ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: STATEMENTS ON ISOLATION, MEMORY, AND ACCEPTANCE

John Duncan Boatright, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2020

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Thomas DeLio, Professor, Music Theory & Composition

Statements on Isolation, Memory, and Acceptance is a fixed-media electronic composition approximately 20 minutes in length in two movements. Spoken word recordings of poetry and prose comprise the entire sound source for the work. The texts serve to represent contrasting emotional states: (fear, anxiety, and tension versus resignation, yielding, and desolation). While these texts differ greatly in their content, they share a trend towards imaginative and abstract imagery which enables the composition to rely on the timbre and aesthetic of the language rather than on the specific prose.

The first movement, Stories misremembered, is characterized by the gradual granulation of the component vocal samples, the results of which are then layered into a texture that fully occupies the sonic spectrum before a series of filters are applied to

produce a harmonic texture comprised of the nearly sinusoidal waveforms of each layer of filtered granulation.

The second movement, Stories forgotten, uses the sonic character of the end of the first movement as its starting point, beginning with a series of narrowly filtered clouds of granulated sound underscored by a recitation of the source text by six vocalists. The filtered frequencies of this movement are drawn from prime numbers, with the rationale being that ratios of prime numbers are more likely to be irrational and thus heard as less consonant. These frequencies are always presented in pairs, with the frequency ratios of those pairs being irrational ratios which slowly approach – but never reach – the consonant ratios of 4:3, 3:2, and 2:1. The end result is a gradual but inconclusive approach towards consonance.

The work serves as a commentary on the musical nature of the human voice; spectral analysis reveals that the initially complex timbre of the voice is gradually destroyed until its waveforms almost approach something sinusoidal, before the process reverses itself and the complexity of the voice is once again revealed. The piece was written primarily using SuperCollider, a programming language developed in the 1990s for the procedural manipulation of sound, and also involves the use of Audacity, Logic Pro, Pro Tools, and Reason.

STATEMENTS ON ISOLATION, MEMORY, AND ACCEPTANCE

by

John Duncan Boatright

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
2020

Advisory Committee:
 Professor Thomas DeLio, Chair
 Professor Theodore Einstein
 Dr. Lee Hinkle
 Assistant Professor William Robin
 Associate Professor Mark Wilson