. There is one further component to this, and that is the idea of the list—as bureaucratic inventory.

To concretize the "spider paper" subtext, there is a partial taxonomical list of linyphiid spiders, sheet-web spinners that I thought were not unrelated to the concept of pages. Unlike the orb, funnel, or irregular festoon-web spiders, these linyphiid spin their webs in sheets, which like pages, become written upon by their trapped prey. This listing of some 4300 species of Linyphiidae compiled by A.V. Tanasevitch with species and subspecies, name of discoverer, and date of discovery, goes back to 1757 and is current to 2005.¹⁶ The taxonomy is a positivistic

¹³ Paul Celan, "A Leaf" in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. by John Felstiner (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 343.

¹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, *Die Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 267-268.

¹⁵ Bertolt Brecht, *Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose*, edited by John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd, 1976), 318-320. The first line of their translation begins "What kind of times are they, when".

¹⁶ A.V. Tanasevitch, *A List of Linyphiid Spiders of the World*, website: <http://www.andtan.newmail.ru/list/species.htm>, accessed February 22, 2004.

“non-between,” an attempt to classify and “pin down” the natural world, but ironically resulting in seemingly infinite, unwieldy lists which must be catalogued like books in libraries.

Example 9: *Strange Autumn*, Part 2: *Der Würfel, Die Zwiebel (The Etching)*, 2'20" to 2'59"

	2' – 20"								
8-track	(SILENCE)								
2-track								or throwing	ein En
Reciter	longer sees itself / holding / is it			(Recitation without breathing again. Takes precedence and thus interrupts whispered line.) or throwing ein En					
Perc.				between whispering and lip-sync (almost inaudible): Six hundred and sixteen Centromerus sylvaticus (Blackwall, eighteen forty-one)					
≡									
	2' – 30"								
8-track	(SILENCE)								
2-track		oder				cast it	da	ode ar ei	where I ca
Reciter	oder			Six hundred and seventeen, Centromerus sylvaticus		simile	da	ode ar ei	where I ca
Perc.									
≡									
	2' – 40"								
8-track	(SILENCE)								
2-track	z gewo ke	a col	ist		zu mein	Würf		a writing	in der Hand
Reciter	a col		ist	zu mein Würf			a writing		
Perc.	(Alternatively, this page-turn could be photoalbum to view pasted-in score.)		COMPBK L (LIVE) COMPBK R (LIVE)			turn all pages together in one turn to front cover.			
≡									
	2' – 50"								
8-track	(SILENCE)						"ROLL" →		
2-track	ist	das in which	was	fallen	I see	some	thing in der Hand	SILENCE →	
Reciter	ist	was	fallen	I see	in der		Still		
Perc.	prepare bow	ad lib.	Turn cover perpendicular to table and position bow.			arco, rosined violin bow on edge of cover		pp (light, upbow always white noise only)	

This partial list is the only text in *Strange Autumn* not derived from the Hoban poems. The list is later parodied by an inventory of all individual phonemes from an excerpt of *Die Zwiebel*, the details about which I have written in a previous article.¹⁷ Each phoneme of the recitation is extracted and cropped, thereby becoming an individual sound-sample, and hundreds of these samples are then labeled and sorted alphabetically. These are then presented toward the end of the piece as streams of these alphabetized phonemes. Thus, the phonemic deconstruction into the shattered shards of language is followed up with a system of classification, sorting,

¹⁷ See the author's "The Morphology and Extensibility/Resilience of Musical Spaces as Dynamic Containers" in *Musical Morphology*, edited by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, et. al. (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2004), 207-222.

cataloguing, and positioning. The whole enterprise of *Strange Autumn*, one could argue, is the inner and outer worlds in the process of eroding and then becoming one vast, bureaucratized library. The piece is aware of its proneness to this administration and attempts to show this knowledge, though it is both resistant to and complicit with its transformation.

Concluding Remarks (a Former Footnote)

Even bureaucratic administration finds a twisted reflection. One could ask, “What are these for times, when human beings are dehumanized to the extent, that they are not even permitted to become a statistic?” Tommy Franks, US commanding general of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, issued his now famous statement regarding Pentagon policy on enemy casualties, “We don’t do body counts.” This might explain the reason for flies suddenly disappearing—this strange species of burying fly. If the bodies of killed Iraqis including the thousands of civilians suddenly disappear from mindfulness, the flies, too, would follow. See www.iraqbodycount.org for extensive analysis of Iraqi casualties, the double standard in the counting of the dead, and the “burial” of information.