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More is More: Reza Abdoh, Excess, and the Cultural Materials of AIDS
and
Waiting Rooms, a chamber opera in one act

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Music Composition and Theory

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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Laurie San Martin

Committee in Charge
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ABSTRACT

The first chapter of this dissertation is concerned with the cultural materials of AIDS, as understood through Joseph Cady's framework of immersive style. This framework was conceived to describe strategies found in the literary output of gay men living with AIDS before the development of effective medical treatment. Immersive style is characterized by a confrontational attitude, shifting time-space, and the centering of People Living With HIV/AIDS. This chapter expands immersive style to include the literary work of other marginalized identities that exist in tension with structures of power, as seen in the writing of Tory Dent and Essex Hemphhill. It can likewise be found in performance, such as the direct actions of the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power, and music, like Diamanda Galás' *Plague Mass*, ultimately laying a foundation that is built upon by the later chapters.

The second chapter of this dissertation examines the use of doubling in Reza and Salar Abdoh's lipsynch theater piece, *Quotations from a Ruined City*. Dis/re/embodied doubles include the action of lipsynch to text or songs. Twinned doubles deal with the mirroring and diffusion of voice and identity across characters. Singularities resist the double, but in the case of "Mario's Monolog," it resurfaces through juxtaposed incongruities and immersive style.

The third chapter of this dissertation proposes a framework for excessive form, devised from the combination of camp, immersive style, and late style, and discussed through the work of Abdoh. Excessive form uses a surplus of irreconcilable materials to overwhelm the auditor, rendering the work impenetrable to analysis while subverting the assumed values of genre and form.

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INTRODUCTION

My initial interest in this project stems from my personal experience living with HIV in a "post-AIDS" world. My position is oxymoronic and in-between, the "healthy sick person," a term Peter Bowen used to describe the early stages of HIV infection, now crystallized into a persistent identity for those who have access to healthcare and modern antiretroviral treatments, luxuries that are by no means guaranteed.[1] It is my goal that this project will contribute to difficult conversations surrounding health, stigma, and creative practices while maintaining the memory of those who came before me and, in many cases, died shaping a world where I get to live a healthy life. On a larger scale, I hope to bring music, and sound generally, into the greater fold of cultural studies, particularly as it pertains to HIV/AIDS. While creative practices of all kinds are well-documented in the archives of the AIDS crisis, music and sound rarely receive the same attention as literature, drama, and visual art. Edward Said attributes the general lack of "practical knowledge of music as an art" to a number of factors, particularly the growing gap of access to music education and the difficulty of approaching contemporary musical works.[2] Given my background as a queer, HIV-positive composer, I can enhance the wealth of cultural scholarship regarding HIV/AIDS by furthering conversations around music, sound, and ultimately form.

My decision to focus on the work of Reza Abdoh, an auteur director, may seem curious. However, the importance of sound in Abdoh's work cannot be stressed enough. Abdoh himself is quoted as saying "Often when I structure my work, I think of musical forms." According to Abdoh, dance, music, and image "are all sort of parallel to each other.

[1] Peter M. Bowen "AIDS 101" in *Writing AIDS* 1993, 156, ed. Murphy and Poirier
[2] Edward Said, *On Late Style* 2006, 115

And there is no real hierarchy at all of importance."[3] It was the power of the visual and aural in excessive combination that initially caught my attention during a 2018 retrospective of Abdoh's work at MoMA PS1. This exhibition reconstructed a timeline of Abdoh's life, with ephemera, scripts, and photographs punctuating significant moments. In between these time capsules, dark theaters with blasting speakers showed the surviving archival footage (courtesy of videographer and Abdoh collaborator Adam Soch) of Abdoh's spectacular, over-the-top stage productions.

Reza Abdoh was born in 1963 in Iran to his young mother and wealthy father, owner of the first bowling alley in Iran. He and his siblings, two brothers and a sister, grew up with an affluent lifestyle that afforded them the opportunity to attend boarding school in England. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, Abdoh moved with his father and brothers to Los Angeles, endearingly nicknamed Tehrangeles by the Iranian diaspora, where he would briefly enroll at the University of Southern California. The Abdoh family was poor upon their arrival in the States, thanks to the revolution. This new financial reality was exacerbated by the death of Abdoh's father in 1980, and Abdoh soon thereafter dropped out of school and may have resorted to sex work for survival. By 1983, Abdoh was directing plays in Los Angeles. Around 1989, when he wrote and directed *Minamata* with Mira-Lani Oglesby, Abdoh tested positive for HIV. This led to a shift in his creative work, which acquired a new sense of urgency, becoming "fast and furious." Just before the premiere of *Bogeyman* (1991) and the closing of the Los Angeles Theater Company, Abdoh created Dar A Luz, his own theater company, which consisted of actors from his recent productions. With his new company, Abdoh relocated to New York, and proceeded to tour

[3] Abdoh and Bell, "To Reach Divinity Through the Act of Performance': An Interview with Reza Abdoh." 1995, 61-62

many of his productions in Europe. His health began to deteriorate in 1992, and he passed away in the spring of 1995 shortly before production was to begin on a new work developed with his brother, Salar, titled *Story of Infamy*.[4]

Abdoh assembled frighteningly intense, dense works out of a huge swath of disparate materials: American television commercials, dances from "exotic" cultures, beloved Hollywood musical numbers, mystical rituals, the emotional baggage of his collaborators, and his own lived experience as a queer immigrant living with AIDS in America. Beyond the gargantuan scope of their materials, Abdoh's works acquire their intensity from a relentless speed and impressive volume. In earlier works, one can hear the strain of his actors as they become noticeably winded and hoarse from shouting over one another — only minutes after they first appear on stage. Daniel Mufson has observed two key periods of Abdoh's creative output, one defined by speed and ferocity, the other by meditative stillness and lyricism.[5] I believe that his final work, *Quotations from a Ruined City,* successfully synthesizes these periods into a breakneck meditation that bounces between an ear-splitting sonic assault and contemplative moments of quiet stillness.

Quotations from a Ruined City is more than just a play; it is a multimedia assemblage of stunning physicality, video, and recorded sound that demands the audience bear witness to the many catastrophes of humanity, of which AIDS is but one. Abdoh crafts a web that links American racism to the Bosnian-Serbian conflict, to capitalism and puritanism, to the golden age of Hollywood, to the innocence of childhood, and to the horrific systemic failures of the AIDS crisis. Barbed wire keeps the audience at a distance, contained, but

[4] Daniel Mufson, "Notes on a Life Imagined and Lived" https://danielmufson.com/the-abdoh-files/notes-on-a-life-imagined-and-lived/
[5] Daniel Mufson 2011, "Comments on Bogeyman" https://vimeo.com/33867692

closely-miked bodily sounds (eating, gasping, choking) create a feeling of sonic infiltration in the body of the auditor, "as if there were no distance between the recorded voice and listening ears."[6] At a moment's notice, one finds oneself transported to another world as Frank Sinatra croons from the body on-stage; a phrase from Bach's *Violin Sonata No. 3 in C Major* seems to enliven the performing bodies before a mid-phrase rupture ushers in a new scene; disturbing images invade the auditors' minds as they listen to detailed descriptions of torture, unable to hide from the voices emanating from the speakers and through performing bodies; suddenly, house lights come up as the lipsynching human-objects, cyborgs that represent "a hybrid of machine and organism," become people once more, actors taking a break and checking on one another, displaying tender expressions of humanity that are markedly different from the intensity of their performance.[7] It is striking, perhaps even ironic, that in this moment of care the performers seem oblivious to the presence of the audience on the other side of the barbed wire. It is as if they don't exist at all.

This is explicitly not "victim art," a term coined in a "non-review" by Arlene Croce of Bill T. Jones' 1995 dance production *Still/Here*.[8] Abdoh stresses that "one has to not be a victim," a stance that echoes the tension between mainstream media representations of HIV/AIDS during the most prominent moments of the crisis, and the realities of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).[9] *Quotations* may be better described as a work that explores power and various "styles of imprisonment," Buddhist ideals that Maggie Nelson clarifies are "the sometimes simple, sometimes intricate ways in which humans imprison

[6] Friedrich A. Kittler, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, and Michael Wutz *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* 1999, 37
[7] Donna Harraway, *Cyborg Manifesto* 1991, 149
[8] Maggie Nelson, *Art of Cruelty* 2011, 85; Arlene Croce, *New Yorker*, "Discussing the Undiscussable" 19 December 1994
[9] Abdoh and Bell 1995, 70

themselves and their others, thereby causing suffering rather than alleviating it."[10] One such style of imprisonment may be experienced by the audience itself, as Abdoh isolated them with the aforementioned barbed wire, and reinforced their captivity by denying them an intermission (the trade off being a runtime of only ninety minutes), even while offering a break to the performers. Thus, the captive audience became spectators of, and were at times spectated by, the human-objects in the performance space. This spectatorship is a synthesis of opposing approaches by Brecht and Artaud, both of whom are regularly mentioned as inspirations of Abdoh's. As Nelson explains, "Brecht demands that the spectator become more aware, via a forced self-consciousness, of his or her complicity; Artaud strives to collapse the distance between looking and acting entirely, leaving the spectator subsumed, possessed, dissolved."[11]

The importance of the auditor, and thus the auditor's body, in relationship to this work cannot be overstated. One of Abdoh's goals was to break his audience, so that they would not "leave the theater intact."[12] Phenomenology, with its emphasis on lived experience and bodily extension, provides a useful perspective to consider Abdoh's pointed challenge of his auditors' bodies. In auditing *Quotations*, one gets the sense that they are being jostled and dragged around: their orientation spins as space and time transform without warning. Sara Ahmed writes, "if orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails."[13] Abdoh disorients the viewer, and keeps them disoriented by pulling them in different directions with image and sound, leading to "a radical or a subtle shift in their

[10] Nelson 2011, 11
[11] Ibid. 24-25
[12] Adam Soch, *Reza Abdoh - Theatre Visionary* 2015
[13] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 2007, 11

perception."[14] In doing so, he is able to generate a sense of chronal anxiety in the viewer, which Mariusz Kozak defines as "a pull between different self-affective orientations, manifested in the tension between different kinds of movement—between a full-blown action and standstill."[15]

My research draws from a diverse collection of materials, including queer theories of temporality, phenomenology, and failure; musical analysis; post-avant-garde aesthetics; performance studies; media studies; literary analysis; cultural studies; writings on camp; and HIV/AIDS scholarship. Through the assemblage of these materials, I propose a framework for approaching durational works that resist traditional systems of value, as dictated by social standards or genre expectations. While this framework employs queer theories, it is not intended to only analyze works made by queer artists, nor is it constrained to work that is explicitly created through the context of HIV/AIDS. Queer as an adjective and verb points to a disturbance in traditional modes of being and knowing, and I use it here to describe people, communities and artworks that are nonnormative, whether that is expressed through sexual orientations and identities, marginalized existences, or a resistance to standard formal constructions.

Abdoh's productions have been archived by videographer and former collaborator Adam Soch and are available to stream on Vimeo, along with the documentary *Reza Abdoh - Theatre Visionary*. I am indebted to Daniel Mufson, who has written a significant amount on Abdoh, and conducted interviews with Abdoh and his closest collaborators and family members near and after Abdoh's death. I expanded on Mufson's efforts by interviewing Galen Wade, a sound designer for many of Abdoh's productions, including *Quotations from*

[14] Andréa R. Vaucher, *Muses from Chaos and Ash* 1993, 45
[15] Mariusz Kozak, *Enacting Musical Time* 2020, 219

a Ruined City. Wade also provided me with the unused footage of his interviews with Soch, as well as the original, high quality audio files for the Los Angeles version of *Quotations*. The New York version of the script for *Quotations* is published in The Drama Review (TDR) Vol. 39, No. 4 (Autumn 1995), and additional resources were accessed at the Reza Abdoh Archive in the New York Library for the Performing Arts.

Part One of this dissertation spans three chapters. In Chapter 1, "Tracing Immersive Style: From Literature Through Performance," I provide the reader with historical context on the AIDS Crisis. This includes many of the challenges faced by People Living With HIV/AIDS and other at-risk groups during the height of the catastrophe, 1981-1996. After establishing the appropriate foundation, I proceed to discuss styles of representation through Joseph Cady's framework of immersive and counterimmersive style. This framework was initially developed to discuss the literary work of Paul Monette, and other gay men living with AIDS at the time. Immersive style employs shock through shifting time-space and confrontational tone, and always centers the experience of PLWHA. In contrast, counterimmersive style can be equated to virtually all mainstream depictions of AIDS, which tended to decenter PLWHA, as well as their (assumed) socially reviled lifestyles, in favor of shielding and uplifting the purity of the stable, nuclear family.

I take Cady's frame and stretch it to include the poetry of Tory Dent, Tim Dlugos, and Essex Hemphill in order to offer a broader view of how immersive style can manifest in writing by PLWHA. In the cases of Dent and Hemphill, I also elaborate on the intersection of AIDS with other aspects of their identities, including gender and race. I then further expand immersive style to consider the realm of performance through the Stop the Church action of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), and its media repackaging by the Damned

Interfering Video Artists (DIVA TV). My final case study pushes immersive style fully toward sound through a discussion of Diamanda Galás and her *Plague Mass*, which is an epic opera trilogy that subverts religious ritual to critique the systemic failures that impeded vital political and social responses to AIDS. In covering these various performances, I demonstrate the alignment in strategies and perspectives between artists and activists, while broadening the discussion beyond literature to include performance and sound.

In Chapter 2, "*Quotations from a Ruined City* and the Double," I first turn away from immersive style to consider how the concept of doubling enables analysis of Reza Abdoh's final theater work. I frame the entire construction of the work as a form of doubling, given its use of lipsynch, and gradually move deeper into the work to discuss the role of dance, song, and character relationships. In the closing of the chapter, I locate immersive style once more in "Mario's Monolog," the only significantly unamplified scene in the piece, which details a man's physical, mental, and emotional struggle with AIDS, loss, and death.

In my final chapter, "Excessive Form: Camp, Immersive, and Late Styles," I offer a framework for what I call "excessive form." This includes durational work that is impenetrable to the auditor by virtue of its surplus of incongruent, juxtaposed materials, its ceaseless deluge of information, and its subversion of standardized values of form and narrative. While I draw from a wide collection of scholarship to develop this framework, it is most beholden to theories of immersive and late style, and camp. I use Beethoven as an entry point to late style, and draw some comparisons between the reception of his late work and that of Abdoh's. After a close examination of excessive form in the context of *Quotations from a Ruined City*, I draw a line from Abdoh's destruction of form to

possibilities for regeneration in the auditor, suggesting a new method of approaching unapproachable, misunderstood, and excessive works.

Part Two of this dissertation is *Waiting Rooms*, an immersive, site-specific chamber opera that uses the cultural materials and experiences of AIDS to explore our relationship to memory and absence. It was conceived to be staged at the Sacramento Gender Health Center, with movement-artist Moscelyne ParkeHarrison guiding the audience through the work as the embodiment of a lingering memory. *Waiting Rooms* begins with a collage of recorded voices excerpted from the interviews of Samuel Lurie and Kathy Ottersten, transgender activists and former members of ACT UP New York. The following scenes, staged in therapy rooms and setting texts by Tim Dlugos (1950-1990), feature a solo performer and, with the exception of Scene Two, a pre-recorded and absent performer. Scene One, *D.O.A*, for mezzo-soprano and absent viola, oscillates between feelings of frustration and gratitude as her life nears its end. The absent viola provides the foundation for the singer's journey through musings and memories. Scene Two, *Knowing It*, is for a singing guitarist with pedals. It follows the performer as they doze off during a lazy morning stuck in bed with their lover. The scene accumulates density as the performer navigates dreams, forgiveness, and sex to find a place of belonging. Scene Three, *Retrovir*, presents bassoon, absent voice, and absent viola in a nostalgic tangle as they reflect on the past, bridging the noisy lovemaking of Scene Two with the quiet purity of Scene Four, *Joe*. Scored for singing violist and absent singing violist, *Joe* is a late night winter walk with an ever-fading memory. The pair ultimately has to accept that their time is up; they cannot remain together. In between each of these "narrative" scenes are fragments of the initial recorded voice collage and a fixed media piece, *Lost/Found*, which follows Scene Four and

includes dance films by ParkeHarrison and Colin Frederick. The finale, *Spinner*, draws the entire ensemble together in an emotionally bittersweet memorial to a lost lover.

CHAPTER ONE

Tracing Immersive Style: From Literature Through Performance

"We are being allowed to die, while low risk populations are being panicked—not educated, panicked—into believing that we deserve to die."

– Vito Russo, "Why We Fight"[16]

Throughout the height of the AIDS Crisis, activists and PLWHA[17] fought tooth and nail for more accurate, holistic representations of life with the virus. Art historian and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp notes that many mainstream efforts to depict the realities of AIDS were one-sided and unrealistic, "bureaucratic abstractions" to be combated at all costs.[18] These poor attempts at representation are easily found in news coverage, television shows, movies, and even prestigious art museum and gallery exhibits from the 80s and 90s, specifically the period between the "discovery" of HIV/AIDS (1981) and the development of HAART (1996)[19]. Instead of providing factual information and humane depictions, media narratives constructed the public understanding of PLWHA through "a regime of massively overdetermined images," that Simon Watney dubbed "the spectacle of AIDS".[20] PLWHA were pathologized as shadowy victims who were ashamed of the identities and behaviors that left them disfigured, hopeless, and resigned to death. Such representations acted primarily as a shield to the institution of the nuclear family, allowing what literary theorist

[16] "Why We Fight" was a speech delivered at an ACT UP demonstration in Albany, May 9, 1988 (Schulman 2021, 662) Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show* 2021, 662
[17] People Living With HIV/AIDS. This term is a contemporary spin on the more commonly seen PWA "People With AIDS"
[18] Douglas Crimp *Melancholia and Moralism* 2002, 88
[19] Highly Active Antiretroviral Treatment
[20] Simon Watney, "The Spectacle of AIDS." *October* Vol. 43, Winter, 1987, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism. 78.

John Clum calls the "mythical, cohesive, all-heterosexual audience" to disidentify with people living with AIDS. This was achieved by decentering the affected person. By erasing anti-assimilationist structures, these mainstream representations affirmed the strength and centrality of the healthy, albeit mourning, family.[21] Television's strategies of inventing narratives for mainstream audiences led to the fabrication of the "victims'' and of AIDS, which might be reframed as gay men, promiscuous heterosexuals, and drug users, versus the "innocents": faithful women deceived by sinful husbands, or unfortunately ill middle-class children. People of Color were almost entirely occluded from these representations despite higher rates of transmission in their communities, emphasizing the insignificance of minorities in the eyes of the mythical audience.[22] This fueled a loop of misunderstanding and social rejection of PLWHA that exacerbated the many obstacles preventing improvements to research funding, medical care and legislative action.

According to medical humanities scholar and poet Joseph Cady, counterimmersive style is a feature of mainstream AIDS representation that focuses on characters who are often in denial about AIDS, and avoids any specifics that might be uncomfortable for the audience.[23] While it is true that the devastation of AIDS is still addressed in counterimmersive style, Cady argues that works made through this frame ultimately collaborate with the larger cultural denial of the disease by stoking AIDS panic and disparaging alternative lifestyles through a moralizing tone. For instance,

[21] John M. Clum "'And once I had it all': AIDS narratives and memories of an American Dream" in *Writing AIDS* 1993, 200, ed. Murphy and Poirer

[22] It is worth mentioning the deep distrust of the medical establishment by People of Color during this time, especially in the context of the crack epidemic, the War on Drugs, and the USPHS Syphilis Study at Tuskegee. Essex Hemphill discusses this situation and threads it through the challenges of building queer coalitions across racial lines in *Ceremonies*.

[23] Joseph Cady "Immersive and Counterimmersive Writing about AIDS" in *Writing AIDS* 1993, 244, ed. Murphy and Poirier

documentary-style television interviews and news programming tended to focus on the AIDS-afflicted body while deploying a disembodied and disinterested voiceover narration as the arbiter of knowledge, which Watney identifies as a viewer "who already 'knows all he needs to know' about homosexuality *and* AIDS."[24] This allows the audience to continue to inhabit spaces that are guarded from the brutal realities of illness while simultaneously reinforcing the conception that all people with AIDS have frightening physical ailments, and are therefore visibly othered. These mainstream representations of AIDS victimized PLWHA, and elided a constellation of identities and behaviors under a single banner of homosexuality. AIDS itself was conceived through homosexuality, with its initial discovery in gay men and its labeling as gay-related immune deficiency (GRID). Thus, AIDS can not be represented or discussed without pointing toward maligned social demons, especially homosexuality, indiscriminate sexual encounters, and intravenous drug use, leading to a colloquial fusing of these behaviors in the public mind. Such topics are a direct assault on the (white, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual) American Dream, and must be sanitized and made palatable for mainstream consumption.

The impact of this binding of identities is still visible today, and has become internalized in a gay moralism that polices the aforementioned fringe behaviors from within and emphasizes "assimilation into the normative."[25] Counterimmersive style lives on in some of the most high profile gay-produced media, with HIV/AIDS continuing to be stigmatized through frameworks of shame and assimilation perpetuated primarily by wealthy, white gay men—both real and fictional. For example, in the Netflix original series *Uncoupled*, the recently separated Michael, a well-to-do, middle aged white gay man in New

[24] Watney 1987, 78, original emphasis
[25] Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies* 2009, 6-7

York City played by Neil Patrick Harris, has to navigate the contemporary hellscape of online dating and hook up culture. The position of *Uncoupled* as a mainstream gay program cannot be overstated: it was released on a major global streaming platform, with one of the creators, Darren Star, having worked on *Sex and the City*, and starring Neil Patrick Harris, an actor bearing a household name and a buttoned-up, clean cut persona. Its handling of HIV/AIDS is partially to develop Neil Patrick Harris' character, who is freshly single and still traumatized by survivor's guilt.In one episode, Michael talks disparagingly about his ex-partner taking PrEP, who he claims is trying to "fuck his way across New York City without getting a disease." This statement, wrapped in the bitterness of a failed relationship, obscures what PrEP actually does by conflating HIV prevention with all STIs, and suggesting that people taking PrEP are by default promiscuous, fueling stigma around HIV, casual sex, and preventative measures. Later, in the middle of a hookup, Michael refuses to engage in further discussion with his partner, stating "I can't get turned on when all I can see is my name on that quilt." By mentioning the AIDS quilt, an emblematic and ongoing community project that memorializes loved ones lost to AIDS, Michael continues to construct his sexuality through his relationship to the crisis and its devastation. He is precisely the age of a so-called lost generation of gay men who were decimated by AIDS, and many of those who survived physically unscathed were still profoundly traumatized by an era of rampant, systemic homophobia and a simmering fear that they might be next to die.

Uncoupled is in a counterimmersive style due to its lack of directness. HIV is not explicitly mentioned; instead, it is suggested through PrEP and "the quilt," catching "a disease," but not *the disease*. There are no characters who are HIV-positive, despite every

character having some relationship to HIV, even if only through the fear of acquiring it. PLWHA are cast out of the narrative completely, as people to be remembered, post-mortem, on the unnamed quilt. For Michael, HIV is too entangled with death, which is itself inseparable from the casual sex life that he must now traverse in his newly single identity. The viewer is assumed to be aware of HIV/AIDS, but not directly impacted by it, thus divorced from the prolonged panic Michael faces at the fear of acquiring the virus, which has been depicted as mysterious and distant, yet ever present.

Joseph Cady finds one strategy of opposition to mainstream AIDS representations in "immersive style," which he positions as a literary and sociocultural response to AIDS, held in a binary tension with counterimmersive style. To Cady, "immersive" AIDS writing is a direct confrontation with denial. Distance and willful ignorance are targeted with graphic reality, so that "the reader is thrust into a direct imaginative confrontation with the special horrors of AIDS and is required to deal with them with no relief."[26] Immersive style targets a double audience: those who deny the ongoing crisis and must be shocked into action, and those who are living through it and need to be heard, seen, and supported. Cady explores immersive style through the poems of Paul Monette, whose writing seeks "to shock and unsettle [us] out of [our] insensibility to AIDS."[27] Immersive style is chaotic and disorienting, using outside references and pop-cultural materials to shift focus and time-place dramatically and suddenly, leaving audiences spinning between varying orientations. Despite this refusal to settle, the orbit of the work circulates around AIDS and the people who are living (and dying) with it.

[26] Cady 1993, 244, ed. Murphy and Poirer
[27] ibid. 246

AIDS literature in an immersive style is far less common than mainstream, counterimmersive representations, but it can be found beyond Monette. In this chapter, I analyze other literary examples of immersive style that complement those presented by Cady. In sampling poetry by Tory Dent, Essex Hemphill, and Tim Dlugos, I hope to provide a fuller understanding of how a writer works in an immersive style, with special attention given to disrupted senses of time-place and tone, confrontational language evoking images of war and the personification of Death, and a specificity toward AIDS and its impact on bodies, lives, and society. Cady's framework asserts that "gay men in the AIDS epidemic… [faced] a unique double degree of cultural disavowal," due to the denial of a devastating illness, but also due to their position as an "unspeakable" part of society, as something separate from humanity. I disagree with Cady's suggestion that IV drug users, particularly Black and Latino, are less impacted by such a disavowal, "saved" by their heterosexuality.[28] Such an overstatement ignores the unique challenges that each demographic faced at its intersection with AIDS. In critique of this overstatement, I expand Cady's framework to consider how other identities, held in tandem with AIDS, might compound marginalization.

Following this, I will begin to trace a path for immersive style outside of poetry by considering AIDS video and activist performance, beginning with the direct actions of ACT UP and their dissemination through the videos of DIVA TV. Then, I move toward musical performance with auteur composer-vocalist Diamanda Galás' *Masque of the Red Death*, an operatic trilogy about AIDS that Galás completed following her brother's death from AIDS-related complications. From what I can tell, Cady's framework has not been taken up by other AIDS theorists and commentators; however, I believe that immersive style has the

[28] Cady 1993, 245

potential to illuminate strategies of representation of AIDS and other experiences, and that it can be applied beyond literature to music, performance, film, and other genres of creative work. In later chapters, I will return to immersive style in the context of the theatrical productions of Reza Abdoh and demonstrate its potential as a component of my framework for excessive form.

Tory Dent (1958-2005): Black Milk

Black Milk (2005), Tory Dent's final published book of poetry, is a dark collection that details Dent's pained seventeen-year survival with AIDS. Having suffered immense devastation from opportunistic illnesses to the point of no return, Dent writes what she calls "evil poetry," wishing to swap bodies with the dead so that they might suffer in her place, and rejecting forgiveness for the elected officials who continue streaks of secondhand murder. These poems, much like Dent's earlier writings, draw frequent analogues between AIDS and the brutalities of war. Several poems in the collection function as responses to older works by other authors, where one line of text from the referenced material functions as a catalyst for the following stanza, or becomes woven within Dent's lines, demonstrating a linkage between the contemporary and the historical "body under siege."[29]

In "The Legend," Dent responds line by line to John Donne's "Holy Sonnet X" as if in dialogue with death, while cursing the failure of the American government to adequately address AIDS.[30] Donne's line, "rest of their bones and soul's delivery" situates the reader in another place and time, before Dent shepherds the reader down a path paved by her own

[29] Nicole Cooley, "A Poetics of Resistance: Tory Dent, Sylvia Plath, and 'The Moon and the Yew Tree.'" *Pilot Light Journal*
[30] Tory Dent, *Black Milk* 2005, 76-83

losses, which tumble into wartime comparisons: “Our best men, at least twenty I knew of personally, and our best women/and children, gay or straight, died from AIDS, more people/than soldiers in the Vietnam and Korean wars combined.” Dent continues with scathing remarks, refusing to “beautify” her language as she points toward inner-city teenage girls who now represent significant portions of new HIV diagnoses, acknowledging that unlike fallen soldiers, they received “No Yankee Stadium tribute… No appearance of the mayor/nor did Mariah Carey perform.” Her final bite asserts that Reagan and the Bush family “should be forced to build the children’s coffins in Botswana, Bangkok, Ukraine, and Buenos Aires…” situating the American response to AIDS as a catastrophe with global repercussions. Then, Donne once more: “Thou’art slave to fate.”

This passage rings with features of immersive style: the form is chaotic in its temporal displacement, pulling the reader from 17th-century England, into late 20th-century America, only to toss one back toward the mid-century American wars in east and southeast Asia, and finally pulling one into Dent’s present moment, 2005 at the time “Black Milk” was published. With mentions of Yankee Stadium and Mariah Carey, Dent evokes the most popular in American sports and turn-of-the-21st-century music as a foil for the horror of teenage girls struggling “...to comprehend geometry proofs/when combating those nasty Norvir side effects[.]” Dent’s poetic form is animated by rage as lyrical musings on her relationship with Death spin out into vicious tirades, and again pull back as she wonders about her own impending end.

Tim Dlugos (1950-1990): "Parachute"

In Tim Dlugos' "Parachute," rage does not animate as much as it obstructs, with stark shifts in tone upending Dlugos' poetic style and revealing a disgusted defeat in a bare, confessional style.[31] "Parachute" jumps back and forth between film references, fond memories, and brutal reality as Dlugos considers his own potential hand in the death of his friend, a young former lover. Time is chaotic and multiple throughout the poem, and the language used to convey the incomprehensible suffering of AIDS is vivid and unflinching. Dlugos tries and fails to reconcile his joyful, fast life with the waves of devastation brought on by AIDS. One is left with no answers, no strategies, and no solutions.

The poem opens with a reference to Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, "The Bergman image of a game/of chess with Death," transplanted to a garden in Provence, with fountains, palms, and Roman ruins, creating a many-layered temporal dreamscape of the film world spliced with a utopian French Riviera dusted by ancient history. Dlugos pivots sharply "...that is what/I think of when I remember/I have AIDS…" His statement is direct, crushing the fantastical opening image and revealing the immediacy of his moment, which again begins to drift ("...But when/I think of how AIDS kills/my friends…") Dlugos describes the monster that has murdered his most vulnerable friends, "innocent as baby deer." The poem continues on a journey through Dlugos' memories of Dwight: a young man "...pinned down with needles/…his mind/lost in the seven-minute gap/between the respirator's failure/and the time the nurses noticed/something wrong." Following the description of Dwight in his final moments, Dlugos again pivots to seven years prior as he remembers their meeting, their lovemaking, and the brilliance of Dwight's spirit, stolen

[31] Tim Dlugos ed. Trinidad *A Fast Life: The Collected Poems of Tim Dlugos* 2011, 517-519

before he could plan "the trip to London or Berlin where he/would be discovered and his life/transformed." The end is colored by the intensity of a beautiful memory held in tension with the suffocating weight of a reality that seems entirely inescapable, as Dlugos realizes "...AIDS is no chess game/but a hunt, and there is no/way of escaping the bloody/horror of the kill."

Essex Hemphill (1957-1995): "Heavy Breathing"

Essex Hemphill's poem "Heavy Breathing," published in *Ceremonies*, reflects similar immersive characteristics as the previous examples by Dent and Dlugos, while simultaneously operating with different identities at stake.[32] Rather than an expression of rage explicitly about AIDS, Hemphill is more focused on his experience as a Black man in America, and the complex struggles of his community in a hostile, racist nation (which vitally intersects with and informs the American response to AIDS). Hemphill sums up his feelings of bifurcation toward the end of the poem: "Urged to honor paranoia,/trained to trust a dream,/… I risk becoming schizoid/shuffling between Black English/and assimilation." AIDS is suggested, but never named, forcing the reader to bring some knowledge to the table and read between the lines. There are two references that stand out: the first being the catchphrase "Silence = Death," adopted by ACT UP as a protest slogan, and paired with a pink triangle referencing gay persecution during Nazi occupation. Hemphill writes: "I'm an oversexed/well-hung/Black Queen/influenced/by phrases like/"Silence = death." In the context of the poem, Hemphill seems to feel tokenized and sexualized as a well-endowed Black gay man, but finds himself othered by the activists who

[32] Essex Hemphill, *Ceremonies* 2000, 4-19

claim to be fighting for his life. The second reference to AIDS is more subtle and reflective of the general times: "We buy time here/so we can fuck each other./Everyone hasn't gone to the moon./Some of us are still here,/breathing heavy,/navigating this deadly/sexual turbulence…"

Similar to Dent's handling of the "Holy Sonnet X," Hemphill weaves direct references into "Heavy Breathing," operating on multiple levels that call forth Black literature, poetry, popular music, news coverage of heinous crimes, gospel music and the Civil Rights movement, among others. He begins with a quote from Aimé Césaire's "Return to My Native Land," a poem depicting Caribbean life, and a foundational text for the Négritude movement, which he continues to evoke throughout the poem, alongside references to other great Black scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and his concept of double-consciousness. Walt Whitman is brought into the mix between statements on gentrification and the shedding of masculine expectations: "Do you think I could walk pleasantly/and well-suited toward annihilation?" The references, along with the reader's sense of time-place, continue to multiply throughout the poem, as Hemphill transforms a city bus into a slave ship, including "urban pirates… boat crew and crack boys…" The poem tumbles forward into a relentless depiction of a true event: the back alley rape and murder of Catherine Fuller. Lyrics from Marvin Gaye's "Flying High (In the Friendly Sky)" become interspersed with scenes of exalted, intoxicated dancing at a drag show, preceded by the punishing aftermath of a long night of drinking. References to the famous gospel song "We Shall Overcome" are then brought forward alongside erotically charged verses, transporting the reader into the bedroom while straddling mental glimpses of the civil rights movement: "And you want me to sing/"We Shall Overcome"?/Do you daddy daddy/do you want me to coo/for your

approval?/Do you want me/to open my hole/and pull you in?" After this immense accumulation of references, Hemphill continues disorienting the reader, conjuring images of resistance (...I dance/in the searchlight/of a police cruiser…) that run parallel to the ongoing Black struggle against police brutality.

Hemphill speaks subtly through his verse to the next generation who might face AIDS, racism, or their own crumbling dreams: "I have been in the bathroom weeping/…I don't want to alarm/the other young men./It wasn't always this way…/the streets weren't always/slick with blood,/sick with drugs." Hemphill then twirls through fantasies of intimacy with the dead that give way to fairytale ephemera ("The fatal glass slipper") and a pop-culture-meets-history awareness of widespread disenfranchisement, a burst bubble: "We were promised/this would be a nigga fantasy/on the scale of Oz./Instead, it's 'Birth of a Nation…"' At the end of the poem, Hemphill spins a rapid-fire conclusion that draws a line through Negritude, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Panthers, and the fossils of an ongoing battle for a Black dream that has yet to be realized, yet is immortalized in museums, becoming fuel for the ever-expanding American capitalist enterprise.

"Heavy Breathing" demonstrates a radical layering of times and places that emerge chaotically, pulling the reader through centuries of experiences, and constantly zooming in and out from the personal to the global and back. The intensity and significance of Hemphill's experience as a Black gay man adds another layer of power to his words, as his relentless language holds AIDS in sight while confronting the hypocrisy of the American dream as told through Black struggle. I would go so far as to say it is not the writing about AIDS that makes Hemphill's verse so potently immersive, but rather the compounding of his intersecting identities as a black gay man living with AIDS in the United States.

Immersive Style in AIDS Activism: ACT UP and DIVA TV

"The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) is a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals, united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis."[33] Founded in New York City in 1987, ACT UP grew to include a number of chapters across the world at its height, but ultimately collapsed following a splintering of ideals and motivations. Today, ACT UP is a shadow of its former self, but some chapters continue to mobilize in support of reproductive health, PreP for all, and other political issues that intersect with AIDS. Many of ACT UP's major victories were won through direct actions, which sought to educate the public while agitating and dismantling the mechanisms that prevented progress on eliminating AIDS. ACT UP historian Sarah Schulman, in hindsight, equates ACT UP's approach to direct action with practices common during the Civil Rights movement, where activists fighting for desegregation and equal rights sought to create "the world that they wanted to see."[34] In effect, the protesting participants did not ask for systemic change; instead, they enacted a new future by pulling it into the present moment. The members of ACT UP designed inventive and creative approaches that functioned as stepping stones toward the group's larger goals. Efficiency was key because of the literal running out of time that characterized the lived experience of PLWHA during the height of the crisis.

Stop the Church, held in December 1989 at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, was the largest demonstration in the history of ACT UP, totaling seven thousand participants. Media covering the action, produced by DIVA TV, as well as the complexity of

[33] actuporalhistory.org
[34] Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show*: *a political history of ACT UP New York* 2021, 26

the action itself, deployed immersive style in a way that pushes beyond Cady's formulation to include sound, music, and performance. Schulman observes that this action in particular utilized a simultaneity of actions and approaches, with different processes unfolding for each component of the larger action.

The action was cosponsored by Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM!), creating a coalition with ACT UP that simultaneously advanced the individual concerns of each organization.[35] Additionally, WHAM! brought more feminist strategies to ACT UP's methods, which were quickly disseminated through teach-ins. Stop the Church was conceived to target Cardinal O'Connor, the corruption of the Catholic Church, and the conservative teachings that many activists believed contributed to the severity of the AIDS crisis. This included homophobic and anti-abortion teachings that were initially confined to private religious schools, but eventually began to influence public education curriculums as well. As the Church continued to flex its power and control, even city policies such as condom distribution and needle exchange programs became contested sites, setting the stage for what may have been an inevitable confrontation between the Church and ACT UP.

Activists—before, during, and after the action—did not have a uniform opinion on Stop the Church, nor on the consequences that followed such an inflammatory action. ACT UP was a *diverse* group united against AIDS, and so each member brought different motivations, experiences, and desires to the meeting floor. There were factions within the group, particularly Catholics, who felt it was a step too far and would ultimately damage the image of ACT UP. Others felt that all publicity is good publicity. And others still were looking for an outlet for their rage and despair and weren't as concerned about the fallout.

[35] Ibid. 10

Despite this tension, many individuals decided to push forward with the action. Most protesters were to be stationed outside while a smaller group infiltrated the Church in order to perform a silent die-in during Mass. The disruption of Mass was by far the most controversial aspect of the action, and according to ACT UPer Emily Nahmanson, the organization did not offer any official support for this aspect of the action, leaving all decisions in the hands of the participants; indeed, Nahmanson has stated that any action within the Church was not initially intended to disrupt the service.[36]

The action proceeded as follows, with the two "stages" of outside and inside unfolding separately. Outside of the Church, protesters carried signs and chanted together; Operation Ridiculous donned clown costumes with the intention of confronting anti-abortion protesters who acted under the name of Operation Rescue. They were quickly apprehended and arrested. Activists distributed fake Mass programs to parishioners as they entered the cathedral, which included context on the AIDS crisis, ACT UP, and the direct action itself. Inside the Church, most demonstrators expected to hold a silent vigil, but this silence was quickly broken.[37] Some ACT UPers broke from the plan and began reading aloud from the fake programs and disrupting the service. Another affinity group stuck to the original plan and performed a silent die-in as they proceeded to lie down in the pews and the aisles. Other demonstrators froze, unsure of what to do in lieu of the long-gone plan. Police entered the Church with dogs as people continued to yell and scream atop the pews; arrested protesters "kept up a banshee screech"[38]; the cacophony continued to build as the Cardinal and his parishioners attempted to drown out protesters, some even

[36] Ibid. 147
[37] Ibid. 151
[38] Lilian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*. 2015. 434-435

throwing punches; and "someone threw a communion wafer on the floor," as one demonstrator "took it, crushed it, and dropped it."[39] Despite the mixed feelings one might have about the action, it is undeniable that Stop the Church was effective. The commotion within the church transformed this action from local to global news, and led Larry Kramer, one of the founders and most prominent members of ACT UP, to declare Stop the Church ACT UP's "most successful demonstration." One begins to see that Stop the Church is not only a method of responding to AIDS, but it also mirrors AIDS, in all of its confusion, anger, and chaos, manifested through performing bodies. Schulman succinctly compares Stop the Church and AIDS writ large: "AIDS was chaotic."[40]

Beyond the direct action itself, one finds immersive style in the video coverage of the action provided by Damned Interfering Video Activist Television (DIVA TV), which was an affinity group within ACT UP that sought to retaliate against mainstream media representations of the AIDS crisis. In the opening montage to DIVA TV's "Like a Prayer," Madonna's titular song provides transitional underscoring to rapid newsflash-style segments, which come with their own diegetic and nondiegetic background music.[41] One hears protesters outside of Stop the Church sing a parody of the traditional Christmas carol "Come, All Ye Faithful," with new lyrics that show support of abortion rights. Later, while introducing the clowns of Project Ridiculous, the auditor hears "Tears of a Clown" by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles in the background. Even recorded speeches become quasi-musical material; at one point, an on-site news reporter accuses AIDS activists of having "nothing to lose." This quote is then repeated with a hard cut while text flashes in

[39] Schulman 2021, 156-157
[40] Ibid. 137
[41] Like A Prayer

rhythm, one word at a time: "What about our lives?" With each repetition, the auditor is shown a different shot of die-in protesters being carried out of the church on stretchers. The pop-culture references, alongside the juxtaposed video and audio, establish a disrupted time-place within the auditor. The sense of disruption multiplies further as feelings of outrage compete against camp mischief, and informative sound bites dissolve into in-jokes and personal testimonies. Through the chaos, one finds an emerging address to the double audience as the montage straddles the brutally serious and the lighthearted, emitting an almost joyous freedom in the face of adversity.

Diamanda Galás (1955-): Plague Mass

Coincidentally, one of the activists who participated in the Stop the Church action was singer-composer and auteur Diamanda Galás, who joined ACT UP following her brother's death from AIDS.[42] Galás was heavily involved in music as a child, and debuted with the San Diego Symphony at the age of 14 as piano soloist for Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 1. Later in life, Galás realized that her true calling was composition through her voice. After studying at the Center for Music Experiment, now the Center for Research in Computing and the Arts, at the University of California San Diego, Galás further honed her craft at the Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music (IRCAM) in Paris.

After her brother's death, Galás' work became centered on the virus, seeking not to describe the horror of the plague, but to *be* the sound of its atmosphere of suffering. Galás pulls the listener apart with references in every direction as she embraces the chaos of

[42] https://clampart.com/2012/01/the-masque-of-the-red-death/galasdiamanda_masque-980/

technologically mediated vocal performance. Through pluralities of genre, extreme technological deformation, bel canto singing, monstrous screeches, and glossolalia that "brings its producing body with it forcefully," Galás invades listening ears with unpredictable colors and discomforting terror.[43] She intentionally uses an unbalanced mix of vocal sounds to produce "the most immediate representation of thought," that understands the voice "as the fundamental physical coordinate" of rigorous processes and concentration states.[44] In her performances, the sonic assault is supported by the visual, such as in the opening of *Plague Mass*, originally performed in the Church of St. John the Divine, where Galás appears naked from the waist up and covered in blood, drawing connections between AIDS and the crucifixion of Christ.[45] Her opening number, "There Are No More Tickets to the Funeral," is a furious, quasi-sermon that weaves Galás' original text with African-American spirituals "Were You There" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" to create a fiery rebuke of those who stand on the sidelines as "one by one of [her] brothers die." In this song, Galás moves effortlessly between the roles of sinister pastor, animated songstress, and grotesque demon by utilizing the full expressive range of her voice's unmatched virtuosity. The most extreme screeches seem to rip themselves out of refined, gorgeous tones, as if revealing the angels and devils that coexist in all of us. Later in the piece, Galás appropriates biblical texts and the rituals of the Catholic mass. This is especially potent in "Consecration", where Galás repeats Jesus' message from the Last Supper as she stands, breasts bared and bloody, as an avatar for the betrayed: both Christ and those suffering from AIDS. Galás' hypnotic recitation of the holy text is decorated with

[43] Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. 2011. 132
[44] Diamanda Galás, "Intravenal Song" *Perspectives of New Music* (Autumn 1981 - Summer 1982), 60
[45] Diamanda Galás, *Plague Mass*. https://vimeo.com/563229549

tinkling bells, but its somber tone becomes increasingly eerie as a bellowing devilish voice begins to echo her own. This deep otherworldly response disintegrates into distant growls and snarls as Galás drops out and the jingling bells become constant and hyperactive. Galás unexpectedly returns with a soaring lament before she transforms once more into a sinister being, declaring "*Sono l'Antichristo"*: I am the Antichrist.

Plague Mass, and indeed much of Galás' work, is a radically different approach to immersive style, with the text serving a secondary role to incredible sonic masses. Her multi-microphone, quadrophonic set-up allows her voice to enter listeners from all angles, carrying with it a violent precision and an uncomfortably close body. Her vocal control allows for seamless, even sudden, transitions between refined operatic singing and raw expression, expanding the shifted time-space of immersive style to include a visceral axis of the familiar and the frightening. Wailing laments mourn the lost, hearkening back to the ancient traditions of public grieving, an alarm to contemporary Western ears that have long privatized and corporatized such anguish. References to numerous spirituals provide a historical link, clarifying that this isn't the first time the oppressed have had to fight. Again, time-space is no longer shifted solely through text, but also through a sonic practice that has become entangled with it. The text throughout *Plague Mass* is extraordinarily confrontational: it accuses bystanders of cowardice, stating that "there are no more tickets to the funeral," thus recognizing and rejecting the scrutiny of a misunderstanding and sensation-seeking public; it bastardizes holy rituals by turning their symbols and language against their practitioners; and it reveals how the rage of neglected suffering can boil over into a manifestation of the ultimate Christian nightmare of the Antichrist. Galás manages to be that nightmare, a fully realized Death born from the bodies of her friends, her brother,

and set to combat her mortal enemies: "We who have died shall never rest in peace. There is no rest until the fighting's done." In his 1993 *Los Angeles Times* review, Lewis Segall astutely observes that "the performance becomes an outlet for all those primal feelings (outrage, betrayal and blind hate) you'll never find in any sentimental AIDS movie-of-the week," revealing how far outside of mainstream, counterimmersive AIDS media this work stands.[46]

Conclusion

Joseph Cady identified immersive style as a specific literary response by gay men to the AIDS Crisis. It was characterized by its centering of PLWHA and reflective of the urgency of their situation amid a grim prognosis. His formulation is reflective of the larger trends in the historicization of the AIDS Crisis: it frames the catastrophe around white gay men, who continue to be the most visible and most privileged demographic to have been impacted by HIV/AIDS during the height of the crisis. Samuel Lurie, in his ACT UP Oral History interview, observes that many of the white gay men involved with the organization resisted coalition building with women, People of Color, and People with Disabilities, because they felt it would "slow it all down."[47] The reality is that (white) gay men were not the only people who faced a compounded "cultural disavowal," and similarly immersive style can emerge from a number of intersecting identities that are held in tension with larger systems of power.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Tory Dent's *Black Milk* centers the experience of women with AIDS, reflecting her extended struggle with illness as well as that

[46] https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-11-01-ca-51900-story.html
[47] Samuel Lurie, Interview by Sarah Schulman, 2015

of the young urban women who continue to be swept up in the ongoing, yet less visible, AIDS crisis. Her use of immersive style includes critiques of the government, even calling officials out by name, demanding justice for those who have died. Tim Dlugos' work uses immersive style as an obstruction to his typical witty, elegant poetic voice, to the point that it nearly ceases to be poetry. Essex Hemphill's "Heavy Breathing" centers the experiences of Black gay men, and is so intertwined with larger questions of belonging that it amplifies immersive style through a dizzying array of references to Black culture and the impossible challenge of masculine performance. AIDS is present and always just beneath the surface, but Hemphill's text is invigorated more by the compounding tensions of race, nationality, sexuality, and gender.

To expand on the literary origin of immersive style, I discussed the direct actions of ACT UP and the media coverage of DIVA TV, focusing on the Stop the Church action. This action, the largest and arguably most disruptive that the group ever performed, was a chaotic mess that mapped the urgent experience of PLWHA onto activist bodies, who infiltrated St. Patrick's Cathedral and used sound and print media to parody Church worship. The coverage produced by DIVA TV leaned into popular music and campy jokes to shift time-place, poke fun at their political enemies, and educate their audience while always centering the ongoing battle against AIDS.

Like many of the members of ACT UP, Galás was not gay, nor did she have AIDS, yet she put her body and voice on the line for the cause. Her *Plague Mass* pushes immersive style almost completely into the sonic realm, expanding the time-place shift to an axis that oscillates between familiar and frightening. Galás successfully corrupts church hymns with monstrous voices while African-American spirituals demand bystanders to take up arms

and fight for justice. Her collection of sonic and text materials, distributed through a quadraphonic speaker system and paired with her nude, blood-soaked performance, ensnares the audience in a relentless diatribe against AIDS.

Immersive style may have been identified through the literary contributions of gay men with AIDS, but it certainly does not end there. It is fueled by a tension between the oppressed and the oppressor, and a willingness to take a stand. Any marginalized identity can compound its efficacy, extending the range of possible reference and increasing the bitterness of disenfranchisement. One can also see the growth of immersive style into a component of a larger strategy of disorientation in the theater works of Reza Abdoh, a gay, Persian immigrant who died from AIDS. His work builds on the strategies outlined in this chapter to enact new possibilities for radical responses to AIDS.

CHAPTER TWO

Quotations from a Ruined City and the Double

Quotations from a Ruined City is the last staged work by auteur theater director and wunderkind Reza Abdoh, with a script written in collaboration with his brother Salar Abdoh. The original *Quotations from a Ruined City* was an early attempt at a novel by Salar Abdoh, which he described as "a conversation with [himself], taking stock of what [he] had learned thus far."[48] Years later, he recalled, "with Sarajevo in mind, [Reza] decided to do a play as a rumination on ruin. It was this text that we used initially."[49] First staged at the 1993 Los Angeles Theater Festival and again in 1994 at an industrial space in New York City's Meatpacking District, the work has been described as "a sort of apocalyptic follies" and a "kaleidoscopic catalog of images of decay and destruction."[50] Its most defining characteristic in comparison to Abdoh's oeuvre of shocking theater is its use of lipsynch, which is found at nearly every point throughout the work. The performers were pre-recorded and developed a rigorously accurate practice of embodying their recorded voices. The production used three CD players—cutting-edge technology at the time—to trigger all sounds in the show and allow for overlapping cues. Text might come from deck one, while deck two might introduce underscoring, and deck three could then be held for percussive sound effects or sudden transition music. A sampler was later added in the New York production to accommodate more flexibility in performance.[51] There was a quadraphonic stereo set up in a box formation for most of the dialogue, with two additional speakers behind the audience. The New York production also increased antagonism toward

[48] Mufson, "Interview with Salar Abdoh, Part II" 1998
[49] ibid.
[50] Ben Brantley, *New York Times*, March 1994
https://www.nytimes.com/1994/03/03/theater/theater-in-review-352993.html
[51] Interview with Galen Wade 2023

the audience with the addition of two subwoofers beneath the bleachers, which pointed upwards toward the unsuspecting guests.

Abdoh requested that his works never be restaged upon his death. In lieu of being able to see live, or even recent footage of performances, I refer to archival footage from the original productions, which has been uploaded to Vimeo by videographer and former Dar A Luz member, Adam Soch. There are two extant recordings: one is of the Los Angeles production, the other of the New York production. The two versions are mostly similar, save for the aforementioned differences in technology, as well as the reworking and addition of scenes. Regarding the footage, I have chosen to focus on the Los Angeles production because its video recording is correctly synchronized between video and audio, unlike the footage of the New York production. This has led to a curious editorial note in the published version of the New York script, which suggests that all components of *Quotations* are not meant to be in exact unison with one another. This might be true at some level, as synchronized movement and sound at a distance is tricky to execute cleanly; however, any lack of unity between the various elements was certainly not Abdoh's intention. When I asked sound designer Galen Wade about the lack of synchronization in the New York production, he clarified that both the footage and the editorial note are mistakes. "Everyone was expected to be perfect," although he acknowledged that the actors, who had completely embodied their virtually unchanging roles, would occasionally mess with the synchronization on purpose when they were frustrated with Abdoh.[52] This demonstrates how vital perfect synchronization was to Abdoh's creative vision, and the incredible performance abilities of Dar A Luz.

[52] Ibid.

Doubling

Analyzing a work like *Quotations from a Ruined City* is daunting; it is dense with references, some subtle and others directly quotational, and it contains nearly enough songs to qualify as a potluck jukebox musical, without even considering the jazz, classical, and Persian music underscoring its cascading script. Beyond the poetic voice of the script, one hears an incredible attention to texture, timbre, and phrasing as cast members lipsync to their own prerecorded voices, often while performing virtuosic, high-intensity physical actions. Salar Abdoh described his brother's knack for making the tangential fit together, recalling that "he knew how to pick the fruit and create a beautiful basket."[53] In an interview with theater historian John Bell, Abdoh describes the work as a tapestry: "You don't sit down and say, 'Oh this does this, that does that' — you sit down and just watch it; it's like a poem."[54] There is no narrative, per se, nor are there truly characters; the script simply lists actor names, even though some of these actors are effectively named as characters over the course of the work. Perhaps this act of naming, and thus becoming, is central to an audience construing any thread of narrative through time. The thread is thin, and must be sought after through a barrage of text, image, and sound.

Doubling offers one point of entry into *Quotations* and its dramatic collage of disparate materials, guiding the auditor through waypoints and hidden messages if one knows where to look. Furthermore, we might consider doubling as a form of repetition, which, as noted by Elisabeth Margulis, is a "fundamental characteristic" of music; in *Quotations*, doubling queers the linear, narrative forms that one may expect from a work of

[53] Mufson, "Interview with Salar Abdoh," 1998
[54] Reza Abdoh and John Bell, "To Reach Divinity Through Performance," 1995, 37

theater.[55] Notably, this doubling is not random; it is an intentional design choice. Abdoh often spoke of his admiration for musical structures in interviews, at one point even describing his own work as "...more music, more dance than a stage play."[56] In conversation with Bell, Abdoh explained his admiration for the contrapuntal devices of Bach, revealing one inspiration for his own sonic layerings: "Often when I structure my work I think of musical forms; a fugue, for example. In a Bach fugue there's a phrase that can get repeated several million times and each time it gets repeated there's a little variety. I feel that's effective as a way of communication."[57] This fascination with contrapuntal devices and musical form likely contributed to the prevalence of Bach underscoring in *Quotations* and other productions. Abdoh would reportedly provide sound designers Galen Wade and Raul Vincent Enriquez with large stacks of CDs, from which they could choose sound samples for the shows, with Bach frequently included. Wade, in an interview with videographer and Abdoh archivist Adam Soch, described *Quotations* as "more of a musical score than a script."[58] Wade elaborated that Abdoh had an incredible intuitive sense for emotional beats, and that these took preference over logical narrative developments. Often in the rehearsal process, Abdoh would insert outside materials—whether a quote from movies or literature, a song from a nursery rhyme, or a dance that he saw a performer use during warmups—to enhance the emotional shape of the production.

Doubling in *Quotations* operates in non-hierarchical layers, from the large-scale constructions of formal design to the microscopic nuances of a significant line of text that is spoken only twice over the duration of the work's ninety-minute runtime: "Remember.

[55] Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat* 2014 5
[56] Howard Ross Patlis, "Dark Shadows Light Forces" in *Reza Abdoh* ed. Mufson 1999, 28
[57] Abdoh and Bell, "To Reach Divinity Through Performance," 1995, 35
[58] Galen Wade, "Speaking of Reza Abdoh, part 3" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRbMDP4pxyE

Remember. We are bound to the past." It's as if the entirety of the piece seeks to enact this phrase, achieving a conceptual throughline while asking of its audience, must history repeat itself? In this chapter, I place doubling in *Quotations* into the following categories: dis/re/embodied and twinned. Dis/re/embodied doubles involve the splitting of the sounding voice and the body, typically to be reunified at a later point. This includes the act of lipsynching to one's own prerecorded voice, vocal covers of musical show tunes or original songs, and video doppelgängers. Twinned doubles are concerned with the pairing of characters and the diffusion of the voice across these pairs, and even across the entire ensemble, reinforcing couples and dissolving the individual.

While these categories will prove useful in conveying strategies of doubling over the duration of *Quotations*, there are several episodes that seem to fall outside of such tidy groupings: Mario Gardner's monologue, delivered live and unamplified to the audience, the scheduled performance break and its immediate aftermath, and the performers' escape past their barbed wire enclosure and through the audience. These outliers form another category, which resists doubling, yet as we will discover is unable to fully negate it, either. I call this category singularity. The singularity category functions to collapse time and space between audience and performer. While the doubling categories function to queer time and space through repetition, the singularity category allows the auditor and performers to bear witness to their shared moment. It's as if the veneer of performance is removed, though only briefly.

Dis/re/embodied Doubles

Dis/re/embodied doubles are common in *Quotations*, for this category includes lipsynching, a plethora of songs, and video doubles. Lipsynching does not simply play a role in *Quotations*; it *is* the work. During virtually every delivered line, and all of the songs, one never hears the live voices of the performers. The decision to prerecord nearly the entire show was made after considering the budgetary constraints of miking each actor, as well as the state of director Reza Abdoh's health. In interviews, Abdoh stresses that this decision allowed him to "have complete control," despite the fact that he was frequently absent from the theater during the staging and production of *Quotations*.[59] Often his health prevented him from full participation even when he was in attendance. At one point, unable to speak, he would write notes to his assistant director, Sandy Cleary, who would share them with the cast.[60]

This was not the first time that Abdoh employed lipsynch, as it briefly appears in *The Law of Remains* (1991) and *Bogeyman* (1990), but it's certainly his most ambitious application.[61] The practical considerations of prerecording are numerous: actors are no longer faced with vocal and physical exhaustion from shouting their lines, and their bodies are freed to focus on physical performance over the delivery of sonic elements—and as Abdoh's oeuvre demonstrates, virtuosic physicality is demanded from the performers. Furthermore, by fixing nearly the entire work into a recorded track, the piece begins to resemble something like sound art, a radio play that has become corporeal and spilled out onto stage. Whether we consider it to be a soundtrack, a compiled score of pre-existing and

[59] Abdoh and Bell 1995, 62
[60] Galen Wade, "Speaking of Reza Abdoh, part 4" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaUkIExUiAY
[61] Ibid.

familiar music, or something else entirely, *Quotations* has a musicality that invites musical analysis through the counterpoint of its disparate components and its deployment of sound as a narrative and symbolic tool.

Abdoh's works have been referred to as collages, poetry made from sound and image, and by employing such pervasive lipsynch, *Quotations* takes this concept farther than any of his other pieces. As Merrie Snell writes, "lipsynching involves the dual process of quotation (or appropriation) and fragmentation similar to collage and sampling. In fact, lipsynching itself is already a kind of audiovisual collage wherein the silent bodies of the lipsynchers recombine with the disembodied voices of recorded song to create a new articulation of both."[62] To lipsynch is to assemble; in effect, the physical performance and the recorded track (consisting of sound, music, and script) are two separate objects, colliding in time and space. The actors themselves become assemblages, bodies merged with machines and transformed into tools with voices that are only allowed to speak what they have always already spoken. Sound designer Galen Wade repeatedly describes this as "the actors in their cages," remarking that the Los Angeles Theatre Company production of *Quotations* was likely the closest that Abdoh's work ever came to being fixed.[63] Because of prerecording, the actors were forced to always revisit the same performance, and there was less flexibility for the major revisions that had become characteristic of Abdoh's creative process. The physicality of the lipsynch performance of *Quotations* is captivating: even the most subtle tongue clicks and sighs seem to be deeply ingrained in the performing bodies.

[62] Merrie Snell, *Lipsynching* 2020, 137
[63] Galen Wade, "Speaking of Reza Abdoh, part 5" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eg1BHGmr_Qc

Snell refers to this aspect of lipsynching as "an intensified form of listening" that is rooted in the performers saying "'Look at me! But also 'Listen to this!'"[64]

Showtunes, Vocal Covers, and Original Songs (Song Space)

For a work that is not usually considered musical theater, *Quotations* features a surprising number of songs pulled from seemingly every direction. There are showtunes, such as "Oh, What A Beautiful Morning" from *Oklahoma!*, "Supercalifragilistic" from *Mary Poppins*, and "Gonna Build A Mountain" from *Stop the World - I Want to Get Off*; the Pete Seeger folk tune "When I First Came To This Land"; a cover of Frank Sinatra's "All the Way" by performer and choreographer Ken Roht; a brief sing-along performance, live, to Marilyn Monroe playing "Chopsticks" in *Seven Year Itch*; and "Imagining Sin," simply labeled "Peter's Song" in the script, written by Dar A Luz member Peter Jacobs. The songs were not performed live (save for the brief "Chopsticks" excerpt, which is not a song per se), but they were recorded individually by cast members and lipsynched in performance. Most of these songs would have been relatively well known by a general audience, which creates a fascinating space of identification between auditor and performer, as one may very well find themselves singing, or even just moving their lips silently, along with the lipsynching performer. This phenomenon speaks to what Roger Hallas describes as the "permeable space" of songs: "song has the propensity to fill a room, but it also has a capacity to fill us." Hallas goes on to suggest that listeners "may in fact experience the song as a moment of corporeal mimesis."[65] In other words, these popular songs may create a doubling effect between the performer and auditor, as one identifies with the lyrics and even with the

[64] Snell, *Lipsynching* 2020, 139
[65] Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies* 2009, 157

performers themselves, creating a layering effect as personal connections meld with the present, performative moment.

"All the Way"

"All the Way" arrives at a surprising moment in the flow of events. Following a short performance break, the cast enters "Offering Section," where they fall to the ground one at a time, sobbing, as one hears gasping breaths and ominous crow calls. A cadence, labeled "Guana Split," transitions the offering section over four counts into Electrocution Sequence #3, a perfect repetition of the earlier electrocution sequences: dark stage with flashes of ominous green lights, five booming bongs of stillness, and Ken's frantic dancing toward the side of the stage as Peter and Tom P. approach the barbed wire, seeking to escape from their enclosure. And yet, as soon as Peter grabs the barbed wire, the auditor hears the metallic screeching of electrocution amidst wildly flashing lights. Blackout.

From here, the auditor hears a descending piano intro that lands on an upwardly arpeggiated chord. As if flipping a switch, the final tinkle of the piano seems to illuminate a handheld light in Ken's hands. The intensity of the previous offering and electrocutions melt away as Ken lipsynchs to his own voice, crooning on the lyrics of Frank Sinatra with a sincere smile. This is one of the few moments during *Quotations* where there is only one action happening on stage, and with only one person. The extremity of the pivot from the previous scene is full of campy excess: here is Ken, the oblivious background dancer, who continues dancing even through the distant electrocutions. And now, in the face of increasingly heightened suffering, we are presented with a love song. "All the Way" is a testament to the extraordinary depth of a true love that is "taller than the tallest tree" and

"deeper than the deep blue sea." Ken declares that this is the only good love, one that is limitless, unyielding, and not predicated on easiness, or even happiness. He sings, "It's no good unless he needs you all the way, through the good or lean years, and all the in-between years." During the full two minutes of the song, Ken lipsynchs directly to the audience. The lyrics clearly signal not only eternal love, but hope that the recipient will welcome the singer into their life, as is revealed in the final verse: "But if you let me love you, it's for sure I'm gonna love you all the way."

When compared side-by-side, it's clear that Ken's rendition of "All the Way" is not the same as Sinatra's. It is a double, but not an exact copy. The vocal timbre is quite different: Sinatra's tone is full, resonant, and supple, whereas Ken possesses a more breathy, even intimate color. Ken's version retains qualities that could be viewed as impurities, like glimpses of vocal fry where his singing tone edges into something more spoken and less-polished. The portamento is pronounced in both versions, however each singer glides differently, drawing emphasis to different points of their phrases. Ken tends to prefer a modest, controlled portamento. Sinatra, however, sings this melody with an incredible fluidity, with nearly every pitch having some sort of bend or ornamentation. The difference in portamento is linked to their approaches to tempo, as well. Ken's performance is much more direct and regular compared to Sinatra's, which stretches, lingers, pauses, and pushes to draw the listener into the emotional fold of the tune. To my ears, Ken's version comes across as less schmaltzy and done-up; it sounds like a private moment shared between vulnerable almost-lovers, who may be sitting only a few inches apart. It's a heartfelt address, not a spectacle.

"All the Way" thrives on hope. It's an exercise in imagining a future together, a plea for one to see that there is only one way to be loved, and that is all the way. The handheld light, reminiscent of a magic wand with an oversized bulb, is brilliant in the otherwise darkened space. One is left with a feeling that they are staring at a light at the end of the tunnel. Or, perhaps Ken is a masculine double of a fairy godmother, who will enchant the auditors with his glowing wand, granting their greatest wish.

The final cadence features a brief prolongation as one hears the piano oscillate between the mediant and subdominant. Even as Ken finishes his tune, the piano wants to keep going, as if it is reaching out towards the listener. It bears repeating that the excess of this moment is ludicrous in the context of the show, evidenced by a laughing audience member as the song closes. Obviously, the exaggerated tenderness and sentimentality of "All the Way" cannot last. Before the cadence can settle with rhythmic finality, it is cut off by the return of gasping breaths as the audience witnesses cast members holding the limp bodies of their fallen comrades.

Peter's Song ("Imagining Sin")

About forty-five minutes before "All the Way," a disembodied voice whispers, "Sarajevo…" longingly, before dim lights reveal cast member Sabrina Artel eating a banana. For ten seconds, the auditor hears the impossibly close sound of chewing, "as if there were no distance between the recorded voice and listening ears."[66] With no warning, the sound of "frantic string music"[67] fills the theater with Bach's *Violin Sonata No. 3 in C Major* as the lights slowly fade up. Sabrina is in no rush. She continues to eat her banana center stage,

[66] Kittler 1999, 37
[67] *Quotations from a Ruined City* script

offering disinterested glances at her fellow performers who hurriedly grab cabbages[68] from a basket and place them into rows across the stage. One performer dons a straw hat and settles into a squat as they stare with suspicion at another, who sports a large black gown, extravagant hat, and blood red lantern. These positions finalize the construction of the *Field Tableau*. As the violin music approaches a half cadence, Peter, with guitar in hand, slips into a crossed-legged seat downstage right from Sabrina. Just before the violin arrives at its cadence, there is a cut, with hardly any gap, to a different recording. Where the auditor is expecting to hear the landing of a cadential dominant chord on the violin's sounding G, they instead hear an immediate pass to Peter's recorded singing voice, beginning on a D. The tempo immediately pulls back, a feeling that is enhanced by the change in beat division from four to three. This new triplet feel gently propels the repetitive melody of "Imagining Sin."

Unlike the aforementioned Sinatra, the audience would not be familiar with "Imagining Sin"[69], which was written by cast member Peter Jacobs and is only labeled "Peter's Song" in the script. The simple tune and its repetitive nature, however, creates a circumstance that enables the auditor to accurately predict what is to come. This mental doubling is another style of mimesis, although here it is established in the present moment of performance through the musical features of the song, and not from the auditor's past familiarity. Shortly after Peter's recorded singing begins, the auditor observes Tom F. and Tony, gasping desperately for breath through oxygen masks. The gasps prickle and poke through the starkness of Peter's voice, unsettling its otherwise flowing lyricism. These recorded sounds dominate the ear, but if one strains there is a barely audible layer beneath

[68] In New York Production, performers place fake lambs instead of cabbages.
[69] Sound score

the breathing and singing: the quiet strum of Peter's acoustic guitar, present in the space and in the moment. A singularity.

"Peter's Song" is the only musical number in the show that has a reprise. The second iteration belongs to the scene "Beef/Peter's Song (Last Two Verses)," which takes place an hour later in the production, during an increasing accumulation of tension as the show approaches its finale. Here, Hawaiian exotica plays as Peter and Tom P. dance with their heads pressed against one another's, as if they are trying to literally put their heads together and merge into one being. This leads into *Beef*, as Peter and Tom P. arrange themselves in a "contorted embrace." Tom P. stands behind Peter and it appears as if they are both wearing a single straight jacket, creating an illusion of a two-headed creature. The song begins with new verses but the same musical features as before: lilting rhythms and a somber, repetitive melody. Whereas earlier Peter sang by himself, this time Tom P. joins him. The auditor can hear the doubling effect as the microvariations between the two recorded voices draw attention to their efforts, and failures, at singing truly as one. In this second performance of the song, there is nothing else happening on stage save for several huge, swinging slabs of beef behind the couple. As the Hawaiian music and pulsing metronome fade away, the auditor is left with a failed combination of voices and bodies.

Despite these failures, I find an additional location of hope in the contorted embrace, the naïve, paired singing voices, and the desire of the performers to become one with each other. Over the duration of *Quotations*, Tom P. and Peter, also known as Floyd and Gordy, are inseparable. They are described in the opening "Top of Show" monologue as "one and the same" and "birds of a feather." They match in costume throughout the show, at one point even wearing matching shirts that both read "FLOYD." These shirts suggest that there is in

fact no Gordy at all, but only a Floyd and someone who believes themselves Floyd, or who hopes to become Floyd. Despite all their trying, the two can never seem to get their togetherness quite right. While their bodies get closer and closer to unification over the course of the show, from the Shackle Tableau to intercourse to the contorted embrace, they never become one.

"Final Text," which occurs only a few short minutes after "Beef," is yet another attempt. Floyd and Gordy begin opposite one another on stage, beef slabs still swinging in the background, as a piano version of Bach's *Air on a G String* floats in the air. This final moment is a double of a wedding ritual. The performers, in their matching green dresses, take slow, measured steps toward one another. They share a single monologue, alternating voices with each line. At two key moments, they repeat one another exactly: "I remember. (I remember.) A dream of my childhood. (A dream of my childhood.)" and "Remember. (Remember.)" They join together for the final statement: "We are bound to the past as we cling to the memory of the ruined city." As these words leave their lipsynching lips, the two performers collapse into a tight embrace. The piano continues to play for about a minute longer as one hears the sharp breathing of quiet crying. The piano cadences just before it completely fades out, and the auditor is left to witness the embracing lovers in silence as the spotlight on their bodies fades to a blackout. While at this level, of course, no one is capable of becoming one, Floyd and Gordy achieved a spiritual bond through their final text.

Twinning: Binding and Diffusion

Floyd and Gordy are not the only twins in *Quotations*. Tom Fitzpatrick and Tony Torn play their own couple, an unnamed pair of Puritans-turned-Capitalists, who stand as a

counterpart to the lovers, Floyd and Gordy. While Floyd and Gordy are always trying to get together, to become one, this does not seem to be the case for Tom F. and Tony. Over the course of *Quotations*, one understands that Tom F. and Tony are entrenched as individuals. They often speak as if on separate tracks, unaware of each other despite sharing the stage. The situations where the two men do interact are fraught with tension: during "Los Angeles Section," Tom F. holds a string attached to Tony's hat. He proceeds to repeatedly pull Tony's hat off his head, laughing with a mean-spirited glee. Later in the show, during *Forty Lines*, the Puritans cyclically interrupt the Floyd-Gordy shared monologue with a disagreement: "No don't do that!/Let them be!" By the end of the show, perhaps reluctantly, the now-businessmen walk solemnly around the stage while holding hands. This façade of companionship, however, cannot hold for long, as they regularly tear their hands from one another's and break into what the sound cue sheet labels as "bitchfight." After each fight, they clasp hands once more and continue their stroll around the stage.

The culmination of their complex relationship can be seen in "Boy Scout Line/Whistling," where the two men's relationship is revealed to the auditor. They begin playfully slapping one another, picking up speed and force, before colliding into a campy, cartoonish smooch on overly puckered lips. Without pause, Tom F. and Tony look directly at the audience and gasp, shocked to have been found out. This shocking kiss retroactively clarifies the tensions of their relationship for the auditor, who understands that the perceived distance between the two characters can only be appreciated through their togetherness, which overflows into petty playfulness and bitter disputes when it reaches its limit. The characters are exposed through their kiss, like two magnets failing to separate.

The Puritans are themselves a mirror-image of Floyd and Gordy. They are simultaneously doubles of one another, and of the other coupled twins. As *Quotations* unfolds, the Puritans are transformed during Mario Gardner's monologue into businessmen in sharp suits, trading the frilled white collars of their historical regalia for a corporate uniform. Tom F. and Tony prowl the stage as predators, while Floyd and Gordy fill the role of prey, both desired and despised. The opening "Top of Show" monologue delivered by the Puritans is the first introduction to Floyd and Gordy, who are positioned as people of power who run the ruined city. Tom F. is bitter and envious of their position as he faces his own losses of wealth and status. This monologue lays the groundwork for a fractured narrative that centers the torture and exploitation of Floyd and Gordy by the Puritan-Capitalists. By the end of the show, however, one observes a convergence of their paths. Both the Puritan-Capitalists and Floyd and Gordy are weathered by the accelerated passing of time, as illness and decay set in. The difference is that Tom F. and Tony find one another in scandal and shock, whereas Floyd and Gordy are united in tenderness and marriage. This layered doubling simultaneously binds the twins to themselves and to their counterparts, diffusing their identities across four bodies, even through moments of resistance.

Impalement

The diffusion of identity and voice across doubles spans the entire cast. This is most obvious during *Impalement*, which includes Tom P., Peter, Tom F., Tony, and Sabrina (dressed as a Puritan disciplinarian).[70] The scene involves very little onstage action: actors stand in their respective spots, directly facing the audience, laser focused on the intense

[70] Script, 115

delivery of the gruesome text. The scene is structured not as dialogue, but a shared monologue split across bodies and voices. While the structure of the text seemingly dissolves the individuals on stage through the removal of their sonic identity and discrete perspectives, the gestures of the twinned couples reveal the split and irreconcilable reality of the pain and pleasure derived from suffering. The audiovisual texture generated through the interplay of bodies and voices is greater than the sum of its parts.

The text includes a matter-of-fact delivery of a graphic description of a young Muslim man, Mustafa, being tortured by Chetniks[71] through impalement. Each line is spoken by a separate voice, which then triggers a rapid place-switching, a physical device that Abdoh uses throughout the show. The script asks that "after each line the speaker moves to the space of his or her counterpart." The twins (Tony/Tom F. and Peter/Tom P.) swap within their pairings, whereas Sabrina simply moves from one side of the stage to the other. Peter/Tom P. embrace each other in a desperate, aching way with each swap, as if they are mourning the suffering of Mustafa. Tony/Tom F. show no such remorse. They begin the scene with the mischievous action of removing the hat of their counterpart and tapping, then later kissing, the counterpart's bare head. Once the hat is replaced, they commence with their swap. As the scene progresses and becomes more graphic, Tony/Tom F. seem to be taking pleasure in the suffering. The hat action turns into a sensual caressing of the arms before each swap. One sees Tony rubbing his stomach as he describes the distant setting of the torture scene.

The description of torture forces the auditor to conjure images in their mind, beginning with the tool at hand: "an oak pole, two-and-a-half meters long, with a sharp iron

[71] Term originally refers to WWII Serbian nationalist guerilla fighters. Revived in the 1990s to refer to nationalistic Serb paramilitary forces, used pejoratively by their opponents.

point." This is most visceral when the monologue takes on an onomatopoeic character, just after the impalement proper begins. Peter, describing the captive Mustafa, says, "He let out a sound. Not a scream or a cry or a death rattle, but a kind of squeaking and banging as if someone was splicing logs for a fence." The choice of words here turns the stomach as the auditor hears and feels themselves in the horrific scene.

A sonic disruption slices through the scene after this initial act of violence. A sudden change in lighting seems to command the performers to turn their backs to the audience as a burst of noise reverberates through the space and videos play on upstage screens.[72] The hammering metronome links to the preceding text, which describes the "slow and steady strikes" of the mallet. Whereas the performers had been addressing the audience directly, the physical pivot turns the tables as both performers and audience watch the same video through the thirteen second barrage of sound. Following the blast of noise, the monologue continues as if there had been no interruption. The grisly imagery is relentless as one is walked through the step-by-step process of Mustafa's impalement. After a second, slightly longer bombardment of noise, the scene approaches its ending as the text both focuses on the suffering Mustafa, "alone on the pole, six feet from the ground," while distancing itself with "the wintry mountain, distant lights." As is typical of Abdoh's narrative pacing, the most horrific of scenes are capped off with a tart pinch of irreverence as Ken bursts into the scene, declaring "I'm hungry, goddamnit." Sabrina throws a cabbage at Ken, bringing an abrupt end to the scene as a moderate jazz tune transports the audience to Los Angeles, or in the case of the New York version, New York City. This alignment of the performed world

[72] Video content is unclear in the archival footage.

with the "real" world suggests the urban location of the performance of *Quotations* as a double for the fictitious and enigmatic ruined city.

The Singularity: Live Voice and Immersive Style

Quotations is a fantasia that moves between radically different times, settings, and realities. This journey of symbols and sensorial extremes is enhanced by Abdoh's willingness to disrupt the internal logic that seems to be carefully shaped over the duration of the work. Some of the most striking instances in *Quotations* end up being those which return the auditor to their present moment by upsetting the performance situation, most often through the sudden inclusion of live voice and the negation of lipsynch. What I am calling singularities are the instances that resist the overt logic of doubling that otherwise pervades *Quotations*. They use live, rather than prerecorded, sound to draw attention to the present, shared moment that both performers and auditors inhabit. By stripping away the bombastic sound and the artifice of lipsynch, Abdoh uses these moments to make the production feel small through collapsed time and distance. The resulting atmosphere is fleetingly intimate.

These singularities are rare in the context of the show. In the first half, one hears the soft strum of Peter's guitar, or the vocalizations of the cast as they perform an ensemble dance number. In the second half, there is "Take a Break," which truncates a dance number at the height of its intensity, leaving Peter twirling and vocalizing a little too long. Abdoh's inclusion of this moment emphasizes the fabrication of the performance, and in a way reveals the doubles of the actors themselves. One sees the bodies who have committed horrific acts, that have been fused with technology and turned into cyborgs, return to their

double life as everyday people. It's a brief moment, as most are in *Quotations*, but an immensely gentle and kind one that conveys the brilliance of Abdoh's assemblage: shock does not always have to be violent. In fact, by this point in the show (approximately two-thirds in), the audience has been saturated with violence. Now, Abdoh has to resort to something more playful to recalibrate the auditor's senses, simultaneously relieving narrative tension while generating it elsewhere. As the break comes to a close, the cast gathers downstage center in black robes as they watch a clip from *The Seven Year Itch*. When Marilyn Monroe declares that she can play *Chopsticks*, too, the auditor hears the cast sing ecstatically along with her piano playing, doubling her instrument and adding dramatic vocal sighs and exaggerated leaps.

Another noteworthy singularity is the escape of the cast through the audience at the climax of "Final Dance." Here, the cast performs several intense repetitions of "Reza's Dance," which loop in a triple meter with loud, rhythmic vocalizations. By this point, much of the cast looks disheveled, particularly Tom F. and Tony, who have lost their suit jackets, loosened their ties, and untucked their button-down shirts. One at a time, couples go to the edge of the stage and remove a line of barbed wire, which has been separating the performance space from the audience. Amid crashing percussion, the dance movements pull the performers toward the edge of the stage as they continue to dance just before leaping into the audience, leaving Tom P. and Peter on stage for "Final Text," and reuniting the two halves of the space. While the archival video does not show where the cast goes once they enter the audience, one might imagine that they too become the audience for the final scene, as Tom P. and Peter perform their poetic faux marriage ritual.

The most pivotal singularity in *Quotations* is "Mario's Monolog," where the singularity encounters the double. It is a structurally significant moment in that it lies in the near-exact middle of the show, and generates a point of transformation for the entire cast. Crucially, it is also the first and only instance that the auditor hears a live voice, from its original sound source, as a focal point.[73] During this scene, the Puritans ditch their period costumes for sleek business suits, the lovers replace their bandages with green nightgowns, and the rest of the cast change into boy scout uniforms. Meanwhile, the naked Mario assumes a crouch beneath a tree center stage before beginning his monologue, which is built around doubles of time, place, and health.

Mario begins his monologue with "Now I lay me down to sleep," a Christian bedtime prayer usually recited by children. He quickly becomes frustrated, observing that he is "not going to sleep." After a brief outburst to God, "why is it so dark in here?" Mario reiterates his frightened plea, lashing out at an unseen nurse. Without missing a beat, he changes orientation again, reminiscing to himself about an old friend who had to learn how to make whiskey. He interrupts his own tangent with another plea to the nurse. This time, it's "getting cold" and he is "running a fever." Through his meandering text, one comes to understand that Mario is stumbling through feverish dreams that span multiple times and places. His internal time-space is doubled through life-flashes and fond memories, aligning with one of the key tenets of immersive style. Through all of this, the auditor only sees Mario, naked, beneath the tree as a video plays in the background and the cast changes costumes upstage.[74] The lack of visual activity on stage centers Mario and forces the audience to bear witness to his slippage between the nostalgic past and the clarity of his

[73] Specified as live in the script
[74] Video not clear in archival footage.

impending death. Abdoh uses both fever and labored breathing as symbols for AIDS throughout *Quotations*, referencing common symptoms of opportunistic illnesses. Abdoh never names AIDS in his work, choosing instead to use more open-ended language such as "the virus" or later in this monologue, "the ailment."

Mario's monologue continues, dipping briefly into the sinister imagery of the ruined city, evoking giant insects that have overrun his "long home." He returns to thoughts of his friend and the literal scars they left on one another's bodies as the auditor hears a whistling tune begin to emanate from the boy scout-uniformed cast upstage. The catchy, pure melody stands in stark contrast to the increasing heat of Mario's monologue, which boils over as he yells to the audience, demanding to be heard while challenging them. As Mario approaches anger, he is not defeated: "I'll rise like Christ in drag." With a hopeful tone he evokes whiskey-making, returning us to the topic of his buddy, where we learn that his friend has already passed. The auditor gets a final fiery outburst that shimmers with power and confidence as Mario snaps at an unseen preacher who asks if he is ready to go: "Ready to go? I put my mascara on, my lipstick on, and my yellow pumps and I snapped back, I'll go when I'm good [snap] and [snap] ready [snap]." Mario's rage turns into an unwavering command over his body imbued with an excessive queer sass. By this point in the monologue, Mario has proven that he is not, in fact, ready. His final remarks are a crystal clear recognition of the "haze" he is in, which he attributes to "the ailment." He returns to the thoughts of his buddy, thankful to have told him that he loved him before he passed, as "the pale horseman starts to gallop by the door." He repeats "gallop" five times as the whistle tune fades out.

Mario's monologue stands as a potent example of Cady's immersive style in staged performance. The most salient features of immersive style, including transformation of time-space, the lack of protection offered to the audience, and the centering of the affected person, are all present in this monologue. Mario's fever, paired with the memories of his friend, pull the audience through nonlinear scenes of delirium and longing. This jumbled structure feels as though one is moving through jump cuts. His memories always feel like the present moment, so that by the end one has to wonder: is death at the door? Or is Mario about to march out in yellow pumps for a night on the town? Through all of this, the audience is left uncertain where Mario *actually* is: could it be that he really is beneath the tree, outside, in the throes of psychosis? One cannot know for sure. Instead, the auditor must sit in the discomfort generated by the tension of Mario's blurry, doubled time-space. The distance between the auditor and Mario's inner turmoil is collapsed by the presence of his unamplified voice and the rawness of his emotions. And while raw, they are not monochromatic: the auditor witnesses a kaleidoscope of intertwined feelings that simultaneously bring terror and joy. Through this entire monologue, Mario is at the center. His significance in the design of the work cannot be understated: he offers the only moment of an unamplified, present voice, at the near-exact halfway point of the show, which triggers a transformation for the entire cast. Mario's voice, emanating from a man dying from AIDS, "the ailment," is a singular pivot point for the whole of *Quotations*.

Conclusion

It's clear that there are parallels between the world as it is on the stage and the world that the audience inhabits. The performed world is a double of the audience's reality,

with a veil of poetry and symbolism laid between them. The costumes and familiar music, jumbled together, alongside references to what today seem like a selection of the greatest hits of the mid-90s American news cycle, from Beirut, to the Bosnian-Serbian conflict, to Latasha Harlins, to AIDS, creates an assemblage of reality. The concept of the double permeates *Quotations*. It is found in the relationship between voice, body, and technology in the lipsynch, in the diffusion of identity across dance numbers and multi-person monologues, and in the construction of "characters," who twin one another from start to finish. Even Mario's singular monologue has a glimmer of the double in its multiple time-spaces and its juxtaposition between states of liveliness and near-death. The double likewise permeates the songs performed by Ken and Peter, which also highlight the potential of song space in the context of the larger work. I read song space in *Quotations* as an enduring symbol of hope, redemption, and utopia in a work that oscillates between the nonsensical and the horrific. The song space functions as a sanctuary for the bombarded auditor, who will no doubt be further subjected to Abdoh's terrors. As a result of close analysis of sound in *Quotations,* my position stands in contrast to that of Abdoh scholar Daniel Mufson, who [disagrees with those who find redemption in Abdoh's work].[75] The songs in *Quotations* are tender and sincere, offering a different sort of reprieve from the dance numbers, which are excessively physical and demanding. This excess forms the focus for Chapter 3, where I explore the implications of durational work that is designed with a surplus of incongruent materials and disorienting form.

[75] Mufson *Reza Abdoh* 1999, 11

CHAPTER THREE

Excessive Form: Camp, Immersive, and Late Styles

Excessive form is my own term for an approach to the design of durational work that intentionally maximizes itself through a vast and incongruous array of materials, resources, references, or behaviors. By nature of its materials, excessive form is full of interruptions, swerves, and about-faces. Excessive form prioritizes moment-to-moment impact and intuitive sensation over narrative coherence and developmental clarity, subverting typical values of form in an effort to overwhelm the auditor. Feelings accumulate and overtake information, so that by the end of a performance, one is left in a state of awe but with an absence of understanding. Excessive form is highly stylized and resists organic influences: the lines that lead us forward may also lead us astray (to paraphrase Sara Ahmed), may force us to retrace our steps, or fully vanish from beneath our feet, leaving us stranded in the weeds. Excessive form remains impenetrable even with repeat engagement.

In order to adequately discuss excessive form, I draw from a range of scholarship and disciplines. Queer theory, particularly through its subfocuses of phenomenology and temporality, allows for a recalibration of values and the "right" way of doing, being, or knowing, while encouraging one to appreciate the ephemeral and its ability to shape us. This is supplemented, even challenged, by music theory and its fascination with duration, form, and materials. Interdisciplinary theories of post-avant garde aesthetics provide an opening to understanding a broad cohort of works which, in whole or part, make use of the same strategies which I believe constitute excessive form. Many of these strategies extend from the theories of Antonin Artaud and Richard Foreman, both of whom seek to frustrate

and liberate the audience and performance itself.[76] Camp, and its emphasis on subversion, incongruity, and juxtaposition, pairs readily with the immersive style proposed by Joseph Cady during the height of the AIDS crisis in the United States, which similarly favors outrageousness, albeit often with a different tone. I find immersive style to be a way of doing excessive form that relies on the socio-political tension between lived identities and systems of power. There are other ways of achieving excessive form, and in this chapter, I discuss its materials, strategies, and potential to engage with what Sara Ahmed calls "the queer moment." Ahmed observes that such ephemeral moments, when "things come out of line," are "fleeting," but she encourages us "not… to search for permanence… but to listen to the sound of 'the what' that fleets."[77]

The Intersection of Immersive Style and Camp: Excess

While camp has not been a primary focus of this dissertation, it can be found widely throughout Abdoh's *Quotations*, and was no doubt a key component of many of the examples of immersive style that I presented in Chapter 1. Camp bears several similarities to immersive style that form a productive overlap. Camp has long been developed through queer cultures and identities as a survival skill meant to critique power cultures through their own cultural detritus. Camp uses exaggeration and incongruity to dismantle and subvert systemic values. It can be both a thing one does and a perspective that one has. Camp, like immersive style, depends on reference, and speaks "to a double audience."[78] As Esther Newton observes, camp is largely about the relationship *between* things.[79] It allows

[76] Antonin Artaud, trans. Victor Corti, *The Theater and Its Double* 2010
Richard Foreman and Ken Jordan, *Unbalancing Acts: Foundations for a Theater*, 1992
[77] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 2007, 106
[78] David Bergman, *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* 1993, 10
[79] Esther Newton, "Role Models" in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. 46

the outcast to become the center, flips negatives to positives, and moves those in positions of privilege and power to the margins. In the case of immersive style, external references, often derived from familiar symbols and pop culture, are used to shift time-space, often rapidly and without warning, as a method of generating impact and destabilizing the auditor. Sara Ahmed writes, "If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that [bodily] extension fails."[80] It could be that immersive style is a form of disorientation, as is failed, or unreceived, camp, whereas camp that successfully embeds itself in the auditor functions instead as an orientation. The successful delivery of camp generates a network between performer and auditor, their shared cultural histories, and the impact of those histories on each party. In this regard, camp and immersive style seem to be different sides of the same coin, not mutually exclusive, and capable of feeding off one another under the right conditions.

To return to Abdoh, "Mario's Monolog" employs both camp and immersive style simultaneously and on several layers. There is the campy incongruence between Mario, nude beneath a tree, and the boy scout uniformed cast, whose repetitive, carefree whistles function as an extreme juxtaposition to the tumultuous path of Mario's delusional monologue. Within the monologue itself, Mario is both child and dying man, alone in a hospital bed yet ravaged by monstrous insects, with his buddy and without him, dying and full of life. An almost stereotypical example of camp is Mario's outburst at the priest, who asks if Mario is "ready to go." The monologue has led the auditor to believe that the priest is asking if Mario is ready to die, yet Mario claps back with a savage sass, instead describing

[80] Ahmed 2007, 11

himself getting made up for a night out, stating "I'll go when I'm good and ready." The camp lies in the incongruence of these juxtapositions, and in the over-the-top femme explosion that erupts from Mario, who calls us "sister" before reflecting on his struggle to overcome his own masculinity.

The cornerstone of both immersive style and camp must be excess. Each aesthetic demands an application that is fully out of scale, literally *too much*. Excess pushes the limits of tolerability and acceptability by challenging conventions, surpassing a state of saturation and thus thwarting comprehension. Auditors find themselves unsettled and rooted in an ongoing state of discomfort, without the typical markers of narrative place, unable to be fully situated. The cramming of materials creates a seemingly endless flow of content that is always turning away from itself, veering off course. As Adorno writes, "what does not grow, does not luxuriate."[81] This is precisely the case for the materials and references presented in excessive form. They must always flee from the auditor before they become a site of comfort and familiarity. In the case of immersive style, the excess lies in a plethora of references *outside* the oppressed person's immediate experience, so that one's focus is never grounded and the point of return is always shocking. Camp, on the other hand, may have multiple points of reference, but its excess is rooted in the caricature of its original and the size of the resulting contrast, which maximizes itself through humorous exaggeration and often bawdy ostentation. Excess, then, may act as a bridge between camp and immersive style, allowing for a mutually supportive amalgamation of the two interpretive frameworks. The role of excess produced from camp and immersive style is to generate

[81] Theodor W. Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* 1988, 155

something else, to create a gap or wedge which pries one open to new ways of experiencing, knowing, and witnessing.

Form, Materials, and Late Style

Musical forms are inherently closed systems that operate according to their own internal logic, with the elegance of their material and motivic economy representing a foil to excessive form. Even the most common historical forms, for instance sonata forms, vary dramatically from piece to piece and can become quite complex while still adhering to a well defined set of expectations. Adorno, through his attempts at unpacking the complexities of Beethoven's late style, demonstrates the boundaries of the sonata, and indeed of form itself. He draws a line at the Piano Sonata op. 101, which he considers "a prototype of the late style," emphasizing that: "...everything is refracted, significant, withdrawn from appearance and in a sense antithetical to it… at the same time enigmatic and extremely obvious."[82] He observes the importance of the creator's gesture, which can be seen in the "naked" qualities of the late works, and shows no effort to hide conventions, despite abandoning the impulse of development to present instead "an ignition between extremes..." As Adorno continues his discussion by considering Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, he observes the construction of form not through "motivic work" but through "a puzzle-like procedure." He states that "The form is not attained through the evolving variation of core motifs, but accumulated additively from sections usually imitative among themselves… the formal organization of the whole… seeks to be induced by the balance of the individual sections, and finally by contrapuntal clamping."[83] Following Adorno, one can surmise that

[82] Ibid., "Late Style I" in *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* 1988
[83] Ibid., 146

the boundary where form begins to fail is marked by the separation of convention, or motif, from its function. By turning away from development in favor of accumulation, density, and compression, the late style signals the end of motivic form and the beginning of something else. This rupture drives a separation between how the music *should* operate and how it *does*, a sentiment which is reinforced by Said's observation of the "highlighting and dramatizing [of] irreconcilabilities" in late style.[84] The rupture appears so brazenly that it must be an intentional will of design, a way of showing the seams and stitches in the assemblage of the materials.

Excessive form shares many of its qualities with late style, although excessive form takes these qualities even further. Through an increased cramming and accumulation of surplus materials, the excessive work revels in a constant *hyperrupture* that challenges the continuity of the durational work with a fracturing of its contents. Fragments stutter and stall, threatening to collapse the structural frame of the work. Through proportional balance and the rare return of the unchanging motif, excessive form is able to tumble forward with a series of bursts and propulsions. Following along the lines of camp and immersive style, excessive form does *too much* with its materials. In the case of Beethoven, one review of *die Grosse Fuge,* in an 1826 publication of *News. Vienna*, describes the experience as "incomprehensible," amid a string of unfortunate exoticizations about who might enjoy such a confusing work. The reviewer goes on to suggest that "Perhaps so much would not have been written down if the master were also able to hear his own creations," remarking on Beethoven's well-known late-in-life deafness. The reviewer's final observation, however, speaks to the core of late style: "perhaps the time is yet to come

[84] Said, *On Late Style* 2006, xv

when that which at first glance appeared to us dismal and confused will be recognized as clear and pleasing in form."[85]

Overwhelmed by an excess of materials, the auditor begins to feel their hold on the situation slip. Rather than following the affairs on stage, checking the boxes of protagonist and antagonist, rising and falling action, the auditor is tossed into an ocean of ideas, sounds, and gestures that all strive to prove themselves as the most vital, urgent, and useful to the narrative. Over time, the auditor may begin to connect some surface details of the assembled materials, but even with multiple encounters the excessive work cannot be fully understood. In the case of Abdoh's *Quotations from a Ruined City*, *New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley found "the work's cumulative effect… comparably numbing and — despite its attempt to create a historical arc — non-developmental."[86] Excessive form endeavors to "magnify so many other aspects of experience that you simply lose interest in trying to hold on to narrative coherence." Before long, one is forced (or as dramatist Richard Foreman offers, allowed) to "become absorbed in the moment-by-moment representation of psychic freedom."[87] Upon losing one's agency, the auditor is invited to reclaim it in the name of spectacle, of the queer moment, and to celebrate the wash of sensations, illusions, and contradictions presented to them. Excessive form carries one along in the flow of its disorientation to an unknowable destination.

Over the course of a more typical work, the auditor should be able to track generally where they are and where they land. But if excessive form has done its job, one will find

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[85] https://www.bu.edu/beethovencenter/files/2017/06/crit_recep_beethoven_op126_to_WoO140_feb21-2.pdf 41-42; We now know of *die Grosse Fuge* as op. 133, but it was originally presented as the finale to op. 130.

[86] Ben Brantley, *New York Times*, March 1994, https://www.nytimes.com/1994/03/03/theater/theater-in-review-352993.html

[87] Richard Foreman and Ken Jordan, *Unbalancing Acts* 1992, 5

oneself unsure of where, exactly, *there* is. Foreman believes that "an art that affects you in the moment, but which you then find hard to remember, is straining to bring you to another level."[88] Maggie Nelson, in her compelling *Art of Cruelty*, picks up this thread in a discussion of Ryan Trecartin's dazzlingly absurd tour de force, *I-Be Area*, a feature-length spectacle of queered identities and the merging of embodied and digital reality presented in an early 2000s cyber aesthetic. She distills the effort to strain the audience's memory as an "aesthetics-of-amnesia." For Nelson, the experience of such a deluge of information does not send one away with clarity, confidence, or a renewed vision for the future. Instead, one finds oneself with "a kind of vibrating memory of the unnerving psychic state the work induced, or captured, or invented."[89]

The Excess of Reza Abdoh: Extremes, Juxtapositions, and the Husks of Convention

Reza Abdoh repeatedly describes his theatrical works as collages, which essentially acknowledges the juxtaposition of surplus materials. Daniel Mufson wrote that Abdoh "self-described as an artist of excess."[90] Over the span of ten minutes, one may witness horrific violence, sing along to a commercial jingle, be swept away by a river of poetry, and tap one's foot to a catchy, razzmatazz dance number. By bombarding the auditor with *too much*, Abdoh triggers a state of awe, shattering or breaking the auditor through sensory overload. The *hyperrupture* so successfully distorts the form that it leaks out to the body of the auditor, rupturing our experience of continuity. Once Abdoh began condensing his evening-length productions into ninety-minute works following his HIV diagnosis, there

[88] Ibid. 23
[89] Maggie Nelson, *Art of Cruelty* 2011, 50
[90] Mufson, "Quotations from a Ruined City and the Ends of Reza Abdoh" https://danielmufson.com/the-abdoh-files/quotations-from-a-ruined-city-and-the-ends-of-reza-abdoh/

was no sense that material was cut; instead, it was compressed into a much denser package. As Jan Breslauer writes in her 1993 *Los Angeles Times* review of *Quotations from a Ruined City*, "[Abdoh's] theater of assault spews forth a barrage of confrontational and sometimes painfully eloquent images. And while he (and we) may suffer for his excesses, there's a compelling ferocity to the work."[91] The proximity to death, the end in sight, is integral to Adorno's formation of late style. Abdoh, by virtue of living with HIV during a period where there were no effective treatments and social stigmas bore crushing weight on PLWHA, was operating within his own late style.

Quotations is without a doubt formally fractured. It contains over fifty scenes within its ninety-minute frame, with some lasting only a few seconds. As suggested in Chapter 2, the fractured landscape of the form should not be confused with a lack of return. There are whole collections of scenes which return in part or in full over the course of the work. The "Electrocution Sequence" has three iterations, delineated by a sinister green glow, Ken's frantic yet oblivious dancing, and the sound of screeching metal as performers are electrocuted by the barbed wire fencing that marks the boundary between stage and audience. "Butterfly Sequence" also has three iterations, held together by the act of swiping a net to catch butterflies. "Peter's Song" is heard twice, each time with different verses. Even "Top of Show" returns, although with an extreme asymmetry: it opens the show, returns again following a dance number, and then returns once more during the final rapid-fire barrage of the show.

The intention to return and repeat is still present in the formal structure of *Quotations*, but the logic of the return is seemingly scrambled, a vestige of goal-oriented

[91] Jan Breslauer, "Quotations from a Ruined City Lashes Out At Brutality," *Los Angeles Times* September 1993, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-09-13-ca-34695-story.html

form that loses its narrative potency but continues to procedurally quilt together the myriad parts of the puzzle. Larger groupings of individual scenes, or structural repetitions, are fragmented and redistributed throughout the overall design of the work. Despite functioning as waypoints for the auditor along the winding path of the show, these recurring scenes do not further the narrative, or even help it. One may find themselves confused, even, as to how Floyd and Gordy are once again falling victim to the electrified fence following several failed attempts. Or, how is it that the performers are seemingly immune to electrocution as they tear through the barbed wire during the escape following "Final Dance?" The return ceases to be a goal and instead becomes a process that generates the illusion of structural binding, where the parts are made to fit together not through a logical evolution of ideas, but by their nature to appear and reappear.

The dance numbers in *Quotations*, as I discussed in Chapter 2, are perhaps the clearest example of stylistic incongruity across the work, and are some of the most repeated materials in the show. In their juxtaposition against the larger body of materials, from the narrative fragments centered on Floyd and Gordy or the Puritans, to the scenes of torture and war, one discovers the polar extremes of Abdoh's vision. However tense, the fractured and illogical pairing of the mundane dances with the weight of catastrophe assists in formal balancing. Depictions of terror are negated by the dance numbers, which are all staged in the same fashion: lights up, downstage, with the entire cast gyrating, and sometimes vocalizing, in unison. Inspired in part by the movie-musicals of the Golden Age of Hollywood, Abdoh's dance numbers make no claim to narrative relevance. Emerging seemingly out of the blue, the dance numbers do not develop the inner world of the characters, and they can hardly be considered diegetic within the stark staging of

Quotations; they are just good old fashioned fun. When paired with torture scenes, however, the extreme exertion of the cast and their beaming smiles take on a more sinister quality. Just as the dance numbers negate the catastrophes, so do the catastrophes cast a shadow over the frivolous joy of the dances.

For example, the first dance number, "Mingus Dance," follows the appropriately titled "Randy Cows/Ear Pull Section." The scene begins with Tom F. urging murder (although of whom is not clear) as he and Tony meander through a back-and-forth monologue about "the real ruin." Meanwhile, Sabrina, in a school teacher uniform, pulls Peter, dressed as a mummy, around the stage by his ear, "reprimanding him violently." Sabrina takes things too far and pulls Peter's ear to the floor, causing him to scream and immediately triggering "Mingus Dance." The mummified cast dances to a sped-up *Boogie Stop Shuffle* while Tom F. and Tony giggle with a demented glee. Amidst all of this, Tom P. affixes a fake ear to Peter's head before kissing the other. In his tenderness, Tom P. tries to reverse, or negate, Peter's suffering. Sabrina, however, again rips the ear from Peter's head as we hear the same sample of Peter screaming and the dance abruptly stops, punctuated by a tacky xylophone sweep and a V-I cadential figure as "Top of Show" returns.

The cadential figure, as occurs in tonal music, is another convention that is unexpectedly, yet frequently, used in *Quotations*. Musical cadences are used as both punctuation and transition. To echo Adorno, they acquire a "husk-like" character in their separation from the musical phrase, representative of nothing more than a particular sonic quality. It is the auditor's familiarity with the cadence that gives it such power in *Quotations*. It is not always a closing gesture, sometimes serving more as an elision between the closing of one scene and the opening of the next. This occurs during the transition into

"Field Tableau/Peter's Song," where the violin, sampled from Bach, drives with certainty toward a cadence, only to be thwarted at the last moment by something entirely different: the sound of Peter's voice in the wrong key. This transition is labeled "frantic string music," and it is used as a timed cue for the performers, who must quickly set the stage and get into position for the "Field Tableau." The rush of the violin is supported by the scurrying on stage as the rupture between where the violin *should* arrive and where it actually lands leaves the auditor disoriented, with a lingering tingle of motion as "Peter's Song" spills out, pensive and introspective.

Abdoh's use of the tonal cadence is by no means regular, with there being no clear pattern to when or how they are applied in *Quotations*. There are some that are allowed to complete themselves, and others that become obstructed by the ceaselessness of Abdoh's form. The "frantic string music" occurs once, and is then set aside, only to be picked up again much later in the show, well after the halfway point of "Mario's Monolog." When it returns, it is the exact same sound clip, uncanny in its repetition. Rather than just a single return, it becomes obsessive, as Abdoh repeats the transition three times, back to back, between "Target Sequence," "Sign Sequence," and "White Robe Sequence." This generates a cumulative frenetic energy as the entire cast twirls and vocalizes wildly to the string music, which is finally allowed to play out in "Frantic Movement Section." The intensity of the repetition splits the moment asunder in one of the most exposed scenes of *Quotations*. Suddenly, the lights are brought up and the sound is cut while performers continue vocalizing and twirling until they collapse to the stage floor to "Take A Break." Abdoh reveals to the auditor the artifice of the entire performance situation, allowing one to see the people on stage as people, voices trickling from their bodies rather than the speakers

surrounding the audience. “Take A Break” subverts the greatest convention of all: staged performance as something separate from reality.

Conclusion: Destruction and Regeneration

In an interview with Andréa R. Vaucher, Abdoh speaks of his relationship to death, suggesting that it “provides the opportunity for regeneration.” He goes on to say that “where things are destroyed, ideas are destroyed, lives are destroyed or self-destroyed—within that framework, ideas and people and thoughts and objects are reconstructed…otherwise you are in a state of stasis.”[92] The form of *Quotations* breaks under Abdoh’s excess, and because of this, the auditor is forced to imagine a new way forward in order to attempt to understand what they have witnessed. There is no way to passively engage with Abdoh’s work. It is a challenge to the auditor, demanding a certain willingness to go out on a limb, to be led astray. As Daniel Mufson writes, Abdoh’s later works use “indirections to find directions out.”[93] In our straying we continue to return, somewhat in vain, to the memory of the work, or at least whatever residue it has left within us. By destroying the form of *Quotations*, Abdoh creates an opportunity for the auditor to regenerate the work from the shards and tangles one is left with. The overwhelming surplus of irreconcilable and incongruent materials, the “bareness” of shattered conventions, and the surpassing of information by emotions produces the formal hyperrupture, with its irregular interruptions and inexplicable proportions. *Quotations* operates from a permanent state of *too much*, an excessive form. In this case, more is more—the impenetrability of the work generates its ineffable magic, with secrets that

[92] Andréa R. Vaucher, *Muses from Chaos and Ash* 1993, 223
[93] Mufson, *Reza Abdoh* 1999, 5

elude the auditor whether they are encountering the work for the first time or the fortieth. Excessive form creates an opening for the auditor to reframe and reorient their values around durational work, to reconstruct the impossible, and relish the fleeting of the queer moment.

CONCLUSION

When I began this project, I felt a mix of excitement and dread. I knew the topics at hand were personal to me, that I had a stake in them, yet I feared being unable to adequately handle them. To write about AIDS is, in many ways, a futile enterprise. It is a vast and complex catastrophe that has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths in the United States alone. While it has been historicized through gay male experience, it has also impacted other vulnerable communities across lines of gender, race, and class. There is no way to "sum it up," or to speak to everyone's experience, yet I felt compelled to do my best. In doing so, I encountered many challenges. One of which is the lack of diversity in AIDS scholarship, which continues to be overwhelmingly white, and largely centers white gay men. This is not to say that such contributions are at fault, but that they reflect larger trends in the historicization of AIDS itself.

In perusing historical media coverage at Sacramento's Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange, I found myself immersed in absence: of women, of People of Color. This was especially true in the early days of the crisis, and continues to be true today in a supposedly post-AIDS world that centers gay men for preventative treatments and ongoing care while neglecting other at-risk parties. Interviews with former ACT UP New York activists reveal that the AIDS crisis preceded what they call the "trans revolution," including public discourse around transgender identities and experiences.[94] This is not to say that transgender people did not exist, but that they were so disenfranchised, including by gay

[94] See https://www.actuporalhistory.org/numerical-interviews/184-samuel-lurie

men and women, that the record of their engagement within AIDS activism and their position in the Crisis itself remains poorly documented.[95]

Joseph Cady's framework of immersive and counterimmersive styles is one such example of the way that HIV/AIDS has been historicized around gay men and their cultural contributions. In Chapter One, I worked towards two goals: the expansion of immersive style from the literary to performance and sound, and the examination of the impact of intersecting identities, including but not limited to homosexuality, on cultural responses to HIV/AIDS. I pinpointed examples of the ongoing marginalization of PLWHA in gay media through the Netflix original series *Uncoupled*, which fails to reveal the full nuance of HIV/AIDS today. The show features zero HIV-positive characters, yet ample discussion of the virus; HIV/AIDS is kept off-screen and invisible, functioning solely as a framing device of fear for the protagonist, hence my categorization of *Uncoupled* as an example counterimmersive style.

On the other hand, the poetry of Tory Dent, Tim Dlugos, and Essex Hemphill broaden Cady's definition of immersive style, which he formulated primarily through the writing of Paul Monette. Tim Dlugos represents a white gay male experience with AIDS, much like Monette. His inclusion in this project was largely a personal decision: when I was a teenager in rural Missouri, his poetry enabled me to imagine, for the first time in my life, what my future could be like, and it helped me cope with the initial years that followed my own HIV diagnosis. Tory Dent stands as one of extremely few written representations of a straight female experience with AIDS. Her life is exceptional not just because of her gender, but also her extended period of living with and writing about AIDS. Essex Hemphill's poetry

[95] More specific information regarding the relationship between trans and gay communities in Susan Stryker's introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Wittle, 2006.

inhabits a particularly intense intersection of Blackness, masculinity, nationalism, and AIDS. Cady claims that gay men with AIDS experience a double cultural disavowal: one for their homosexuality, and another for their having AIDS. Hemphill's identity as a Black man further complicates the idea of cultural disavowal due to the ongoing struggle for Black liberation in the United States, as witnessed most recently through the visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement, the ongoing epidemic of police brutality against Black people and communities, and the alarming statistics regarding HIV transmission within Black communities.[96] While Cady asserts that IV drug users who are not white may be morally "saved" by their heterosexuality, there is continued evidence that identities, and the implications of those identities within larger systems, are far more complex than he acknowledges. The stigma of HIV/AIDS far exceeds the perceived positives of heterosexuality. Hemphill's poetry exemplifies this entanglement with grace, demonstrating a deep longing for equality and a rebellious ecstasy.

In finding a path for immersive style beyond poetry, I felt it was essential to do so through the direct actions of ACT UP New York. There were of course other ACT UP groups, but the documentation around the New York chapter sets it apart, thanks largely to the ongoing efforts of Sarah Schulman. The Stop the Church action felt most appropriate to me due to its scale, as well as the significance of both sound and text in its performance and media coverage, particularly in the dissemination by DIVA TV. Stop the Church also facilitated a transition to discussing the music of Diamanda Galás, who was present at that action (and as Kathy Ottersten notes in her interview with Sarah Schulman, a regular at the

[96] Daniel S. Berger and John Neff, *Militant Eroticism: The ART+Positive Archives* 2017, 19: "According to the Black AIDS Institute, by age forty 'the odds a Black gay man will be living with HIV are roughly 60%. One can scour the entire world and struggle to find a population more heavily affected by HIV/AIDS than Black gay men in the U.S.'"

Monday night meetings).[97] The chaoticness of Stop the Church and the media coverage of DIVA TV encapsulates the core tenets of immersive style: shifting time-space, confrontation, and the centering of PLWHA.

Diamanda Galás, in my opinion, achieved her goal of being the sound of the plague. Her performances feature a rawness that is hard to find elsewhere. I believe that this is in part due to the power of genre to contain and dictate style. While Galás began her musical journey through a classical tradition, *Plague Mass* is a far cry from the relatively approachable and conservative approach of a major symphonic work like John Corigliano's *Symphony no. 1*, which is essentially the only piece of classical music that receives discussion in AIDS discourse. Other works, such as Robert Savage's *AIDS Ward Scherzo* or Peter Eötvös' operatic adaptation of *Angels in America*, come nowhere close to achieving the brutal confrontation of Galás music. Style aside, its use of reference and subversion of religious ritual are absolutely excessive. While I did not discuss Galás in the context of excessive form, I believe that her work would be right at home within that framework.

In Chapter Two, I used the concept of the double to analyze Reza Abdoh's *Quotations from a Ruined City*. Writing about Abdoh is, in my opinion, much like writing about AIDS in that it is nearly impossible to do it justice. This sentiment is echoed by Daniel Mufson, who likewise found parsing through the copious amounts of materials and interviews difficult.[98] Yet, the concept of the double is useful because it successfully cuts across the many layers and media of *Quotations*, which enabled me to discuss text and characters alongside dances and songs, all of which fit beneath the larger umbrella of lipsynch, which is its own particular type of doubling. I found myself somehow both more engaged with *Quotations*

[97] See https://www.actuporalhistory.org/numerical-interviews/188-kathy-ottersten
[98] Daniel Mufson, "Introduction: The Sickness Proper to the Time," *Reza Abdoh* 1999, 6

than ever (perhaps moreso than any other work), and yet continuously thwarted by it. It is brilliant in its excess, in its assemblage, and yet so impenetrable. I did, however, find new connections as I delved deeper into its illogics. As I mentioned earlier in this document, Mufson does not find redemption in Abdoh's work, although he acknowledges that he stands against other scholars, and even Abdoh himself. In my analysis, I find hope and redemption to be vital components in the efforts to make such an assemblage, an excessive form, work. This redemptive potential is particularly true of the songs, which allow the auditor to take a moment to breathe and reflect. In the case of "Imagining Sin," there is something powerful about Peter singing alone at first, and then being joined by Tom P., his twin and lover in *Quotations*, for the reprise. After their occasional abusive spats, and being tortured by Tony and Tom F., they still return to one another and try again to fuse into one, as their voices join in song and they proceed with their quasi-marriage ritual.

In Chapter Three, I returned to immersive style and linked it to camp as a way of building out the framework for excessive form. Adorno and Said's interpretations of late style proved useful in revealing that Abdoh was working in late style as well. The parallels in reception between Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* and Abdoh's *Quotations* were helpful for my argument: in both cases, critics remarked about the incomprehensibility of these works at their premieres. Excessive form eludes and thwarts the auditor. It is relentless in its progression, yet baffling in its juxtaposition of materials, which could even be described as irreconcilable, in line with Said's observation of late style. It thrives through its bare, almost patchwork-like quality that subverts the standardizations of genre and form.

In conclusion, I believe that there is still more work to be done, and more sense to be made, both of AIDS and of Abdoh. Excessive form, with all of its idiosyncrasies and illogics,

is an opening that can allow for a critical reconsideration of other nonnormative works that resist the path that has been laid before them. It allows for a recalibration of what belongs that challenges the necessity of "getting it." Excessive form gives the auditor space to be unsure and confused, yet moved and in awe. Through its destruction of formal designs, excessive form welcomes the auditor to reconstruct meaning through their own bodily experience.

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Chronological Appendix of Scenes and Events
Los Angeles Workshop of *Quotations from a Ruined City*

Top of Show (#1)
Tony/Tom F. Monolog: Two Minutes (upstage cubicle position)
[sound of nature] [eight gasps]

Opening Movement Sequence *7:15*
Monolog resumes: *My Daddy 1*

Receiving of the Goods *9:17*

Shackle Tableau *10:10*
Peter/Tom P. twinned monologue
[transition: Mambo]
(Tony and Tom F. run downstage from cubicles and take seats in new position)

Randy Cows/Ear Pull Section *12:45*
(Tony/Tom F. Monologue (downstage chair position))
(Sabrina drags Peter around stage by his ear)
(Peter Screams)

Mingus Dance (#1) [transition] *14:21*
"Boogie Stop Shuffle"
(Tom P. unshackles, gives Peter fake ear)
(Sabrina pulls Peter's ear off; Peter screams)

Top of Show (#2) *15:04*
Tony/Tom F. Monologue "A baneful red glow…" (cubicle position)
[lights fade up] [sound of Nature] [eight gasps]
Opening Movement Sequence Reprise: Double-Time [My Daddy, sped up]
[Blackout]
"Sarajevo…"
[five counts of Sabrina chewing banana]
[lights up] [transition: "Frantic classical string music" (Bach)]
(cast arranges sheep cutouts, then collects tools. Peter sits with guitar)

Field Tableau/Peter's Song *19:00*
(Tony/Tom F. cubicle position, breathing into oxygen masks)

Impalement *20:08*
(after each line, speaker moves to the space of their counterpart)
(Tony/Tom F. chair position)
(direct address to audience)

["Thirteen seconds of sound. All face upstage"; light change, videos]

(monologue exchange resumes, lighting as before)
["Sixteen seconds of sound. All face upstage." light change, videos]

(Monologue resumes, lighting as before)
[chokes and gasps]
[Ken opens closet: "I'm hungry, goddammit!"/ Sabrina: "Here, you hosebag!"]

[leisurely jazz transition]

Los Angeles Section *23:42*

Mingus Dance (#2) [transition] *25:00*

Body Bag Sequence/Sabrina's 16 "Words" *25:34*
(Sabrina says "word" every three counts)
Tony/Tom F. bloody laundry (cubicle position)
[last "word" - body bags are opened]

Execution *26:35*
{Sabrina fires five shots. Tom P./Peter flinch. Mario pulls crown off Ken five times. Anita catches butterflies]
Anita repeats: "Kiss the pavement" x4

Butterfly #1 *27:56*

"Gonna Build a Mountain" *28:47*
Action: drums, cannon, plunger, head-to-head struggle. Ken sings. Repeats once, explosions.

Butterfly #2 *29:48*
Action: laundry, lover's embrace. Speaker swaps with each swipe of the net.

Dental Torture *31:05*
Tony/Tom F. twinned monologue

Mingus Dance Upstage (#3) *33:35*

Sabrina, Tight Nuts Text *33:58*
(excerpted from William Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night*)
Bach underscore
"Sarajevo…Ali…Hussein…Karim…Beirut…Land of Sunshine…Latasha Harlins…"

"I'm Dying, No You're Not" Sequence: Brenden Ear Pull *35:18*
Action: ear removal, hot potato grenades, Shackle Tableau,
"All run to dance positions: upstage right facing right"

Arabic Prayer/Reza Wall Dance (#1) *36:50*
Lipsynch "Arab prayer", lights fade after dance

Electrocution Sequence #1 *38:02*
Sound of doors shutting and electrocution. "Five bongs of stillness/five green flashes"
Ken upstage left doing Americana hands and feet.
After fifth bong:

Forty Lines, Tom P. and Peter *38:35*
Twinned Monologue
Tom F/Tony interject: "No don't do that!/Let them be!"
[transition: Scuttle Butt]

Eye Tube Text/Nose Measuring Sequence *41:00*
[transition: V-I cadence]

Reza Dance (#2) *41:57*

Huddle *42:42*

Mario's Monolog *43:10*
(Whistling, boy scouts dance in background)
[transition: Persian Music/Sev Sam/Delirium]

Coffin/Hissy Fit Sequence #1 *47:01*
Ken vocalizes
Tom F./Tony "bitchfight"
Masks on: music stops

Coffin Sequence/Tom. F Amos 'n' Andy Monolog *48:25*
Tom P./Peter emerge from coffins every eight counts
(*Seven Year Itch* clip: "Now I'm going to take you in my arms and kiss you very quickly and very hard.")

Dance: Jazz Juice *50:24*
"Do it Fluid" by The Dirty Dozen Brass Band

Electrocution Sequence #2 *51:29*
Same as #1
Five bongs of stillness, Ken dances frantically in silence

Twenty Lines: Peter/Tom P. *52:01*
Same as Forty Lines, Sabrina wears a muzzle
Floyd/Floyd shirt
[transition: Scuttle Butt]

Eye Tube/Cranium Measuring *54:09*

Target Sequence ("Oh What a Beautiful Morning" Three Shots) *55:20*
"Oh What a Beautiful Morning" slowed
First shot
"Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious"
"Oh What a Beautiful Morning"
Second Shot
"Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, even though the sound…"
"Oh What a Beautiful Morning"
Last Shot

Sign Sequence/Arabic Prayer/Cot Sequence *56:55*
Pizzicato string ostinato
"Eensy Weensy Spider" dance, no song
Voiceover, count from one to ten
[frantic string music transition]

White Robe Sequence *58:52*
[underwater sounds, bubbling, Tom P. lipsynchs with fish face]
[frantic string music transition]

Frantic Movement Section *59:12*
Vocalizing and twirling to string music
As movement climaxes, everything comes to a halt. House lights come up.

"Take a Break" *56:49*
All put on black robes and cross downstage right. John sets offering. When everyone is set:

Seven Year Itch (Video) *1:01:12*
All sing to "Chopsticks" with video. Video ends: all cross to next positions
[transition: Sev Sam/Persian Music]

Offering Section *1:02:30*
Fall to ground, sob
[transition, cutesy: Guana Split VVV - severe violin i cadence]

Electrocution Sequence #3 *1:03:16*
Five bongs of stillness, except Ken. After fifth bong:

Song: "All the Way" *1:03:49*
Ken lipsynchs. Holds handheld light.

Retrace *1:06:06*
Gasps and sobs
[transition: Guana Split A-flat x5]

Dance: Jazz Juice #2/Ballet *1:06:28*

Sunflower Placement *1:07:33*

Milk/Butterfly Sequence (#3) *1:08:01*
Elides into reprise of Tom P./Peter Shackle Tableau,
Bach underscore and twinned monologue
[Transition: V-I]

Song: "When I First Came to This Land" *1:10:55*
All dressed as boy scouts and business men
lovemaking sounds between Tom and Peter

Top of Show Positions (#3) *1:12:38*

Swooshy Dance *1:14:00*
Hawaiian Music dance sequence

Beef/Peter's Song (Last Two Verses) (reprise) *1:16:02*
Beef slabs hang from meat hooks. Tom F/Tony limp with canes.
Tom P/Peter contorted embrace facing audience

Boy Scout Line/Whistling *1:17:08*

Drum Corps Marching Sequence *1:18:02*

Final Dance *1:18:35*
(Reza Dance #3, no music)
Sound gets very loud as barbed wire is removed
All but Tom P. and Peter escape through audience

Final Text *1:21:35*
Air on a G String, embellished, on piano

D.O.A

Scene 1 from *Waiting Rooms*

for mezzo-soprano and absent viola

Trey Makler

Instrumentation
Mezzo-Soprano (G3 - A5)

Viola (mute needed)
Player should be absent in some way.
Prerecorded, off-stage, or another creative option.

Performance Notes
Accidentals do not carry across octaves.

Horizontal arrows show a gradual transition in technique.
This may refer to bow technique (i.e. normal playing to "shiver bow")
or bow placement (sul tasto to sul ponticello). Sometimes refers to both.

Glissandi should be slightly sticky. Linger briefly at the beginning of each gliss.

s.t. = sul tasto
s.p. = sul ponticello
ovp. = overpressure
shiver = shake bow on string with slight overpressure
to produce irregular creaks, scratches, tones, groans
ord. = cancels s.t./s.p./etc.
norm. = cancels shiver bow

. . . . . .

D.O.A by Tim Dlugos (1950-1990)

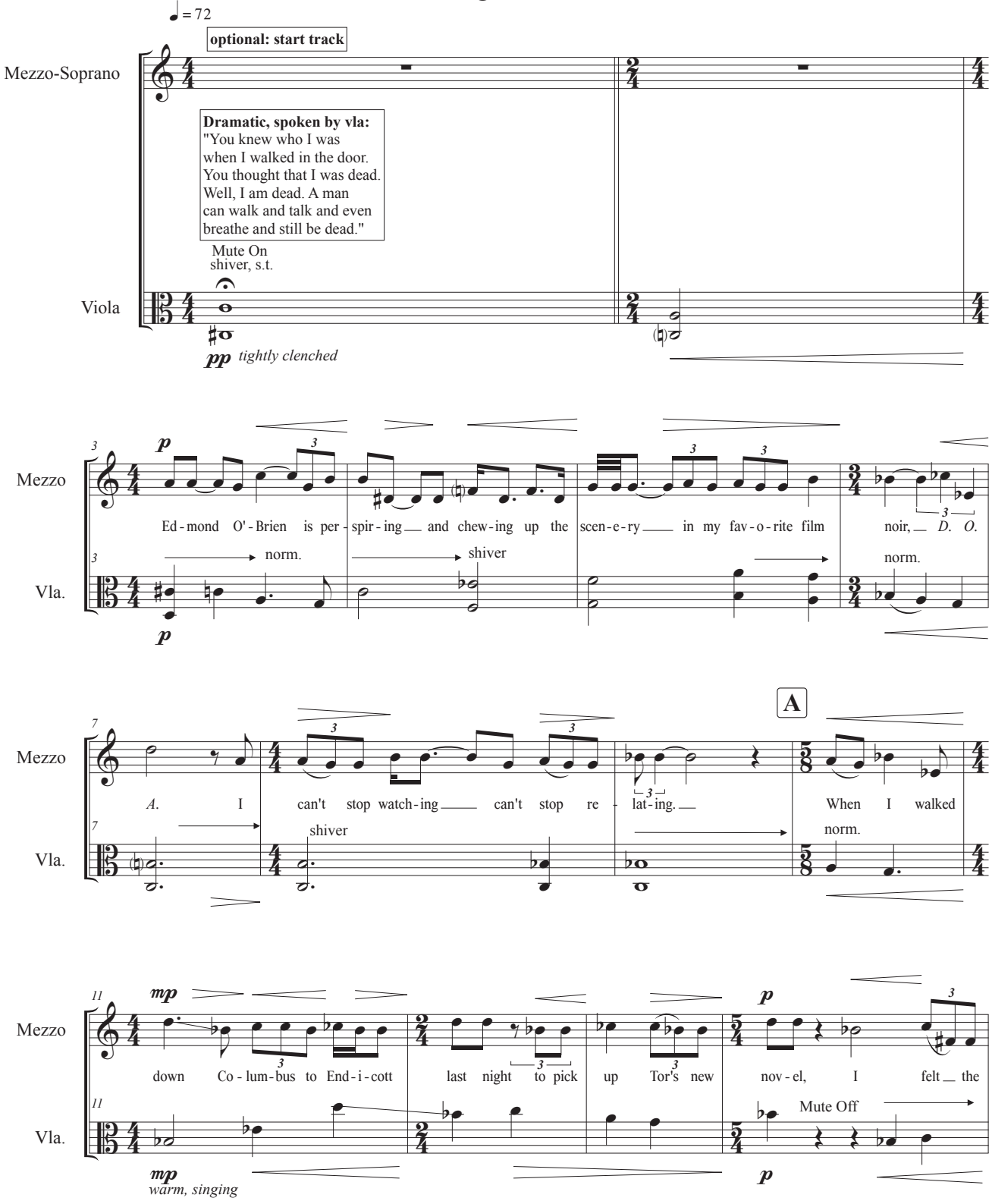
"You knew who I was
when I walked in the door.
You thought that I was dead.
Well, I am dead. A man
can walk and talk and even
breathe and still be dead."
Edmond O'Brien is perspiring
and chewing up the scenery
in my favorite film noir,
D.O.A. I can't stop watching,
can't stop relating. When I walked down
Columbus to Endicott last night
to pick up Tor's new novel,
I felt the eyes of every
Puerto Rican teen, crackhead,
yuppie couple focus on my cane
and makeup. "You're dead,"
they seemed to say in chorus.
Somewhere in a dark bar
years ago, I picked up "luminous
poisoning." My eyes glowed
as I sipped my drink. After that,
there was no cure, no turning back.
I had to find out what was gnawing
at my gut. The hardest part's
not even the physical effects:
stumbling like a drunk (Edmond
O'Brien was one of Hollywood's
most active lushes) through
Forties sets, alternating sweats
and fevers, reptilian spots
on face and scalp. It's having
to say goodbye like the scene
where soundtrack violins go crazy
as O'Brien gives his last embrace
to his girlfriend-*cum*-girl
Friday, Paula, played by Pamela
Britton. They're filmdom's least
likely lovers--the squat and jowly
alkie and the homely fundamentally
talentless actress who would hit
the height of her fame as the pillhead-
acting land lady on My Favorite Martian
fifteen years in the future. I don't have
fifteen years, and neither does Edmond
O'Brien. He has just enough time to tell
Paula how much he loves her, then
to drive off in a convertible
for the showdown with his killer.
I'd like to have a showdown too, if I
could figure out which pistol-packing
brilliantined and ruthless villain
in a hound's-tooth overcoat took
my life. Lust, addiction, being
in the wrong place at the wrong
time? That's not the whole
story. Absolute fidelity
to the truth of what I felt, open
to the moment, and in every case
a kind of love: all of the above
brought me to this tottering
self-conscious state--pneumonia,
emaciation, grisly cancer,
no future, heart of gold,
passionate engagement with a great
B film, a glorious summer
afternoon in which to pick up
the ripest plum tomatoes of the year
and prosciutto for the feast I'll cook
tonight for the man I love,
phone calls from my friends
and a walk to the park, ignoring
stares, to clear my head. A day
like any, like no other. Not so bad
for the dead.

Score

D.O.A

Waiting Rooms, Scene 1

Tim Dlugos (1950-1990)

Trey Makler

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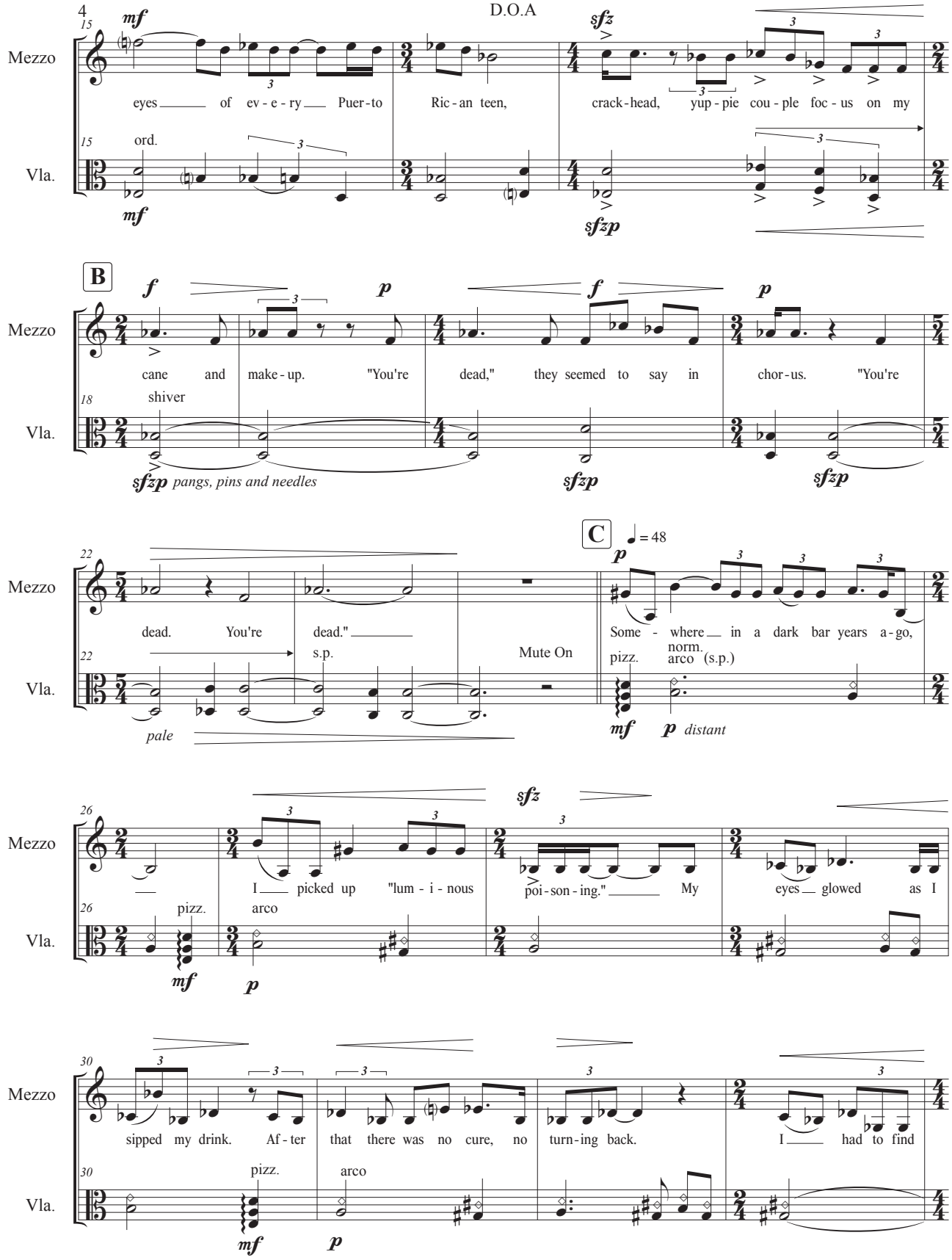
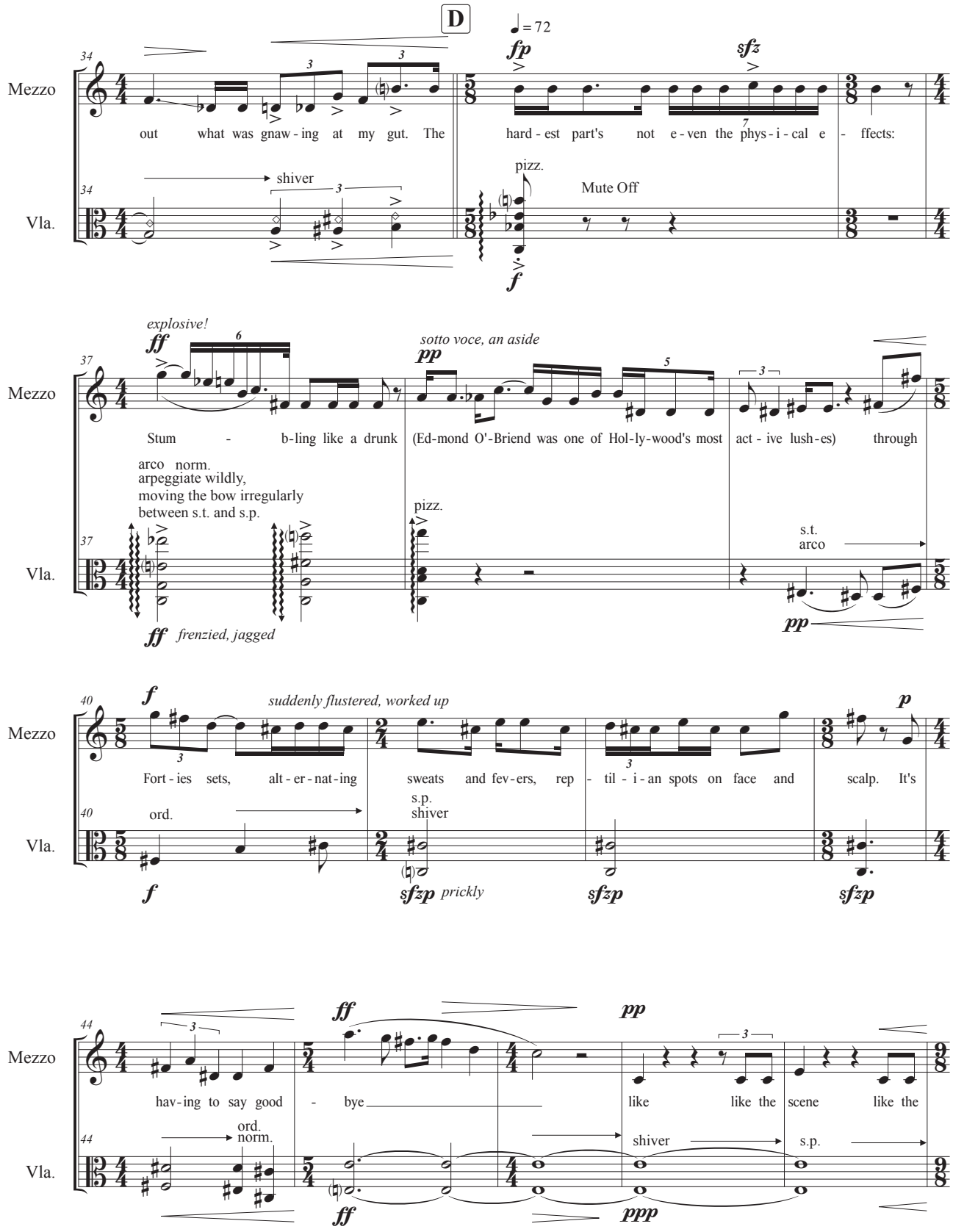
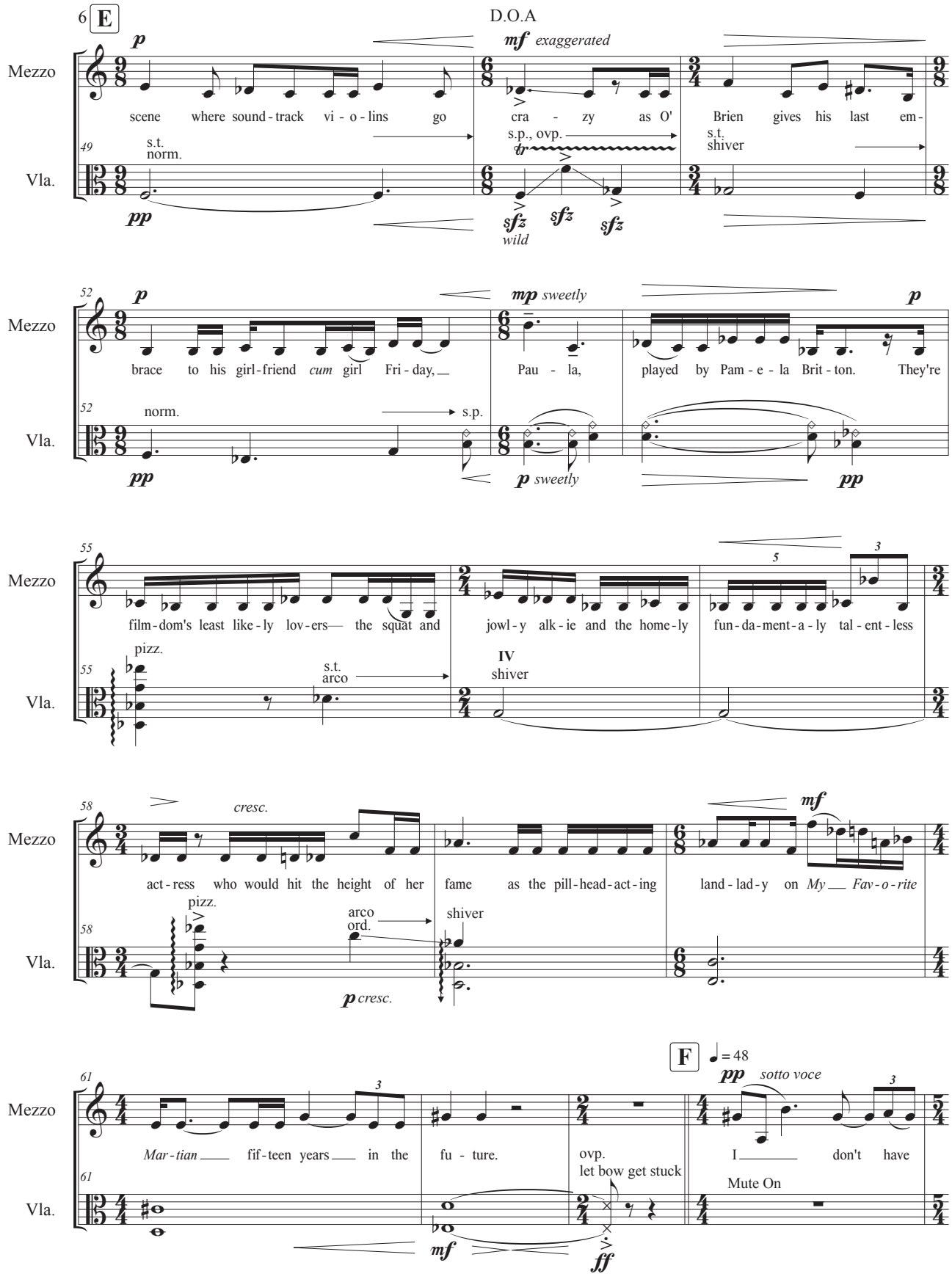
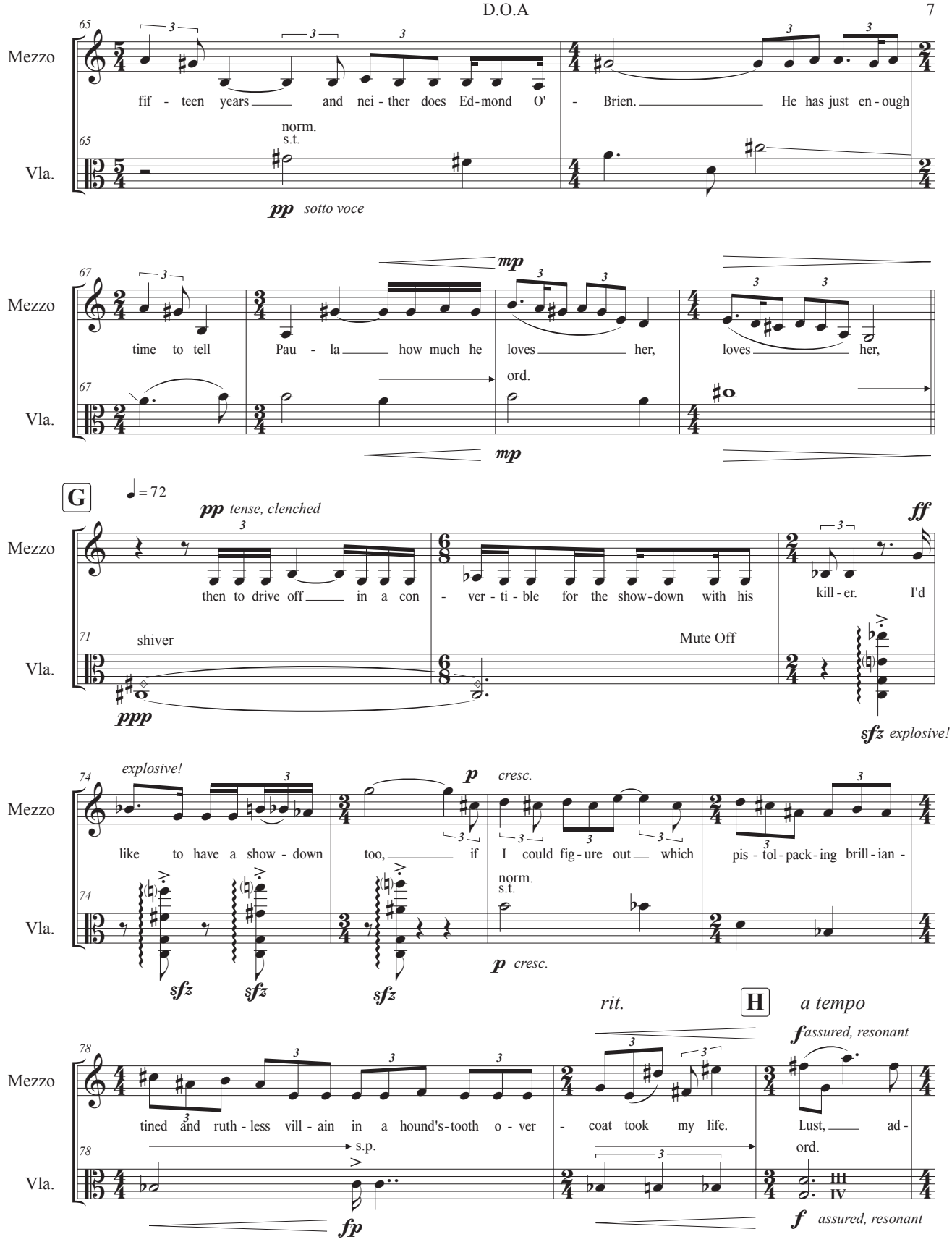
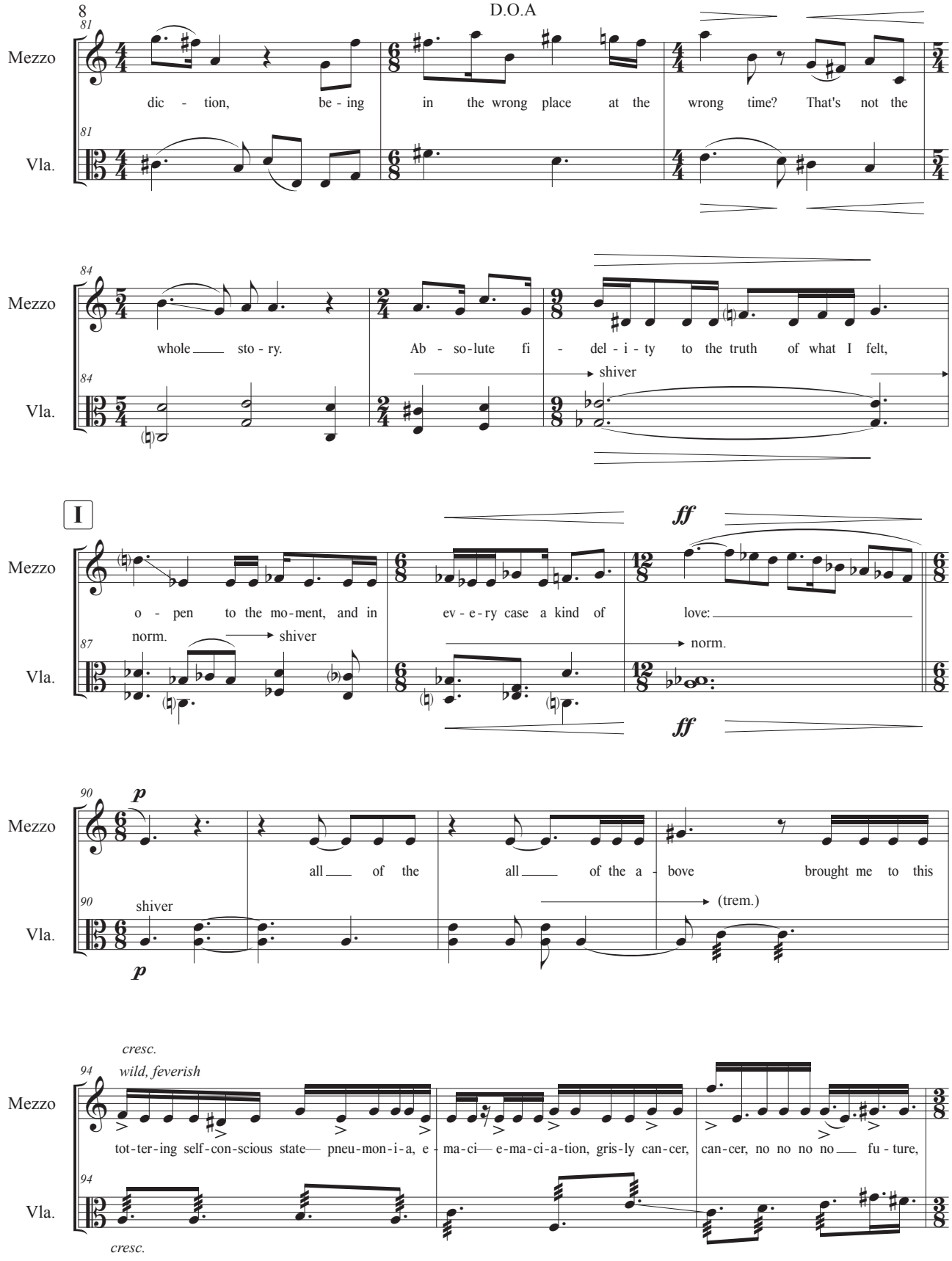
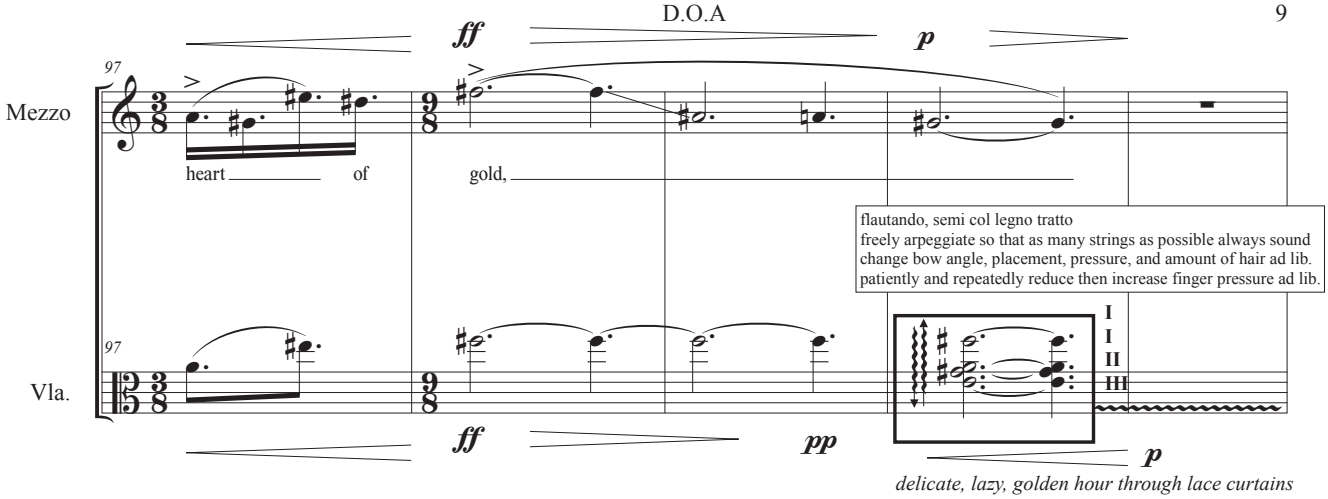
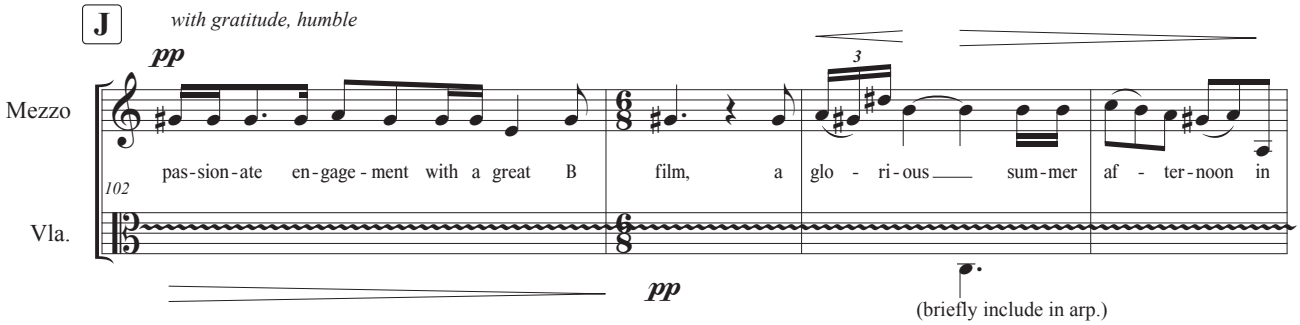
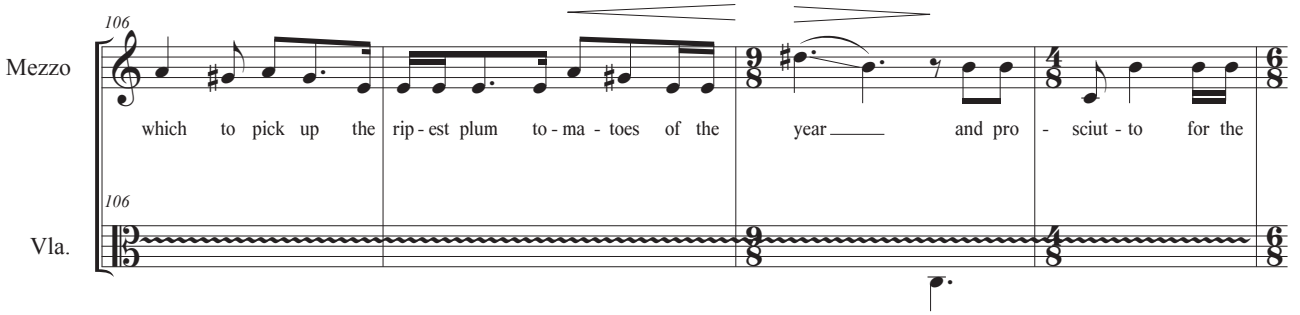
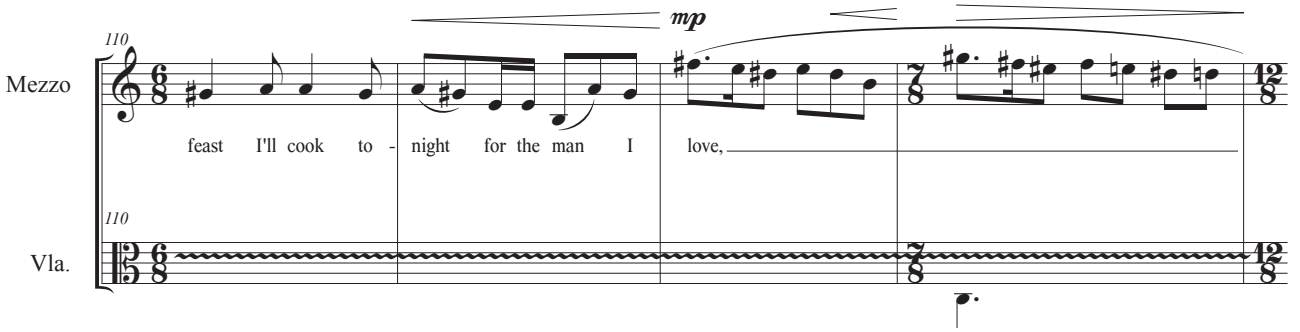
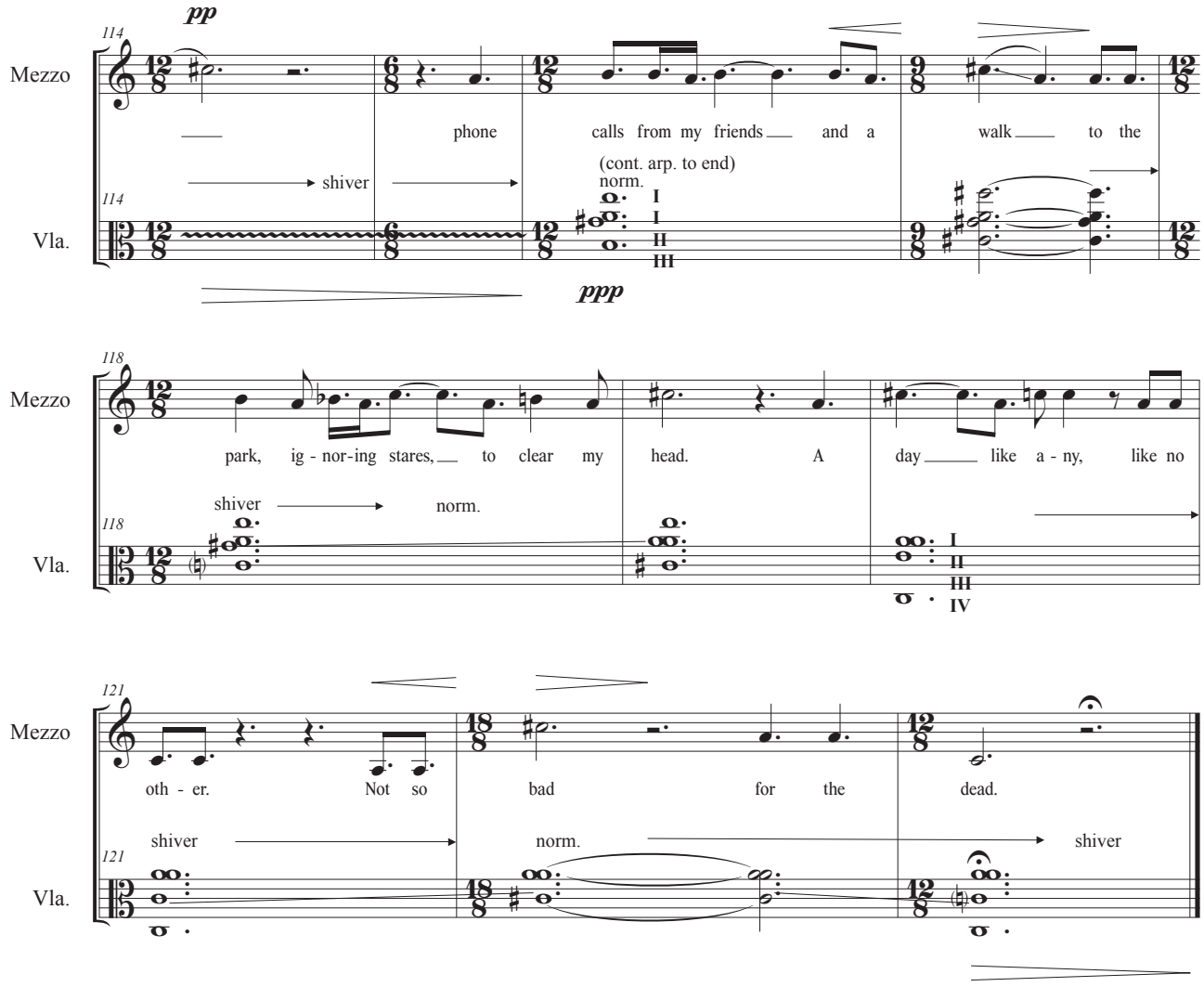
D.O.A

15
mf
Mezzo
eyes of ev - e - ry Puer - to Ric - an teen,
sfz
crack - head, yup - pie cou - ple foc - us on my
15
ord.
Vla.
mf
sfzp
B
f
p
f
p
cane and make - up. "You're dead," they seemed to say in chor - us. "You're
18
shiver
sfzp pangs, pins and needles
sfzp
sfzp
C
♩ = 48
22
dead. You're dead."
s.p.
Mute On
Some - where in a dark bar years a - go,
norm.
pizz. arco (s.p.)
pale
mf
p distant
26
sfz
I picked up "lum - i - nous poi - son - ing." My eyes glowed as I
pizz.
arco
mf
p
30
sipped my drink. Af - ter that there was no cure, no turn - ing back. I had to find
pizz.
arco
mf
p

D
♩ = 72
34
Mezzo
Vla.
fp
sfz
out what was gnaw - ing at my gut. The hard - est part's not e - ven the phys - i - cal e - ffects:
shiver
pizz.
Mute Off
f
explosive!
ff
sotto voce, an aside
pp
37
Stum - b-ling like a drunk (Ed-mond O'-Briend was one of Hol-ly-wood's most act - ive lush - es) through
arco norm.
arpeggiate wildly,
moving the bow irregularly
between s.t. and s.p.
pizz.
s.t.
arco
ff frenzied, jagged
pp
40
f
suddenly flustered, worked up
p
Fort - ies sets, alt - er - nat - ing sweats and fev - ers, rep - til - i - an spots on face and scalp. It's
ord.
s.p.
shiver
sfzp prickly
44
ff
pp
hav - ing to say good - bye like like the scene like the
ord.
norm.
shiver
s.p.
ppp

6 E
D.O.A
Mezzo
Vla.
p
mf exaggerated
scene where sound-track vi-o-lins go
cra-zy as O'
Brien gives his last em-
s.t.
norm.
s.p., ovp.
s.t.
shiver
pp
sfz sfz sfz
wild
52
mp sweetly
p
brace to his girl-friend cum girl Fri-day,
Pau-la,
played by Pam-e-la Brit-ton. They're
norm.
s.p.
p sweetly
55
film-dom's least like-ly lov-ers— the squat and
jowl-y alk-ie and the home-ly
fun-da-ment-a-ly tal-ent-less
pizz.
s.t.
arco
IV
shiver
58
cresc.
mf
act-ress who would hit the height of her
fame as the pill-head-act-ing
land-lad-y on My Fav-o-rite
pizz.
arco
ord.
shiver
p cresc.
F
♩= 48
61
pp sotto voce
Mar-tian fif-teen years in the
fu-ture.
ovp.
let bow get stuck
I don't have
Mute On
mf
ff

65
Mezzo
fif - teen years and nei - ther does Ed-mond O' - Brien. He has just en - ough
norm.
s.t.
65
Vla.
pp sotto voce
67
mp
Mezzo
time to tell Pau - la how much he loves her, loves her,
ord.
67
Vla.
mp
G
♩= 72
pp tense, clenched
ff
Mezzo
then to drive off in a con - ver - ti - ble for the show-down with his kill - er. I'd
71
shiver
Mute Off
Vla.
ppp
sfz explosive!
74
explosive!
p cresc.
Mezzo
like to have a show - down too, if I could fig - ure out which pis - tol - pack - ing brill - ian -
norm.
s.t.
74
Vla.
sfz sfz sfz
p cresc.
rit.
H
a tempo
f assured, resonant
78
Mezzo
tined and ruth - less vill - ain in a hound's-tooth o - ver - coat took my life. Lust, ad -
s.p.
ord.
78
Vla.
fp
III
IV
f assured, resonant

81
Mezzo
dic - tion, be - ing in the wrong place at the wrong time? That's not the
81
Vla.
84
Mezzo
whole sto - ry. Ab - so-lute fi - del - i - ty to the truth of what I felt,
shiver
84
Vla.
I
ff
Mezzo
o - pen to the mo-ment, and in ev - e - ry case a kind of love:
norm.
shiver
norm.
87
Vla.
ff
90
p
Mezzo
all of the all of the a - bove brought me to this
shiver
(trem.)
90
Vla.
p
cresc.
wild, feverish
94
Mezzo
tot-ter-ing self-con-scious state— pneu-mon-i-a, e - ma-ci— e-ma-ci-a-tion, gris-ly can-cer, can-cer, no no no no fu - ture,
94
Vla.
cresc.


Mezzo
Vla.
97
ff
p
heart of gold,
flautando, semi col legno tratto
freely arpeggiate so that as many strings as possible always sound
change bow angle, placement, pressure, and amount of hair ad lib.
patiently and repeatedly reduce then increase finger pressure ad lib.
I
I
II
III
pp
delicate, lazy, golden hour through lace curtains

J
with gratitude, humble
Mezzo
Vla.
102
pp
3
pas-sion-ate en-gage-ment with a great B film, a glo - ri-ous sum-mer af - ter-noon in
(briefly include in arp.)


Mezzo
Vla.
106
which to pick up the rip-est plum to-ma-toes of the year and pro - sciut - to for the


Mezzo
Vla.
110
mp
feast I'll cook to - night for the man I love,

pp
114
Mezzo
phone calls from my friends and a walk to the
shiver
(cont. arp. to end)
norm.
114
Vla.
I
I
II
III
ppp
118
Mezzo
park, ig - nor-ing stares, to clear my head. A day like a - ny, like no
shiver
norm.
118
Vla.
I
II
III
IV
121
Mezzo
oth - er. Not so bad for the dead.
shiver
norm.
shiver
121
Vla.

Knowing It

Scene 2 from *Waiting Rooms*
for voice, acoustic-electric guitar, and pedals

Trey Makler

Knowing It by Tim Dlugos (1950-1990)

I open my eyes you
kiss me, say It's dawn
I smile, don't even check
go back to sleep you too

Buxtehude wakes us up
your roommate turned the stereo
on, which is o.k. we kept him
up late w / whatever we did

last night & I'm sorry
but not enough to have stopped
what he must consider the noise
we made we call it something

else over here in the space
that our bodies fill up
w / their action: coming
home & knowing it

Score

Knowing It

Scene 2 from Waiting Rooms

Trey Makler

gradually pull D string out of tune to C♯
over the duration of the scene

Create loop with these figures
Add a few layers to make a "bed"

30"

Acoustic Guitar

(behind nut)

lush, cozy, lazy

15"

4 **Patient, not too precise (♩. = 50-54)**

Vox.

I o - pen my eyes you kiss me say It's dawn I smile, don't e - ven check go back to sleep you too

4

Gtr.

(bend behind nut) 4 5 (with slide) +delay +fuzz -fuzz -delay

blurry, slurred, trailing off

loop

Interlude I: Sleep Sequence
Oscillate btwn collections
freely and sparingly inflect

7

(add some of this to loop)

15"

Gtr.

+delay

swishing sheets, soft snores, whistled breath; floaty and repetitive

loop

20"

(unpitched snaps and crackles, like a bad cable)

10 +fuzz

Gtr.

loop x o x o x o x o x o x o x o

15"

13 **Sing-songy, carefree**

Vox.

Bux - te - hu - de wakes us up your room - mate turned the ste - re - o on which is o. k.

(add some of this to loop)

-fuzz

13

Gtr.

+fuzz

loop

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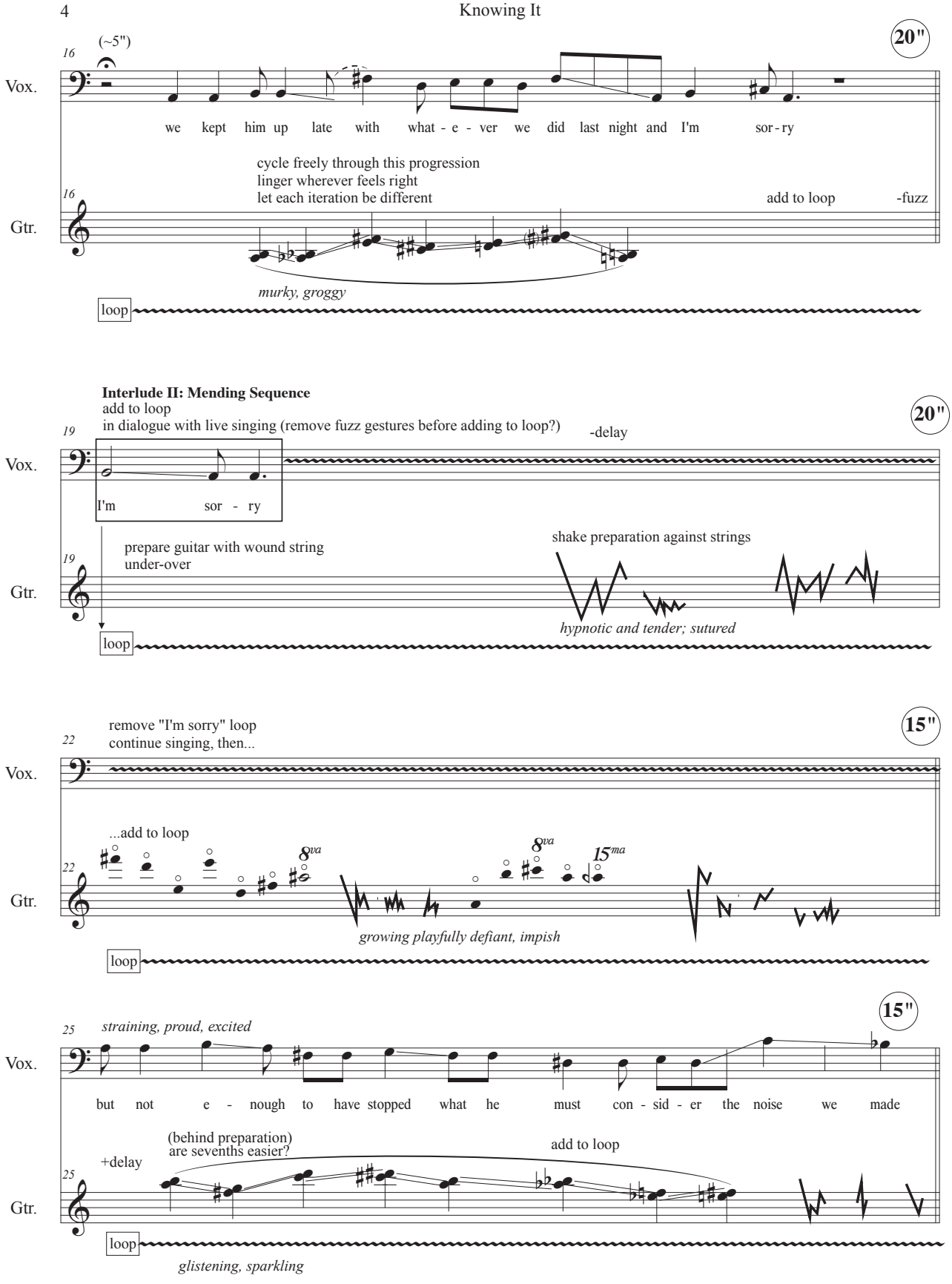
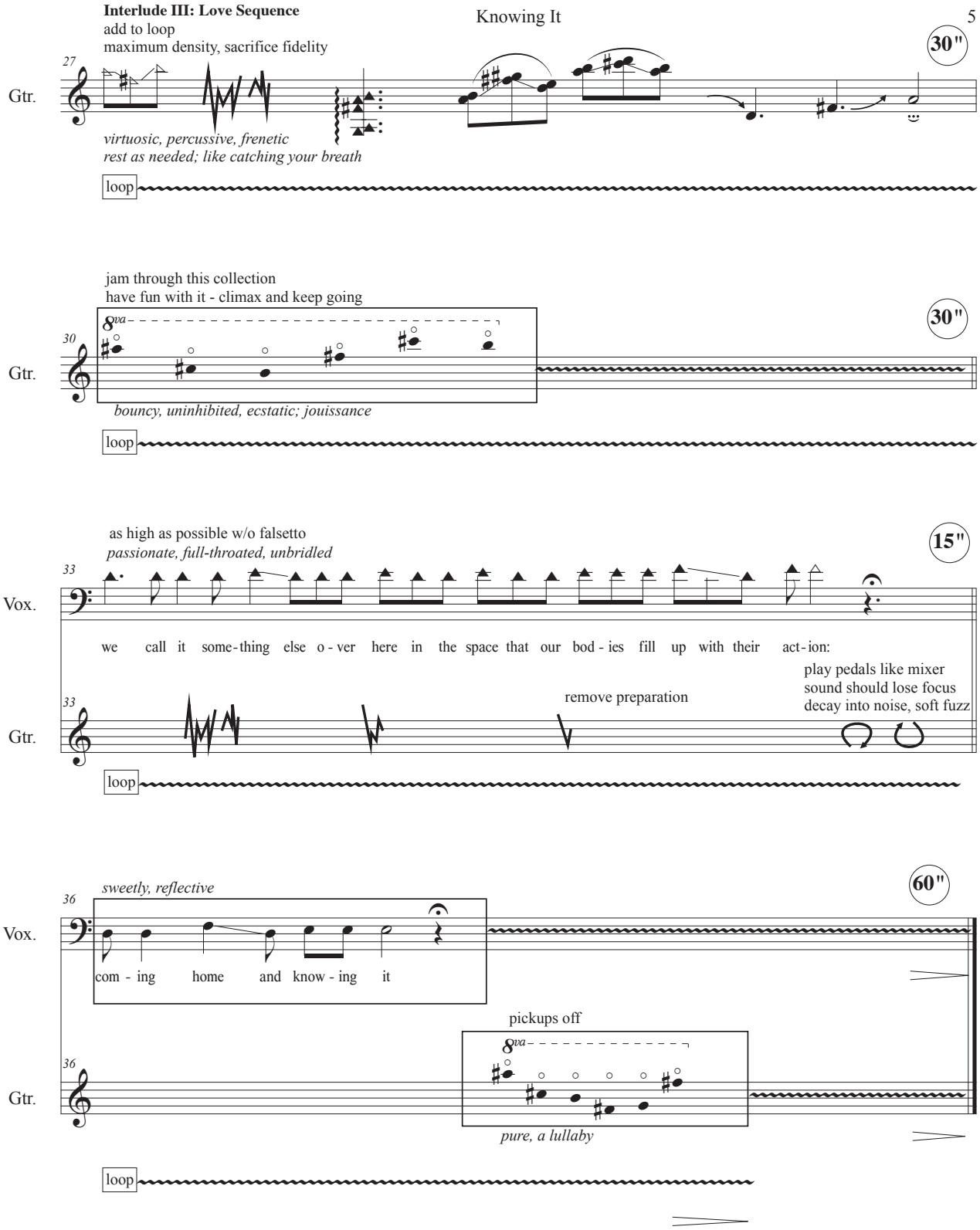

20"
16
(~5")
Vox.
we kept him up late with what - e - ver we did last night and I'm sor - ry
cycle freely through this progression
linger wherever feels right
let each iteration be different
add to loop
-fuzz
16
Gtr.
murky, groggy
loop
Interlude II: Mending Sequence
add to loop
in dialogue with live singing (remove fuzz gestures before adding to loop?)
20"
19
-delay
Vox.
I'm sor - ry
prepare guitar with wound string
under-over
shake preparation against strings
19
Gtr.
hypnotic and tender; sutured
loop
15"
remove "I'm sorry" loop
continue singing, then...
22
Vox.
...add to loop
8va
8va
15ma
22
Gtr.
growing playfully defiant, impish
loop
15"
25
straining, proud, excited
Vox.
but not e - nough to have stopped what he must con - sid - er the noise we made
(behind preparation)
are sevenths easier?
add to loop
+delay
25
Gtr.
loop
glistening, sparkling


Interlude III: Love Sequence
add to loop
maximum density, sacrifice fidelity
27
Gtr.
30"
virtuosic, percussive, frenetic
rest as needed; like catching your breath
loop
jam through this collection
have fun with it - climax and keep going
8va
30
Gtr.
30"
bouncy, uninhibited, ecstatic; jouissance
loop
as high as possible w/o falsetto
passionate, full-throated, unbridled
15"
33
Vox.
we call it some-thing else o-ver here in the space that our bod-ies fill up with their act-ion:
33
Gtr.
remove preparation
play pedals like mixer
sound should lose focus
decay into noise, soft fuzz
loop
sweetly, reflective
60"
36
Vox.
com-ing home and know-ing it
pickups off
8va
36
Gtr.
pure, a lullaby
loop

Retrovir

Scene 3 from *Waiting Rooms*
for bassoon, voice, and viola

Trey Makler

Instrumentation

Bassoon
Voice (F♯3 - A4)
Viola

Each system lasts for approximately thirty seconds.

Accidentals carry across phrases, with reminders in busier sections.

Material does not need to align in any particular way.

Gestures should be played freely, without a clear meter or rhythmic grid.

Boxed material is to be repeated freely ad lib. and may be stretched, fragmented, or explored.

Wedges show embouchure sag (bassoon) or overpressure (viola).

M = multiphonic. Player should choose multiphonics that speak easily and have a prominent B4 overtone.
Suggested multiphonics from *Contemporary Techniques for the Bassoon: Multiphonics* by Jamie Leigh Sampson:
#107 #113 #126

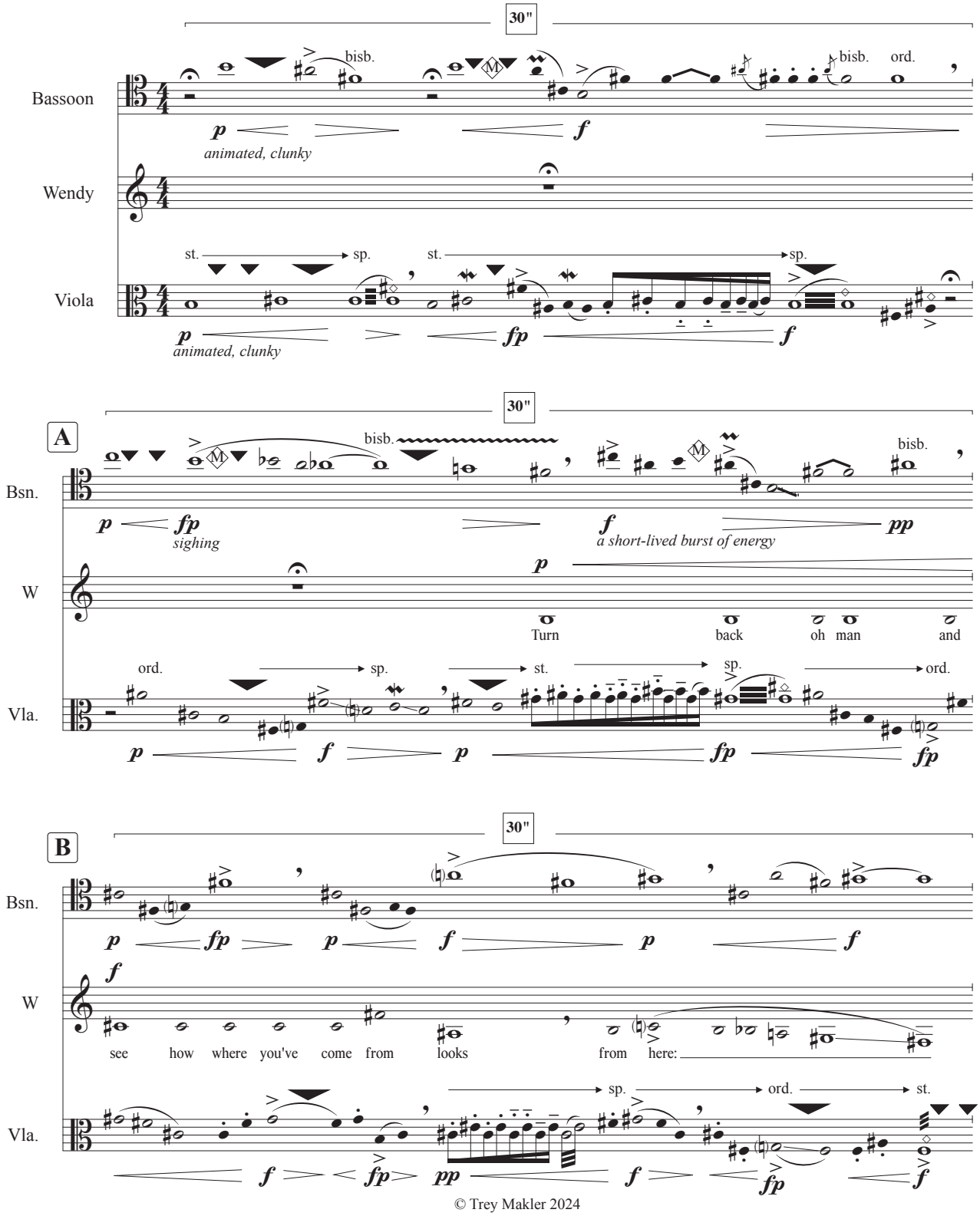
st. = sul tasto
sp. = sul ponticello
shiver = shake bow on string with slight overpressure, producing irregular creaks and groans

Excerpt from *Retrovir* by Tim Dlugos (1950-1990)

Turn
back oh man
and see how where you've come from
looks from here: the light-
filled leak of sunrise, drone
of morning's clarity and fleeting sense
of firm direction, lunch with wine,
siesta and the afternoon you're part of.
Here the sky is always blue
and white...

Score

Retrovir

Tim Dlugos (1950-1990) — Scene 3 from *Waiting Rooms* — Trey Makler

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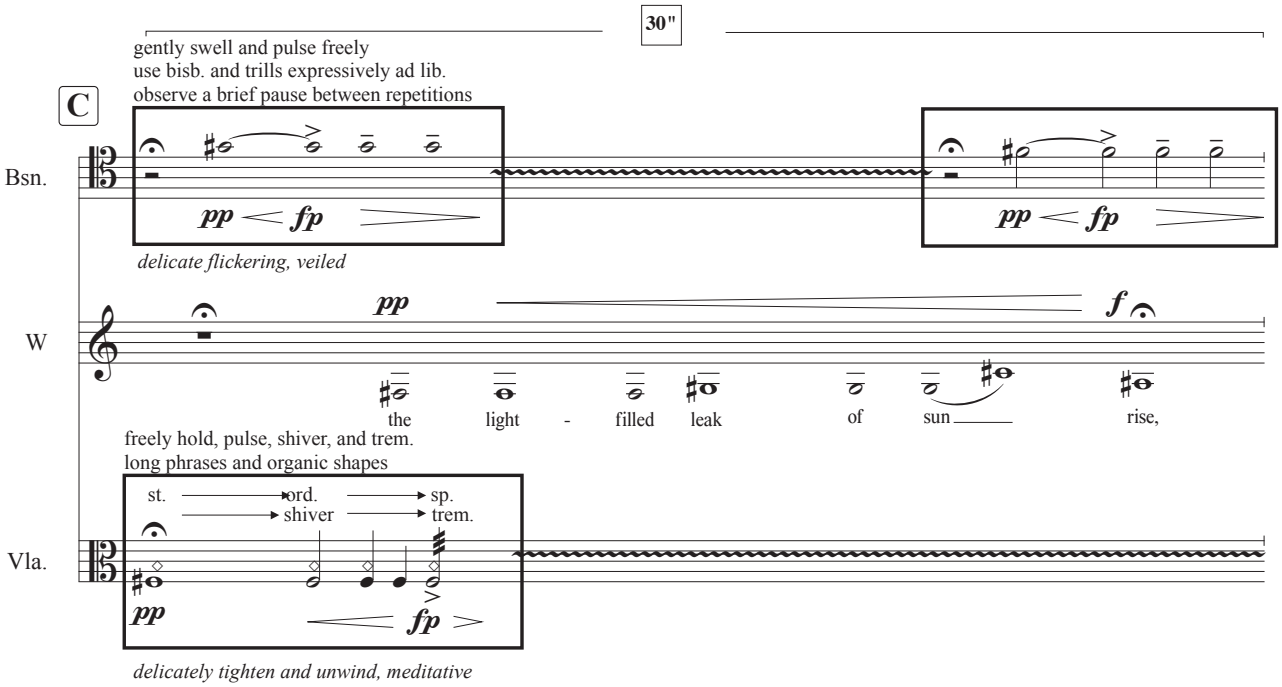
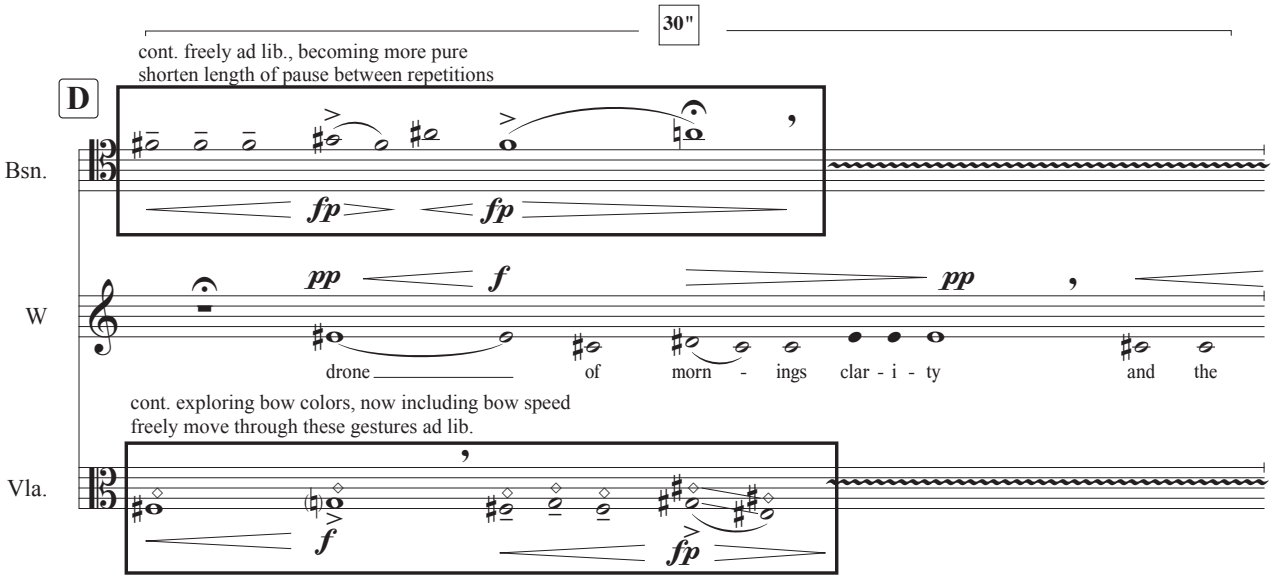
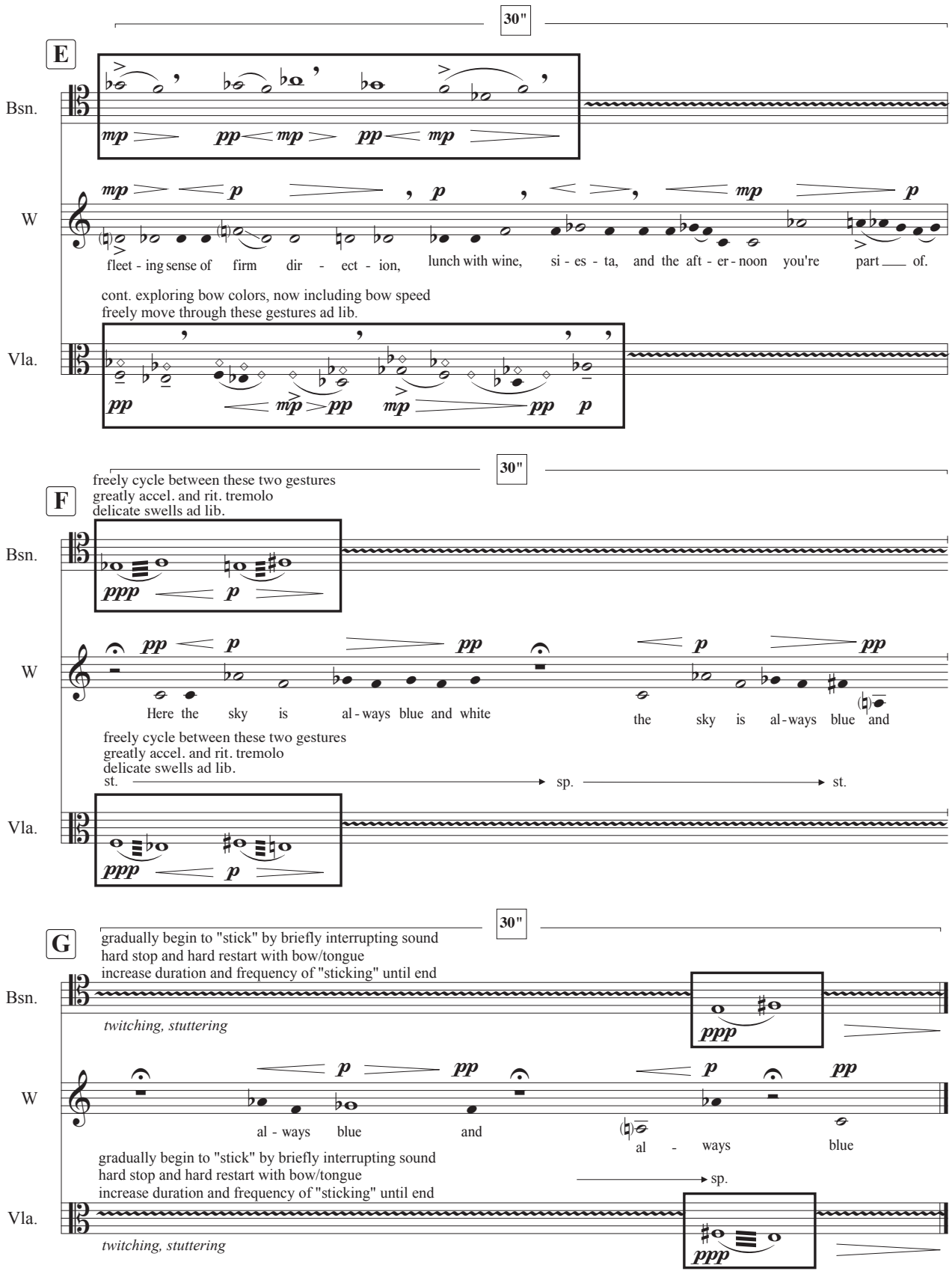

30"
gently swell and pulse freely
use bisb. and trills expressively ad lib.
observe a brief pause between repetitions
C
Bsn.
pp fp
pp fp
delicate flickering, veiled
W
pp
f
the light - filled leak of sun rise,
freely hold, pulse, shiver, and trem.
long phrases and organic shapes
Vla.
st. ord. sp.
shiver trem.
pp fp
delicately tighten and unwind, meditative


30"
cont. freely ad lib., becoming more pure
shorten length of pause between repetitions
D
Bsn.
fp fp
W
pp f pp
drone of morn - ings clar - i - ty and the
cont. exploring bow colors, now including bow speed
freely move through these gestures ad lib.
Vla.
f fp


30"
E
Bsn.
mp pp mp pp mp
W
mp p p mp p
fleet - ing sense of firm dir - ect - ion, lunch with wine, si - es - ta, and the aft - er - noon you're part of.
cont. exploring bow colors, now including bow speed
freely move through these gestures ad lib.
Vla.
pp mp pp mp pp p
30"
F
freely cycle between these two gestures
greatly accel. and rit. tremolo
delicate swells ad lib.
Bsn.
ppp p
W
pp p pp p pp
Here the sky is al - ways blue and white
the sky is al - ways blue and
freely cycle between these two gestures
greatly accel. and rit. tremolo
delicate swells ad lib.
st. sp. st.
Vla.
ppp p
30"
G
gradually begin to "stick" by briefly interrupting sound
hard stop and hard restart with bow/tongue
increase duration and frequency of "sticking" until end
Bsn.
twitching, stuttering
ppp
W
p pp p pp
al - ways blue and al - ways blue
gradually begin to "stick" by briefly interrupting sound
hard stop and hard restart with bow/tongue
increase duration and frequency of "sticking" until end
sp.
Vla.
twitching, stuttering
ppp

Joe

Scene 4 from *Waiting Rooms*
for singing violist and absent singing violist

Trey Makler

Both players speak and sing. Viola II should be pre-recorded or offstage. Adjust dynamics as necessary.
Wooden mutes are preferred, but if unavailable players may use rubber mutes.

Viola I should play freely against Viola II. Imagine you are walking side-by-side with someone, and constantly coming in and out of step with them.

Use circular bowing and ricochet to explore rich and varied timbres. Embrace their unpredictably to draw out different colors.

Let glissandi be sticky, with a slight lingering on the attack.

Boxed musical material should be repeated for the marked duration.

Boxed text material should be spoken in a casual, comfortable voice. Place text approximately where the box falls in the measure, allowing pauses between words or phrases separated by multiple spaces (as in "we walk to the train"). Let the rhythm of the text be conversational - do not try to fit it into the meter precisely.

sp. = sul ponticello
st. = sul tasto
ric. = ricochet
circ. bow = circular bow

Overpressure is shown with a wedge.

Joe (original text, viola II)

It's cold, you note
(correctly) as we walk
to the train

it's midnight, it
will be colder
when you leave
6 a.m. or so

What I Have To Do:
think about Robert Lowell
so I can be coherent
tomorrow a.m.

I don't think
I have to think about
you, but I do
anyway

about you next to me anyway
(such an ego!) under
the dim lights

in a blue seat
on an old train
that has not started to move

Remixed Text (viola I)

you leave

when you leave I
I I I I think about you
next to me

you leave me on an old train
What I Have To Do:
think about Robert Lowell
so I can be coherent
tomorrow a.m.

Midnight
6 a.m.
tomorrow
anyway

What I Have To Do
I don't think I have to
but I do
I do

you note
you leave
you have to you
you
you don't
you don't
you don't
you
do

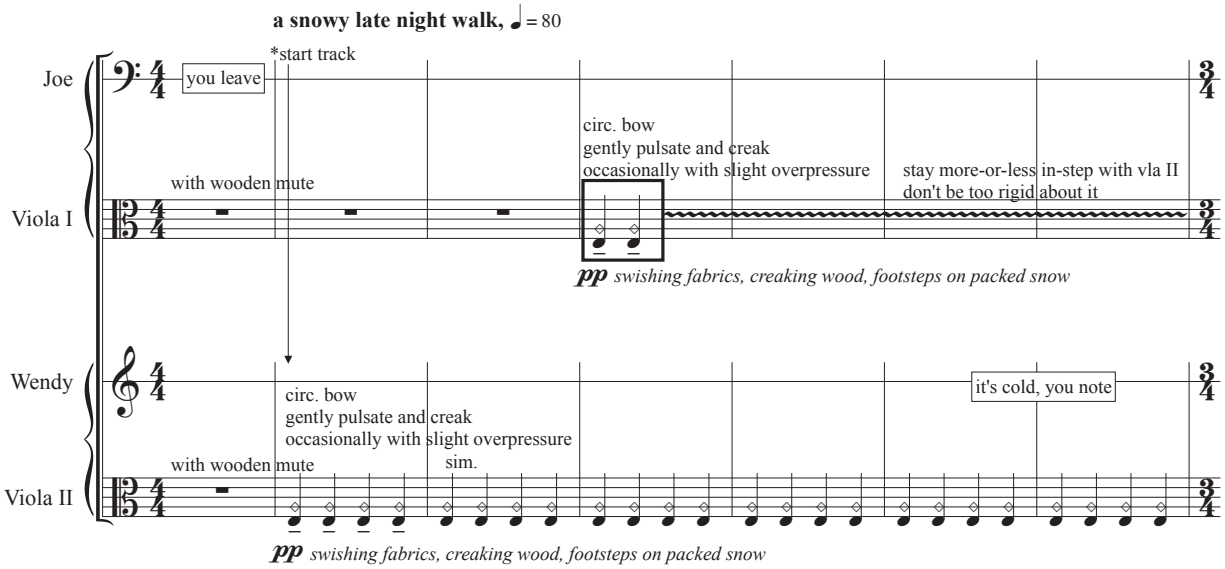
Score

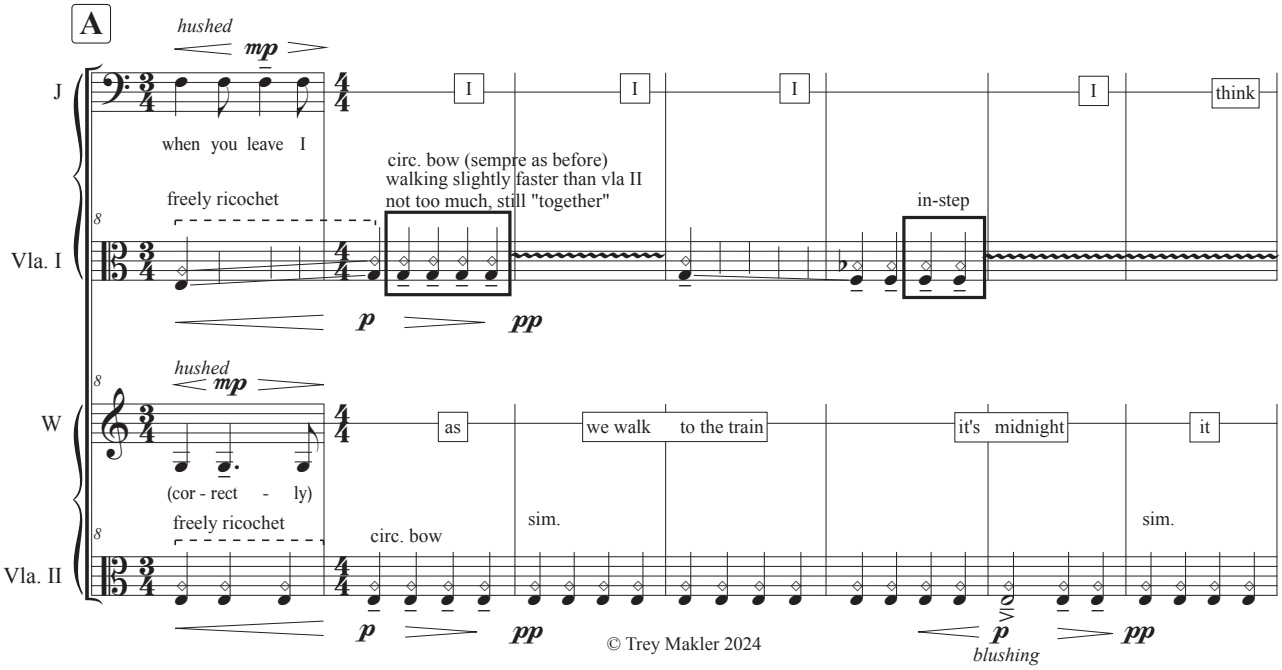
Joe

Tim Dlugos (1950-1990)

Scene 4 from *Waiting Rooms*

Trey Makler





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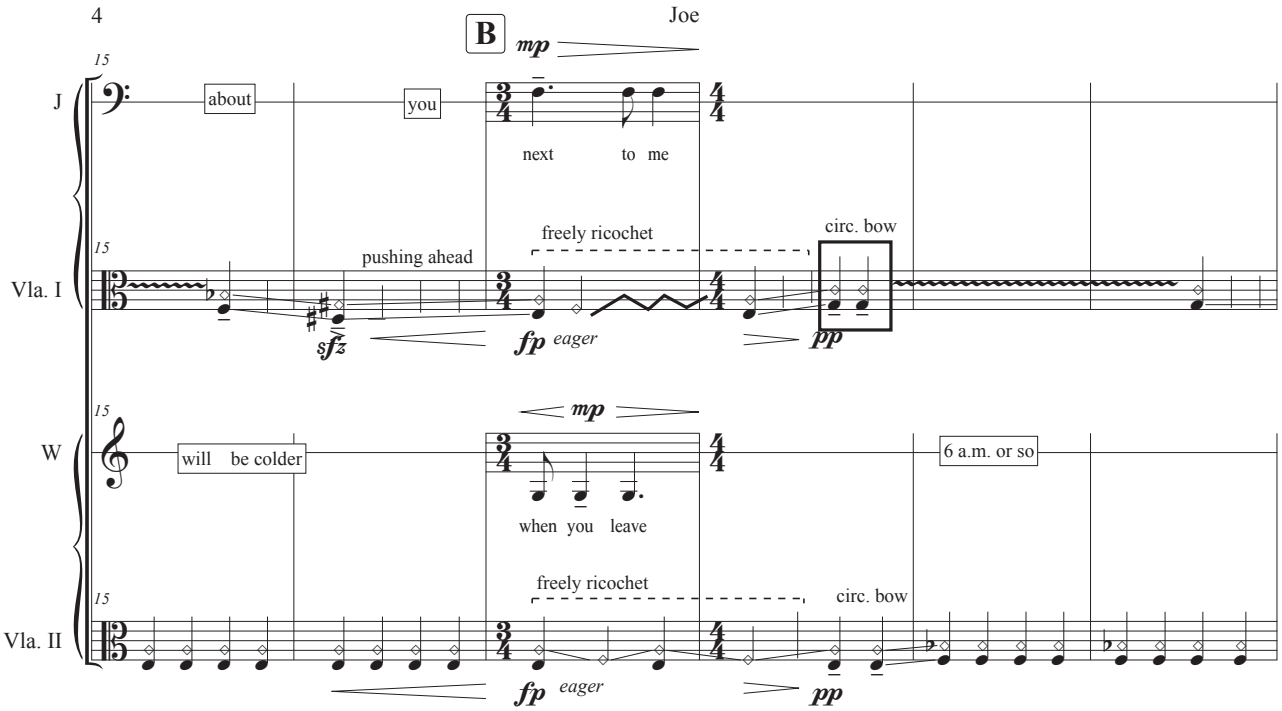
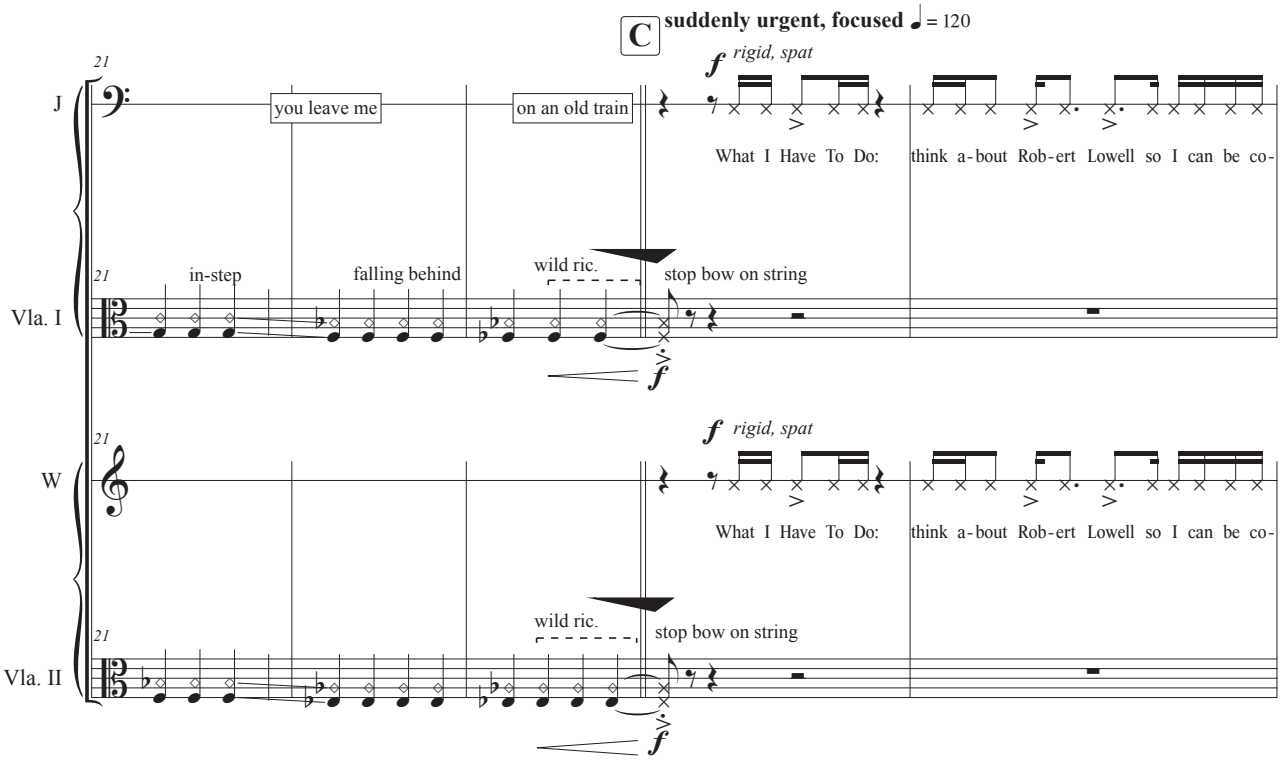
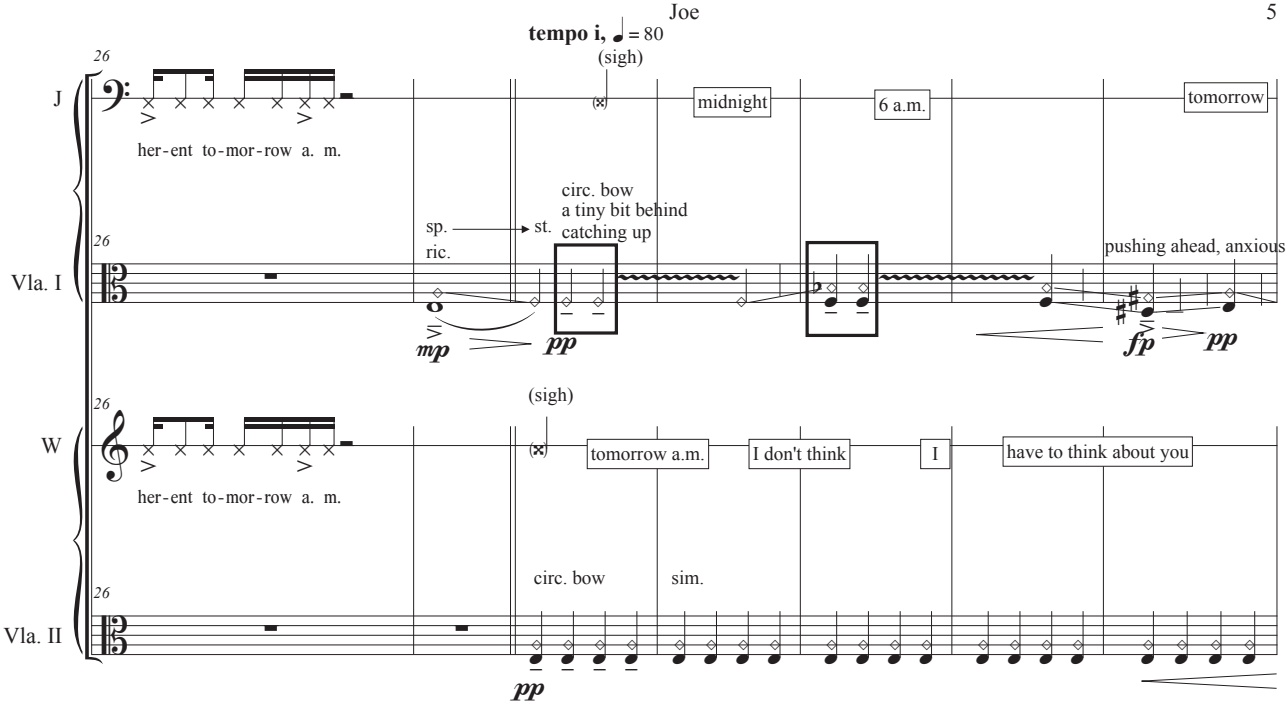
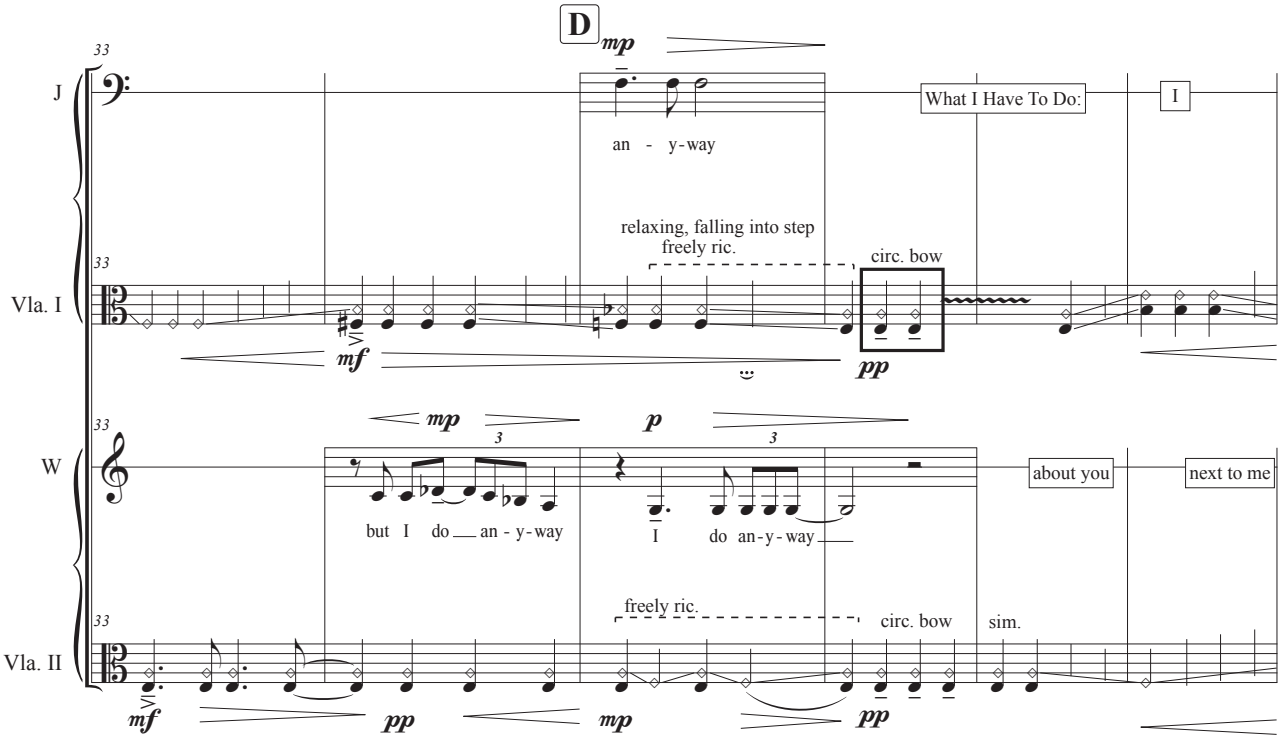
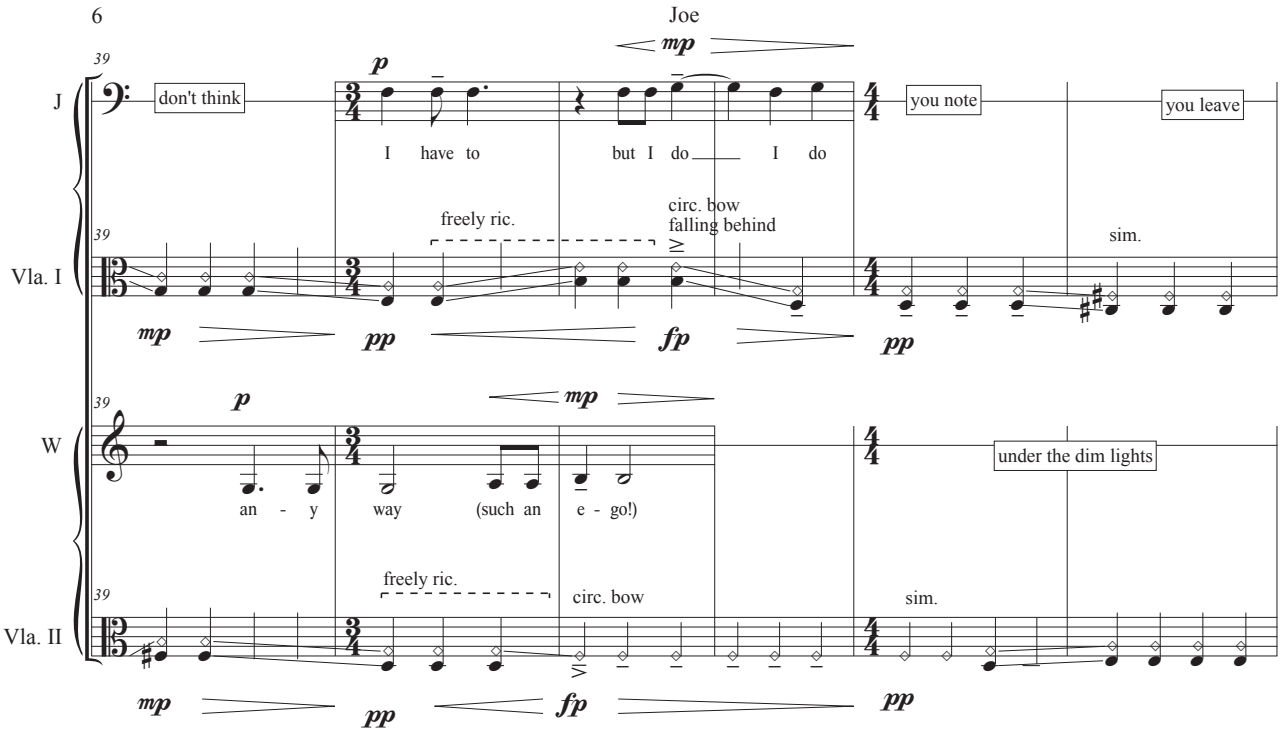
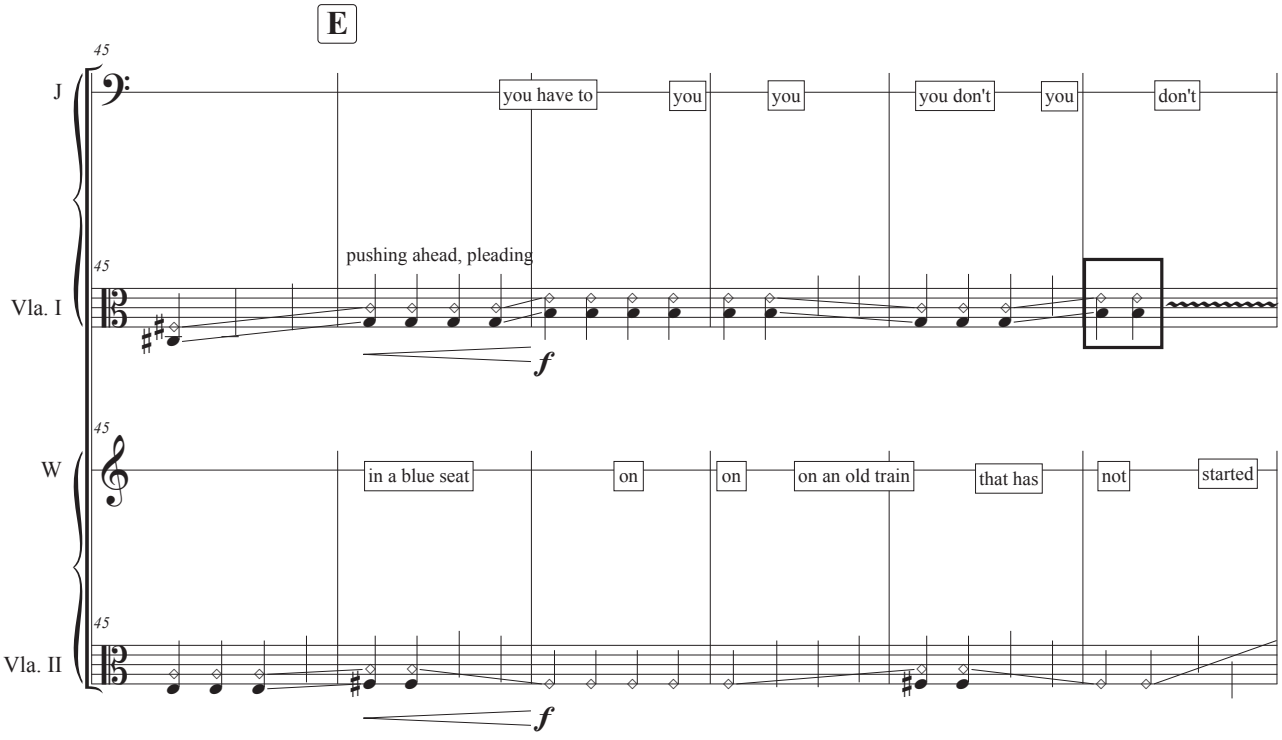
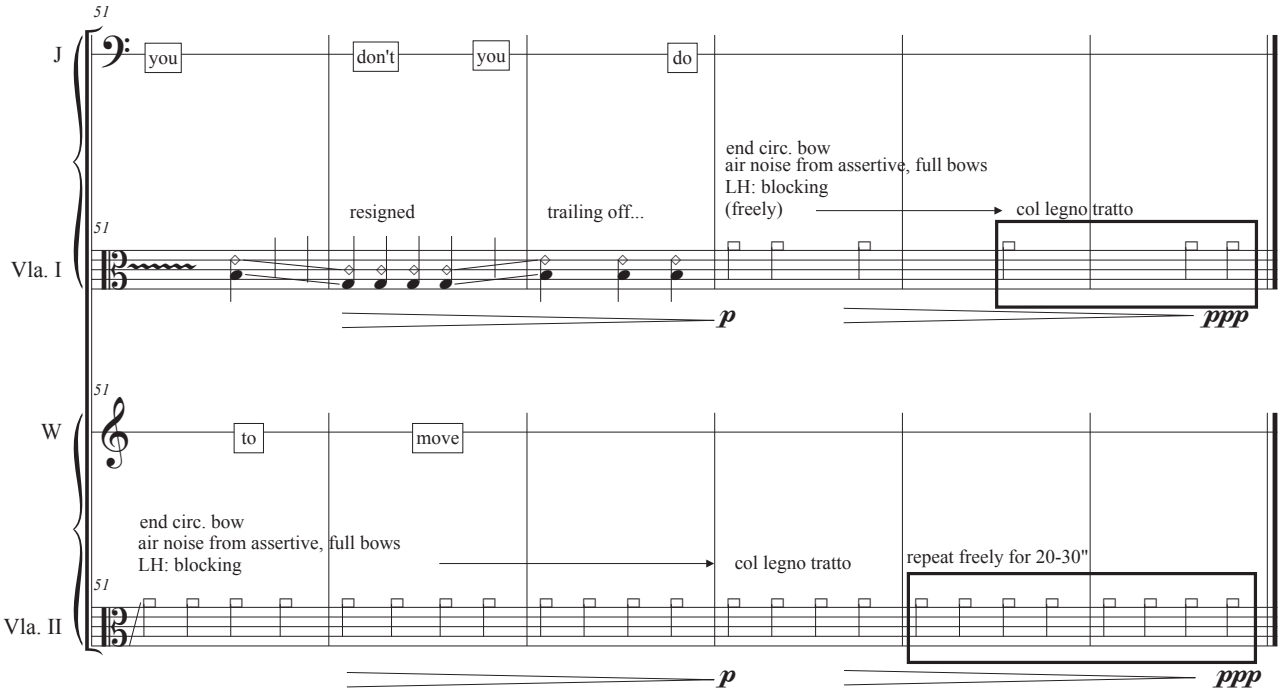

B
mp
15
J
about
you
next to me
15
Vla. I
pushing ahead
freely ricochet
circ. bow
sfz
fp eager
pp
15
W
mp
will be colder
when you leave
6 a.m. or so
15
Vla. II
freely ricochet
circ. bow
fp eager
pp


C
suddenly urgent, focused ♩ = 120
21
J
you leave me
on an old train
f rigid, spat
What I Have To Do:
think a-bout Rob-ert Lowell so I can be co-
21
Vla. I
in-step
falling behind
wild ric.
stop bow on string
f
21
W
f rigid, spat
What I Have To Do:
think a-bout Rob-ert Lowell so I can be co-
21
Vla. II
wild ric.
stop bow on string
f


tempo i, ♩ = 80
(sigh)
J
her-ent to-mor-row a. m.
midnight
6 a.m.
tomorrow
Vla. I
sp.
ric.
st.
circ. bow
a tiny bit behind
catching up
pushing ahead, anxious
mp
pp
fp
pp
W
(sigh)
her-ent to-mor-row a. m.
tomorrow a.m.
I don't think
I
have to think about you
Vla. II
circ. bow
sim.
pp


D
mp
J
an - y-way
What I Have To Do:
I
Vla. I
relaxing, falling into step
freely ric.
circ. bow
mf
pp
W
mp
p
but I do an - y-way
I do an-y-way
about you
next to me
Vla. II
freely ric.
circ. bow
sim.
mf
pp
mp
pp

6
Joe
39
J
don't think
I have to
but I do
I do
you note
you leave
freely ric.
circ. bow
falling behind
Vla. I
sim.
W
an - y way
(such an e - go!)
under the dim lights
freely ric.
circ. bow
Vla. II
sim.


E
45
J
you have to
you
you
you don't
you
don't
pushing ahead, pleading
Vla. I
W
in a blue seat
on
on
on an old train
that has
not
started
Vla. II


51
J
you
don't
you
do
end circ. bow
air noise from assertive, full bows
LH: blocking
(freely)
col legno tratto
51
Vla. I
resigned
trailing off...
p
ppp
51
W
to
move
end circ. bow
air noise from assertive, full bows
LH: blocking
col legno tratto
repeat freely for 20-30"
51
Vla. II
p
ppp

Spinner

Finale from *Waiting Rooms*

for mezzo-soprano, viola, electric guitar, and bassoon

Trey Makler

Instrumentation

Mezzo-Soprano (G3-F5)

Viola

Electric Guitar (reverb, amp)

Bassoon

Accidentals do not carry across octaves.

Boxed materials should be repeated according to instructions.

Vertical arrows clarify moments of alignment across ensemble during free materials.

bisb. = bisbigliando (timbral trill)
st. = sul tasto
sp. = sul ponticello
clt. = col legno tratto
shiver = shake bow on string with slight overpressure to produce irregular creaks, scratches, tones, groans

. . . . . .

Spinner by Tim Dlugos (1950-1990)

If Plato's right, my "you" is a reflection
of years-ago phenomena, the way I felt
when faced with your unquenchable erection
and well of nervous energy, that let you belt

the latest songs and dance till sunrise,
high as a kite whose string I held. You were as sweet
as your nightly two desserts, as unwise
as I, and just as loath to meet

unpleasantness head-on, as when you told me
that we were through. "Impossible," I said,
a disbelief that still enfolds me
when I wake and remember that you're dead.

I'm writing to your shadow, which recedes
with youth we shared and spent, to fill
the absence of your voice, my dull need.
Ghost of a ghost, this puts you farther still.

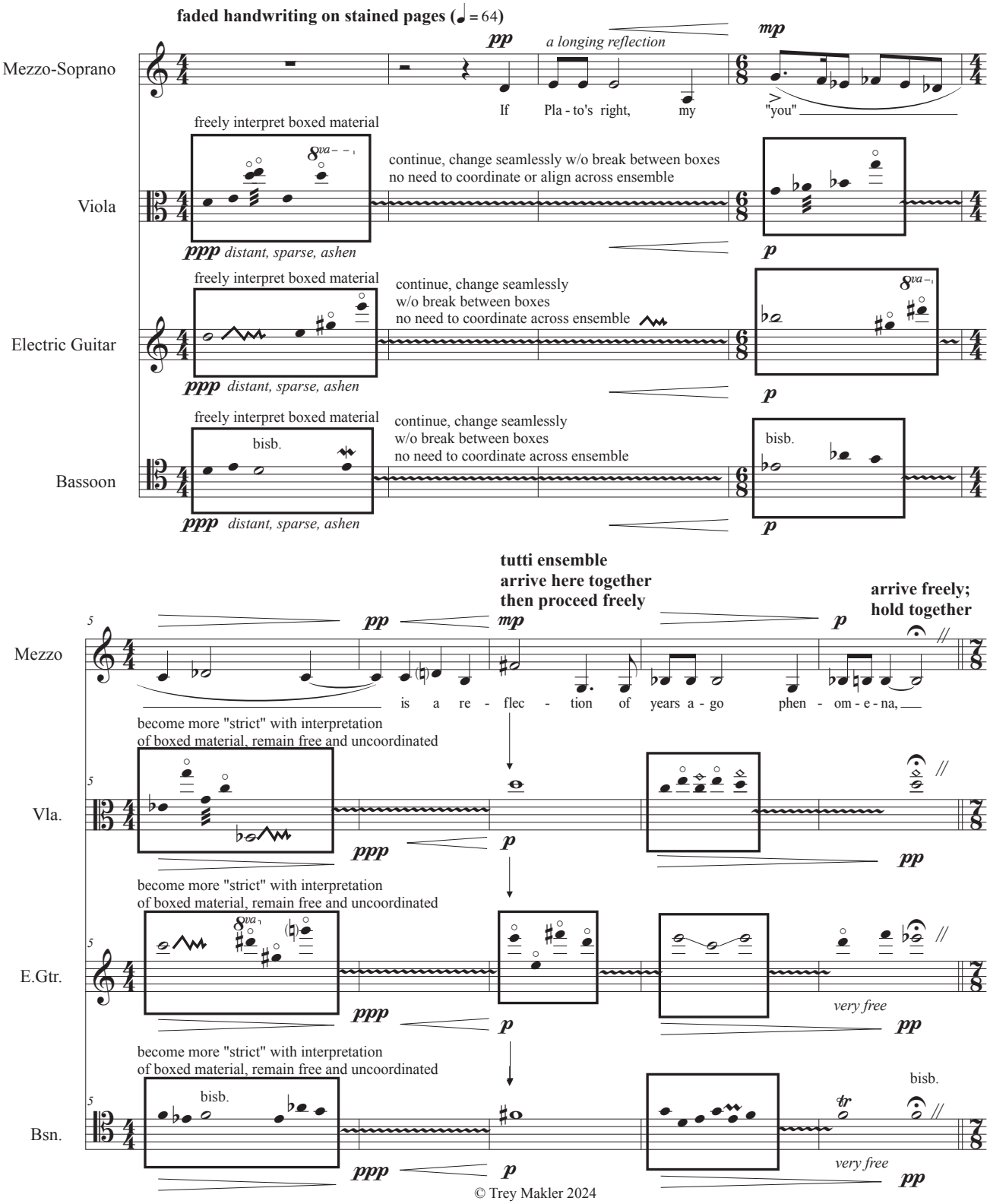
Score

Spinner

Finale from *Waiting Rooms*

Tim Dlugos (1950-1990)

Trey Makler



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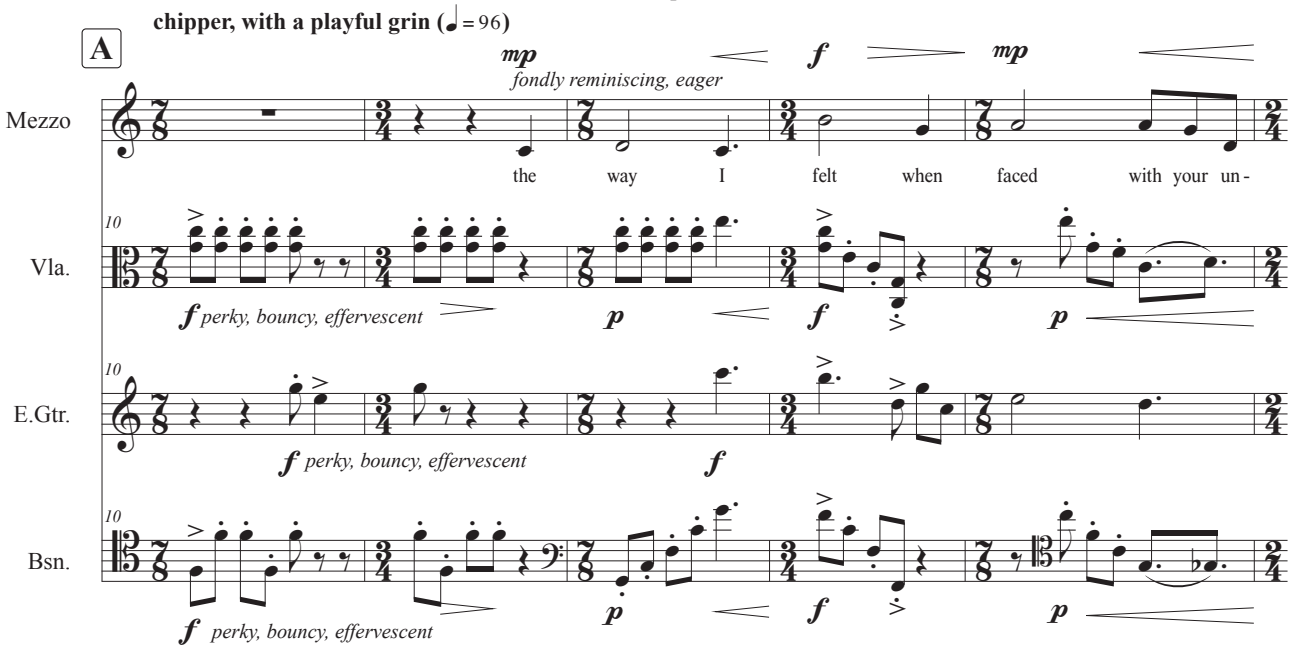
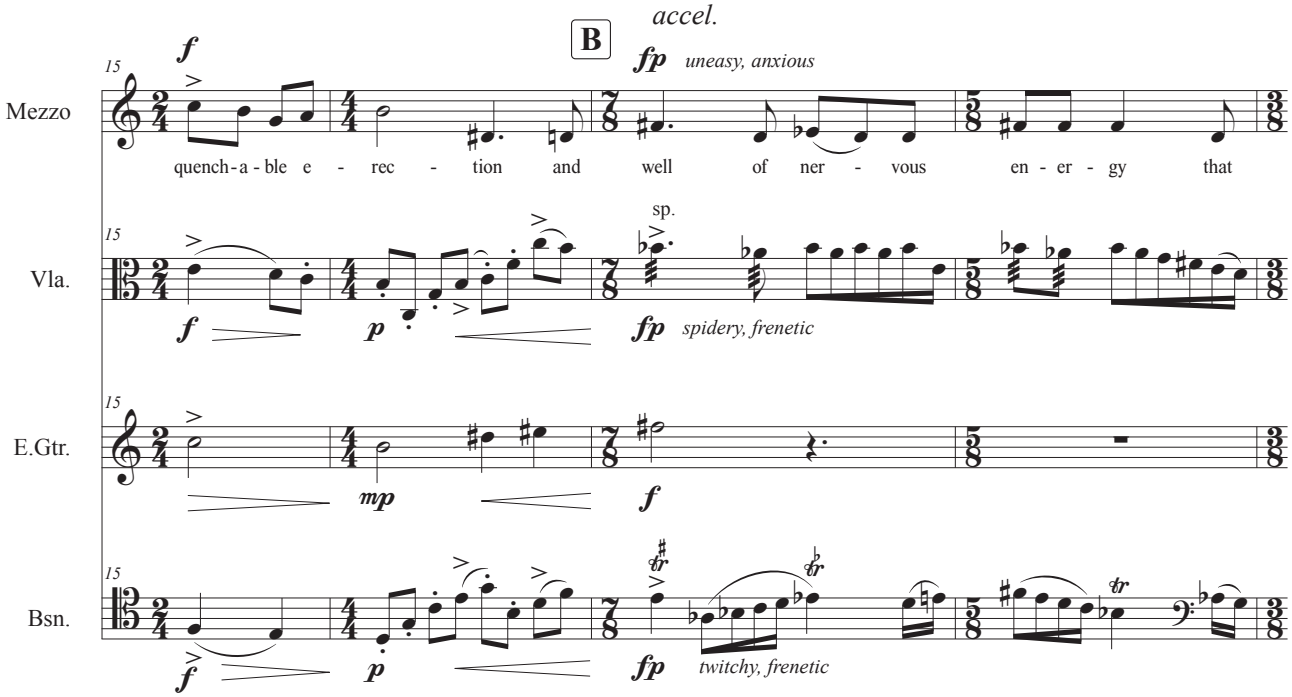
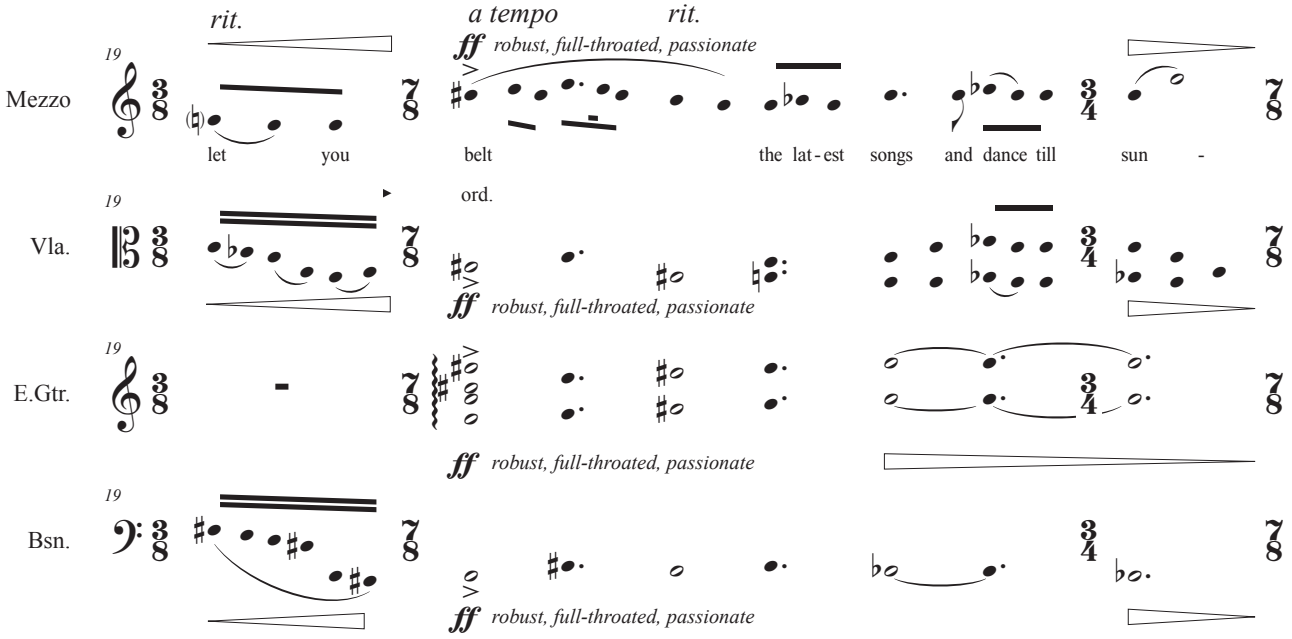
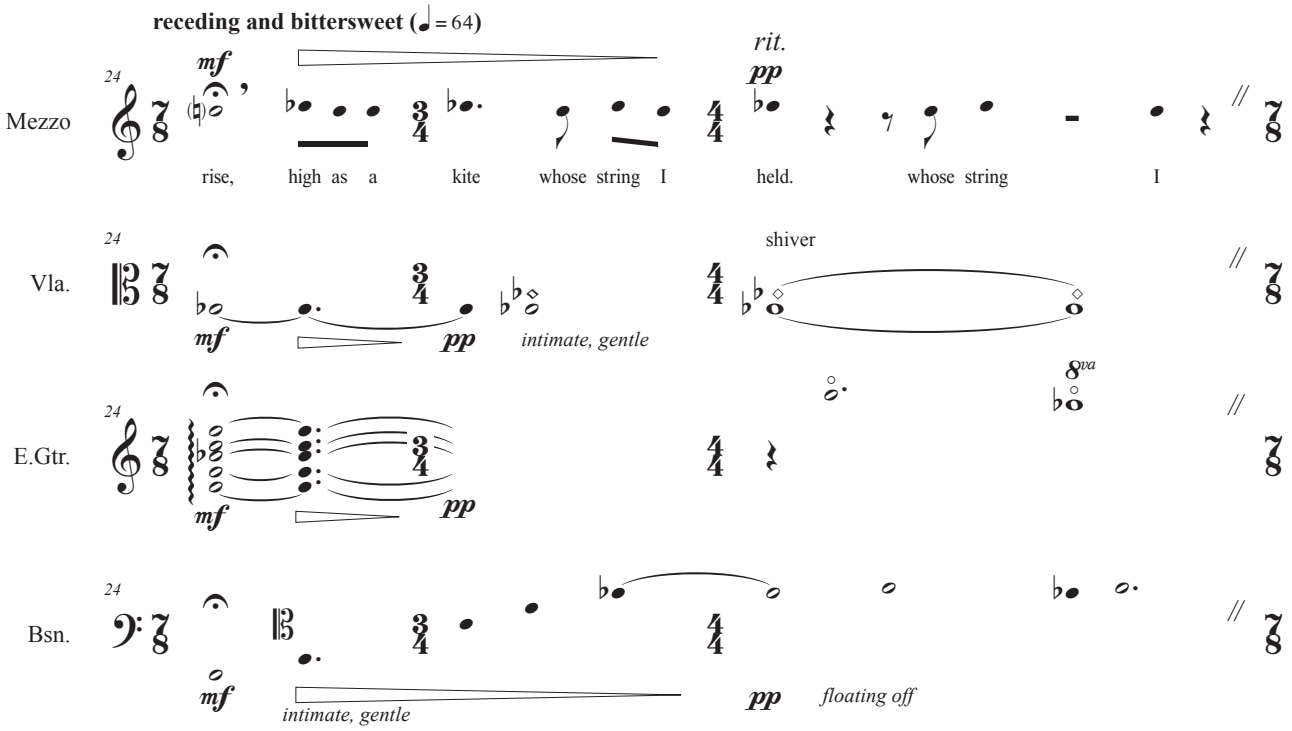
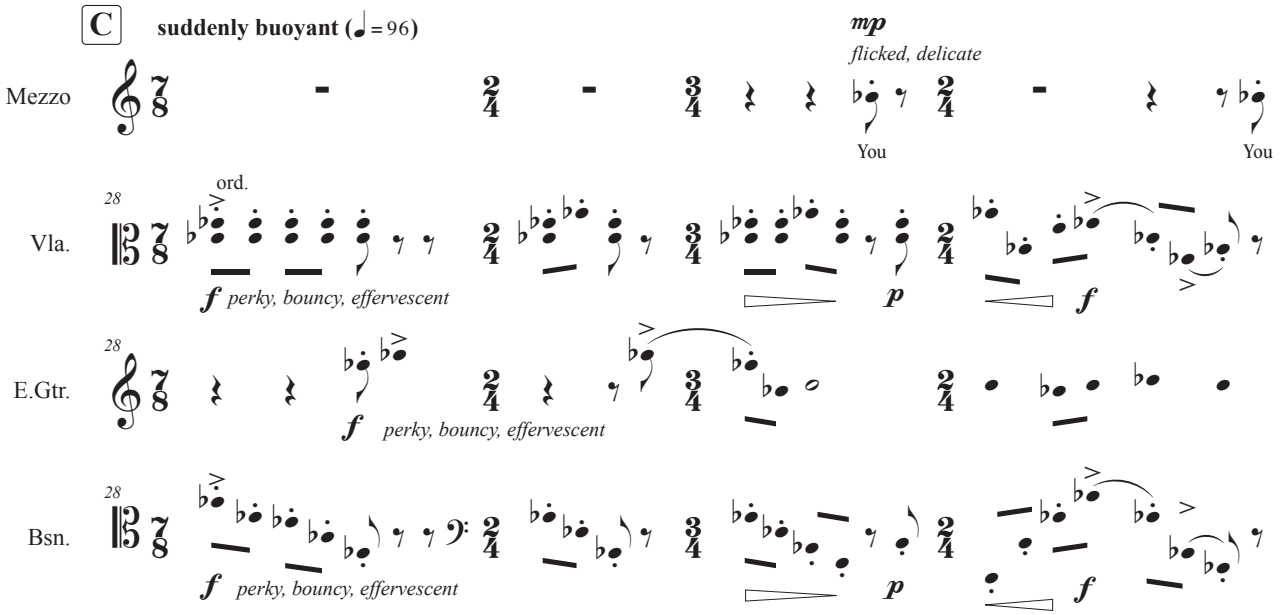
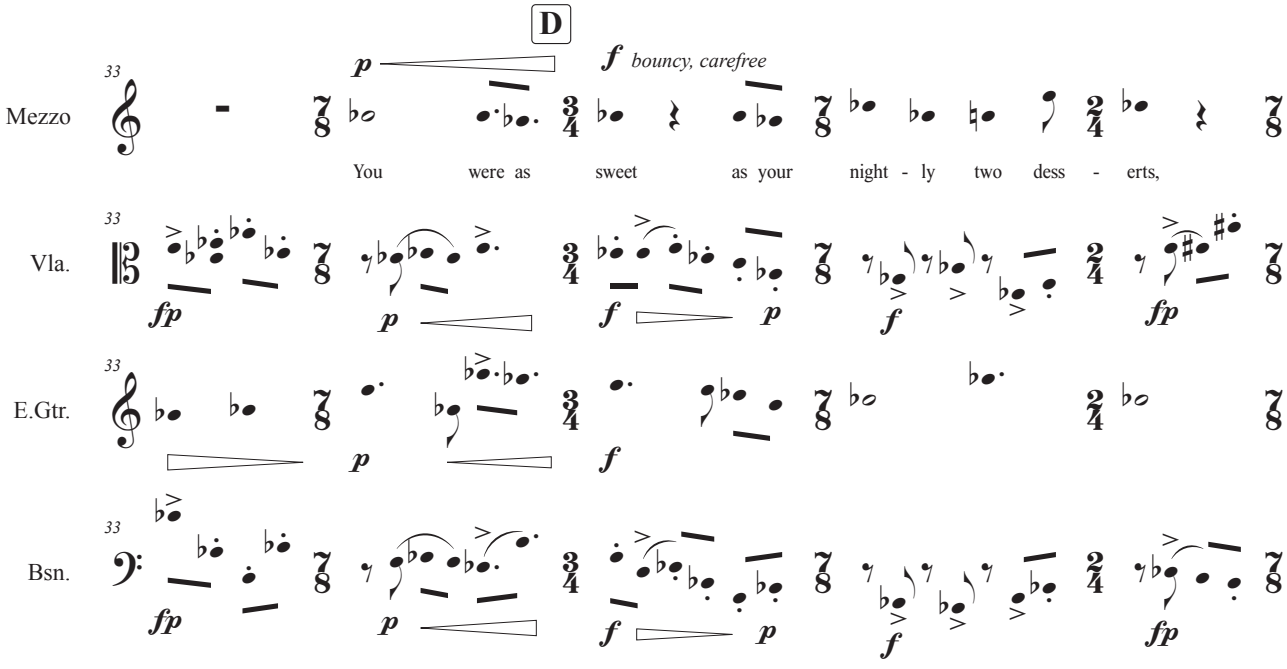
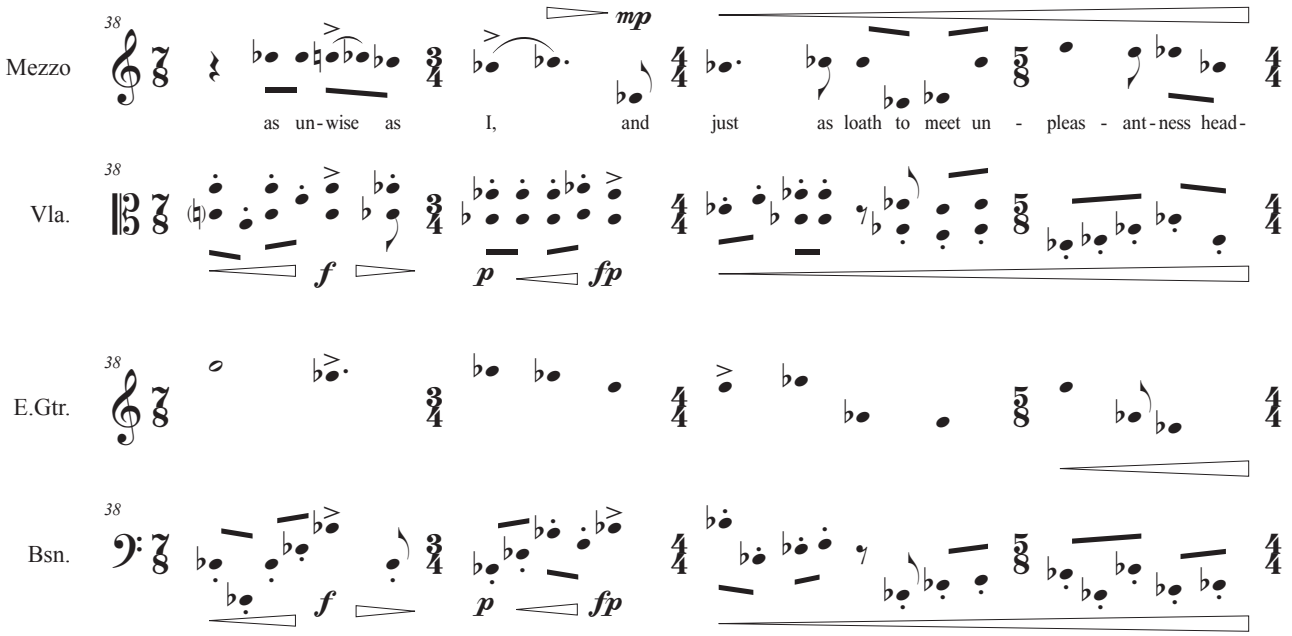

chipper, with a playful grin (♩= 96)
A
mp
fondly reminiscing, eager
f
mp
Mezzo
the way I felt when faced with your un-
Vla.
f perky, bouncy, effervescent
p
f
p
E.Gtr.
f perky, bouncy, effervescent
f
Bsn.
f perky, bouncy, effervescent
p
f
p

accel.
B
f
fp uneasy, anxious
Mezzo
quench-a-ble e - rec - tion and well of ner - vous en - er - gy that
sp.
Vla.
f
p
fp spidery, frenetic
E.Gtr.
mp
f
Bsn.
f
p
fp twitchy, frenetic


rit.
a tempo
rit.
19
Mezzo
ff robust, full-throated, passionate
let you belt the lat - est songs and dance till sun -
Vla.
ord.
ff robust, full-throated, passionate
E.Gtr.
ff robust, full-throated, passionate
Bsn.
ff robust, full-throated, passionate

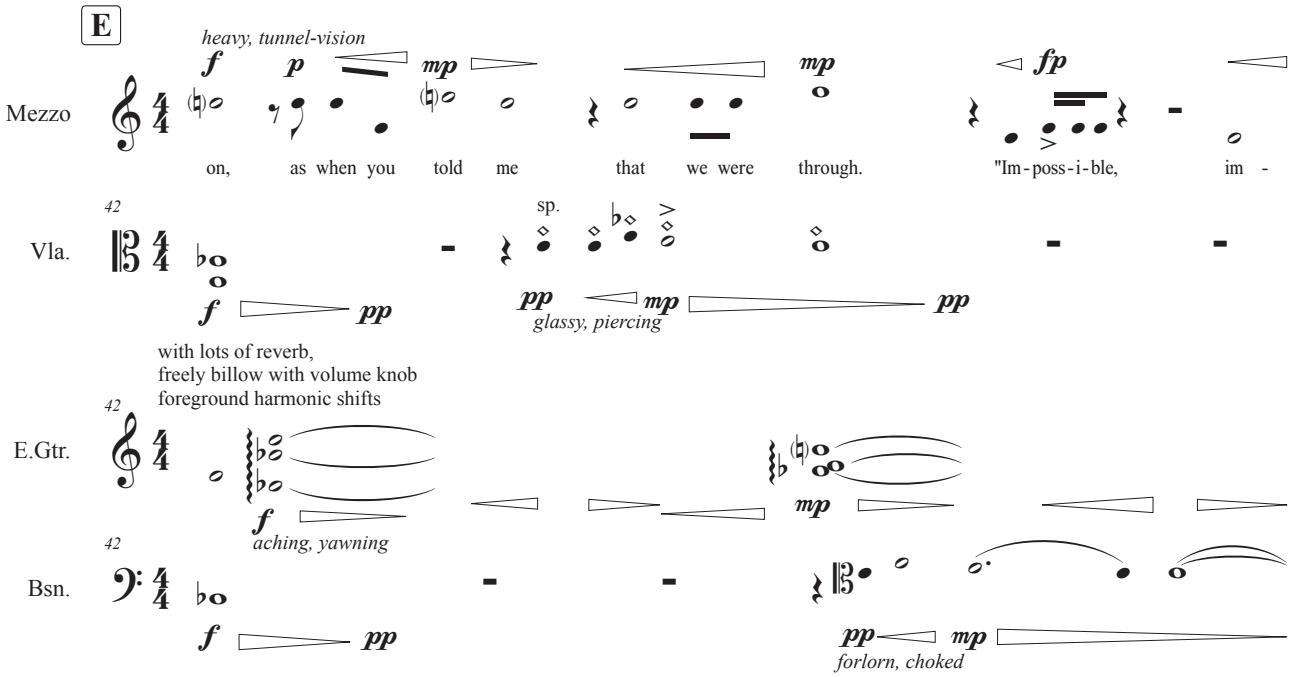

receding and bittersweet (♩= 64)
rit.
24
Mezzo
mf
pp
rise, high as a kite whose string I held. whose string I
Vla.
shiver
mf
pp
intimate, gentle
E.Gtr.
8va
mf
pp
Bsn.
mf
intimate, gentle
pp
floating off

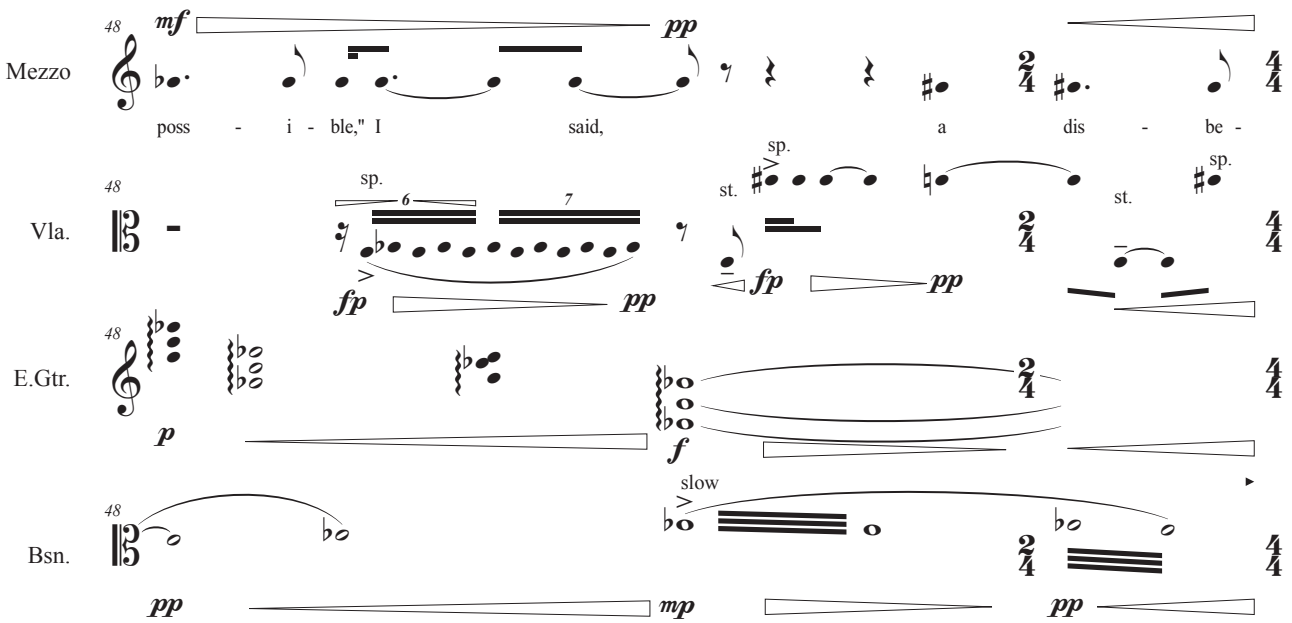

C
suddenly buoyant (♩= 96)
mp
flicked, delicate
Mezzo
You
You
28
ord.
Vla.
f perky, bouncy, effervescent
p
f
E.Gtr.
f perky, bouncy, effervescent
Bsn.
f perky, bouncy, effervescent
p
f

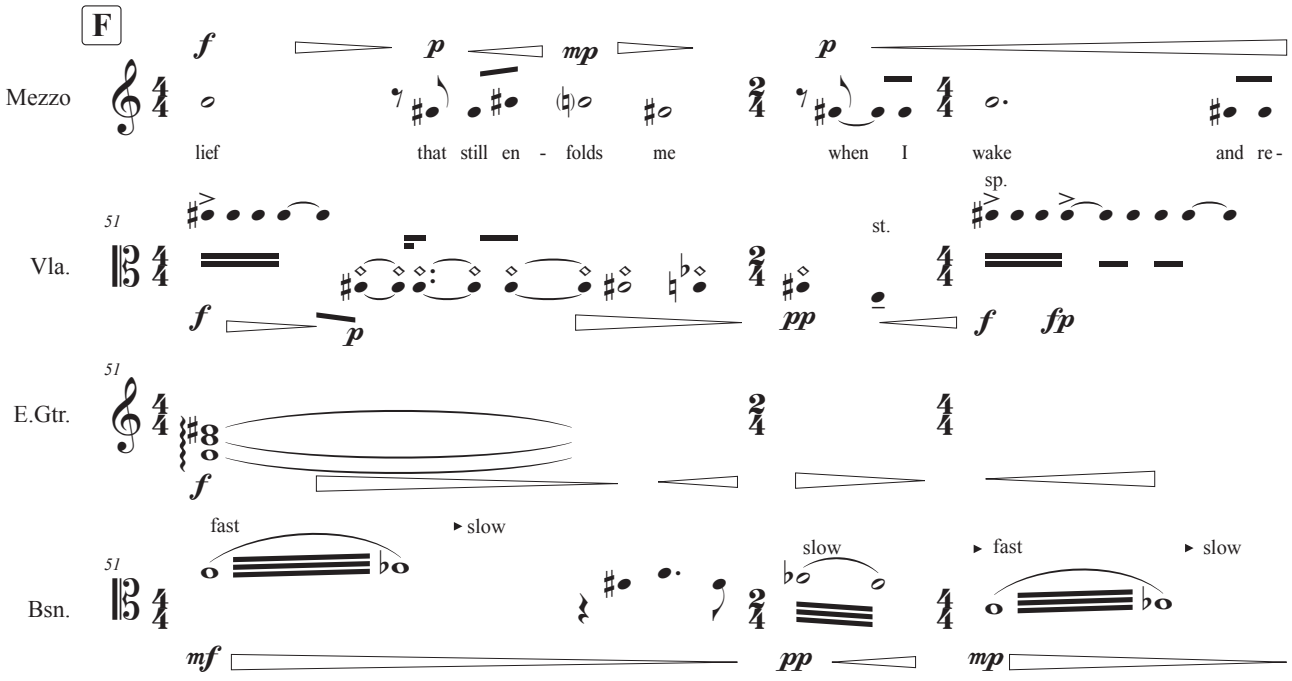

D
p
f bouncy, carefree
33
Mezzo
You were as sweet as your night - ly two dess - erts,
Vla.
fp
p
f
p
f
fp
E.Gtr.
p
f
Bsn.
fp
p
f
p
f
fp

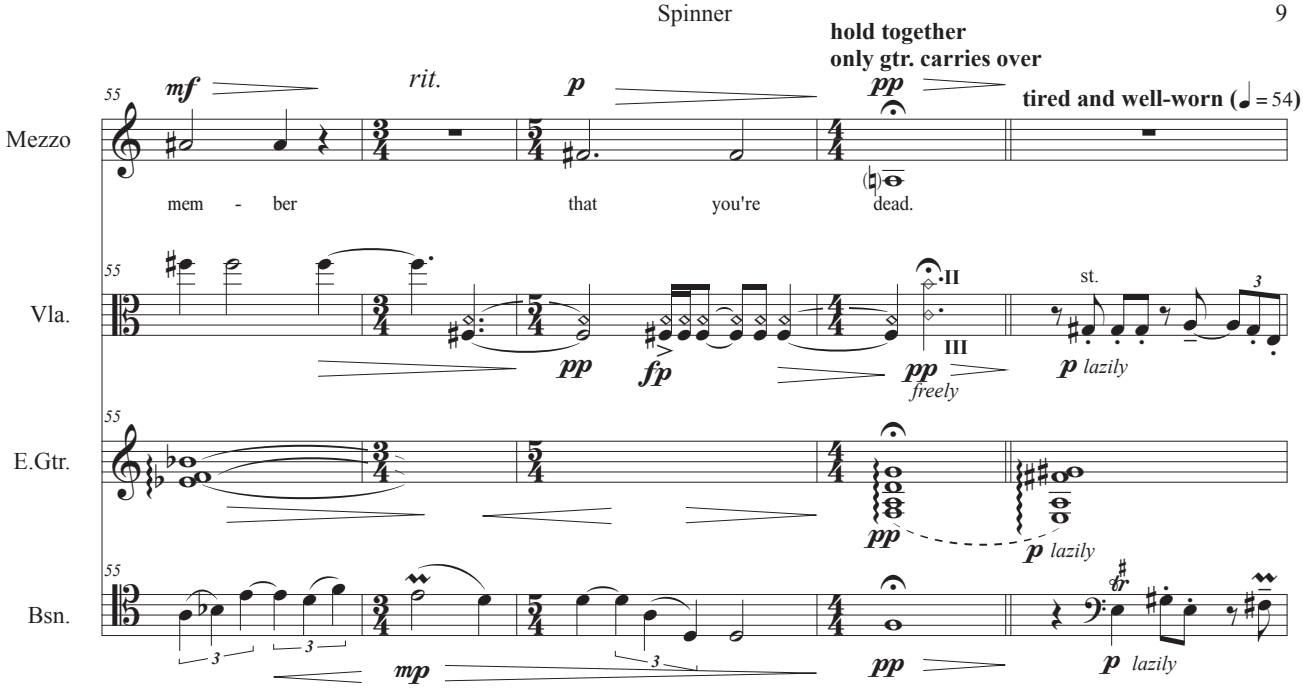
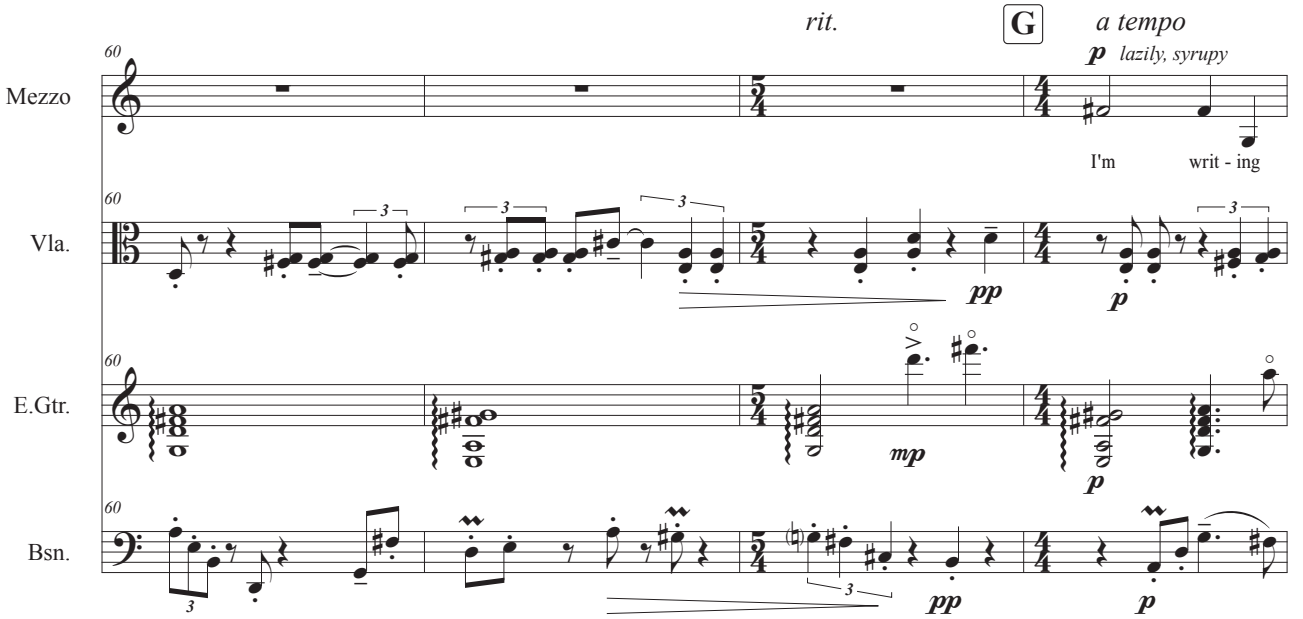


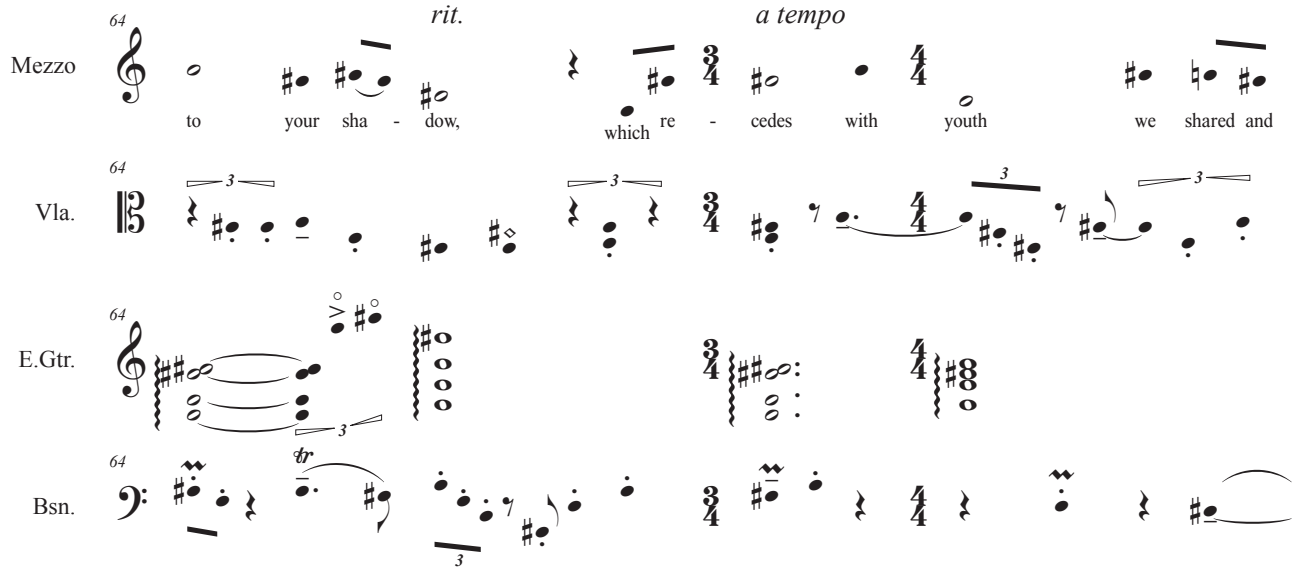
tightly subdued, bewildered (♩ = 64)

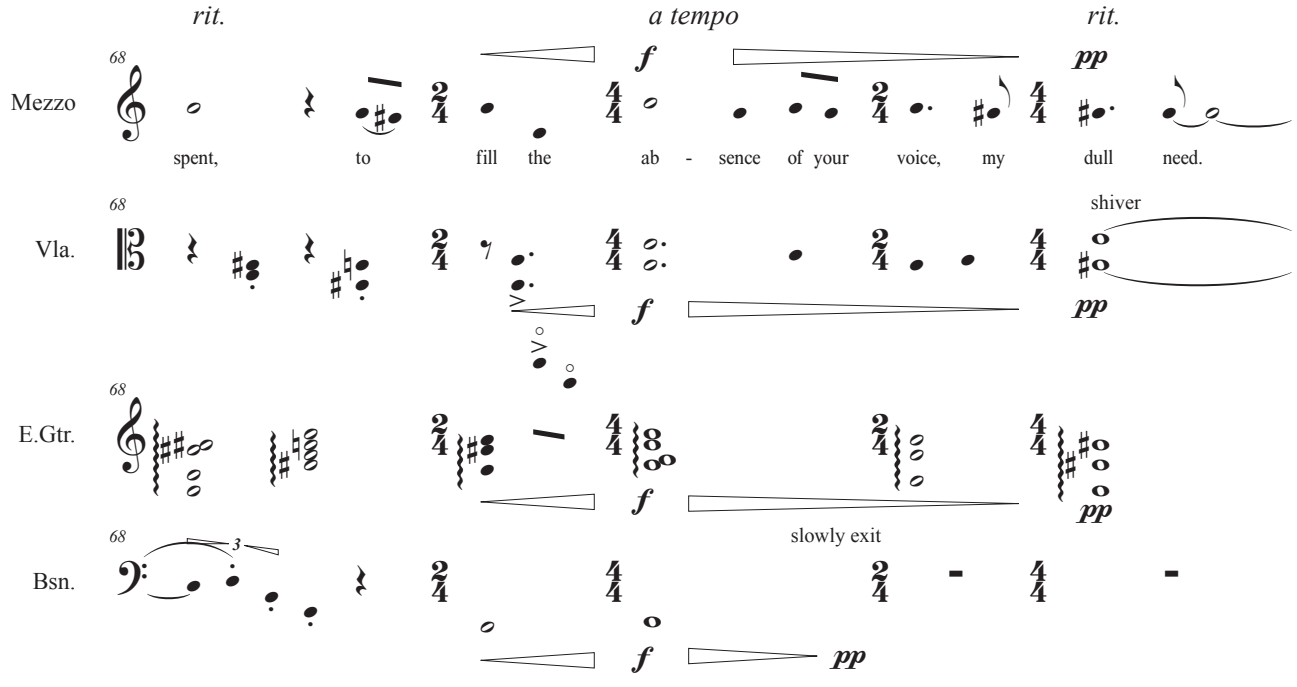


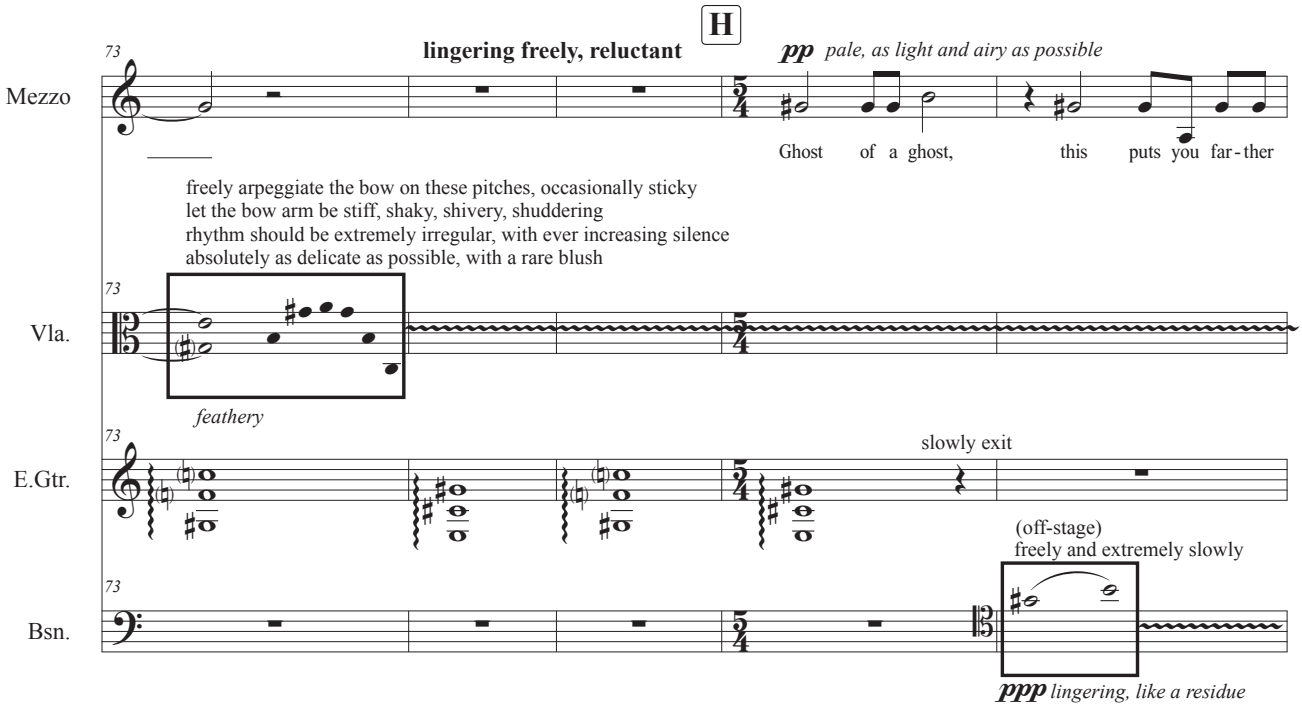

48
Mezzo
mf
pp
poss - i - ble," I said, a dis - be -
Vla.
sp.
6
7
fp
pp
st.
sp.
fp
pp
sp.
st.
E.Gtr.
p
f
Bsn.
slow
pp
mp
pp

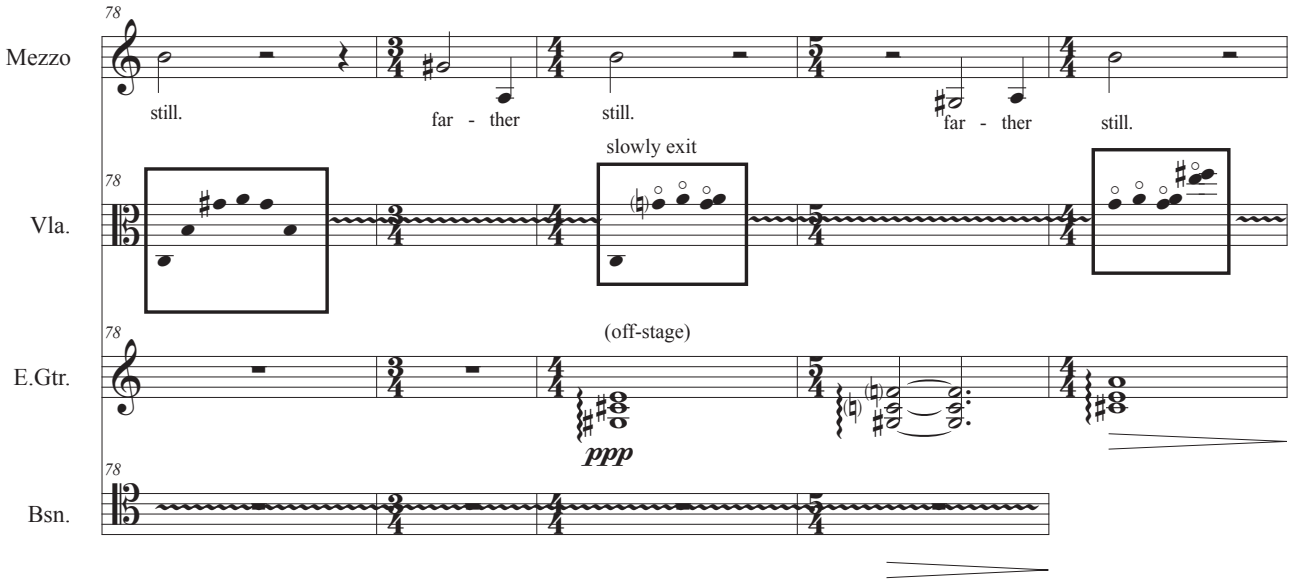

F
Mezzo
f
p
mp
p
lief that still en - folds me when I wake and re -
51
Vla.
sp.
st.
f
p
pp
f
fp
E.Gtr.
f
Bsn.
fast
slow
slow
fast
slow
mf
pp
mp

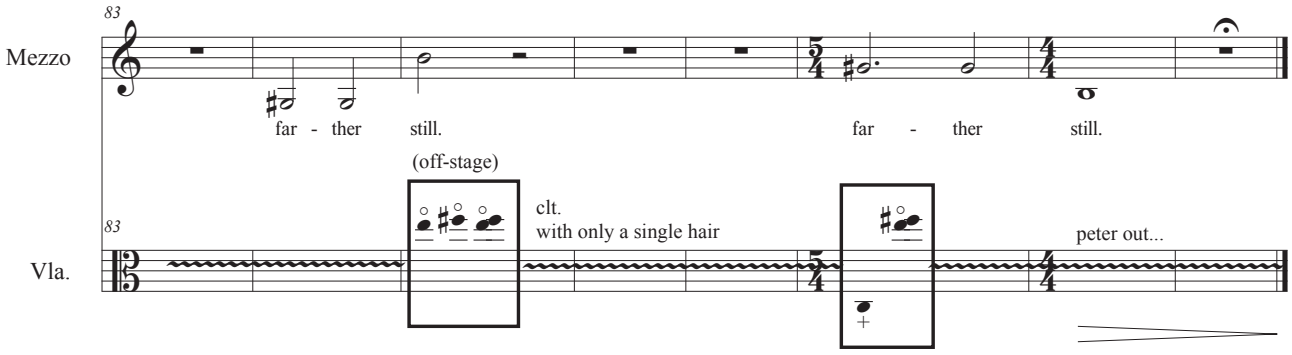

hold together
only gtr. carries over
tired and well-worn (♩ = 54)
Mezzo
Vla.
E.Gtr.
Bsn.
mf
rit.
p
pp
mem - ber that you're dead.
II
III
st.
fp
freely
p lazily
mp

rit.
G
a tempo
p lazily, syrupy
Mezzo
Vla.
E.Gtr.
Bsn.
I'm writ - ing
pp
p
mp


64
rit.
a tempo
Mezzo
to your sha - dow, which re - cedes with youth we shared and
Vla.
E.Gtr.
Bsn.
tr


rit.
a tempo
rit.
68
Mezzo
spent, to fill the ab - sence of your voice, my dull need.
f
pp
shiver
Vla.
E.Gtr.
slowly exit
Bsn.


H
lingering freely, reluctant
pp pale, as light and airy as possible
Mezzo
Ghost of a ghost, this puts you far-ther
freely arpeggiate the bow on these pitches, occasionally sticky
let the bow arm be stiff, shaky, shivery, shuddering
rhythm should be extremely irregular, with ever increasing silence
absolutely as delicate as possible, with a rare blush
Vla.
feathery
E.Gtr.
slowly exit
(off-stage)
freely and extremely slowly
Bsn.
ppp lingering, like a residue


Mezzo
still.
far - ther
still.
far - ther
still.
slowly exit
Vla.
(off-stage)
E.Gtr.
ppp
Bsn.


83
Mezzo
far - ther still.
far - ther still.
(off-stage)
83
Vla.
clt.
with only a single hair
peter out...