

construed by Czernowin was carried forward rigorously by Nikodijevic's *dies secundus* and Bedrossian's *Vayehi erev vayehi boker* to a much more settled mode of being; a place of potential contemplation. Thorvaldsdotir outlines how *Illumine* is based on 'the pulsating dance of light through dark' and 'construed around the idea of origin – the fundamental – the beginning and the dawning point of existence. Governed by darkness the light emerges – the starting point is dawn'. It is the only piece of the concert written just for strings – three violins, two violas, two cellos and a double bass – and the ensemble staged themselves further forward in preparation for a more intimate setting. The work itself seemed to gradually unfold to reveal a serene, yet deeply tainted landscape; an entanglement of rhizomatic trajectories. A sense of resolution was nevertheless soon reached. Rather than pursuing through 'the pulsating dance', however, the strings became more sustained and the echoing pulses less pronounced, leading eventually to a final transcendence of stratospheric glissandos.

The consequent limit(s) brought on by human endeavour, as Stiegler implies, nevertheless provides ample opportunity 'to lose oneself in, and to try and feel one's way around in, shadows: in what their illuminations owe to shadows, if it is true that lucidity is that which brings light, and if it is true that there is no light without shadows – if not blindness' (p. 22). Once again, an energetic flux, this time a little more surreal in nature, was thrust forward by Magrané Figuera's *Marines i boscatges* and Gervasoni's *Eufaunique* toward a concluding space of introspection. Andre writes that his piece, *riss 1*, is about presenting compositional interstices 'as eschatological spaces of evanescence. It is about the most fragile areas of fluctuation between planes of sound and time, which are also fissures. The seventh day of the creation is probably more than a break: a tear. A time of reflection, of meditation is seemingly depicted there. It is to do with fluctuation, the fragility perhaps as a portent of the appearance of the Messiah'. In line with Stiegler, the performance itself depicted a fraught search through an ever-engulfing darkness. The sounds of heavy breathing, knocking, and sonic fidgeting occurred alongside violent, perforating strikes that seemed to be desperately mining for potential salvation. Sometimes, the strenuous labour would repeat with a bolder force. At other points a piercing sharpness would lead to a beating resonance, yet one that seemed too intense or foreign to touch. In a mark of closure, the piece did prise open, but only to shift into a less precise location;

the propelling of long sound tubes in the air blurred any definite sense of light/dark, life/death.

Stephanie Jones

doi:10.1017/S0040298217000638

***Infinite Now* by Chaya Czernowin, Vlaamse Opera, Ghent, Belgium**

On the evening of 18 April 2017, the world premiere of Chaya Czernowin's highly anticipated new opera, *Infinite Now*, was performed at Vlaamse Opera Ghent, Belgium. The ambience of the venue was buzzing, highly charged, electrical – a visceral state that seemed contextually appropriate for the lengthy 2.5-hour experience (without intermission) ahead. Programmed as part of the Opera Ballet Vlaanderen 2016–17 'Borderline' series, the set-up and contour of the pre-concert events became eerily symbolic: a large, grandiose, guarded door separated the rooms holding the press conference and pre-concert lecture, through which the composer would eventually pass toward the latter to conclude: '[t]he power to continue, that is what [the opera] is all about. It is not the power to be happy or to be sad. . . . It is much more morose, elemental and existential. The power to continue'. In an instant, the strong ring of emergency sirens then happened to pierce and penetrate from the world beyond – a rather poignant signal to declare the doors to the first performance officially open.

Persistently, Czernowin has used her public appearances and website writings to reinforce how *Infinite Now* is integral to the making vulnerable of such an ambiguous, synthetic, concept such as a 'borderline' – a concept that ultimately forges a 'no man's land' between two distinct poles. Speaking about her opera in Darmstadt in 2016, the composer described how '[f]or me, dialectics and oppositions are opportunities. I do not believe in them. When I see an opposition, or dialectic, I become very interested in the continuum between them. So, between the black and the white there is such a rich and huge universe of all kinds of grey. And that universe I would like to open'. The opera itself incorporates text from two main sources: *Homecoming*, a short story by Can Xue, and *FRONT* a 2014 play based on Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet of the Western Front* by Luk Perceval (also director of *Infinite Now*), texts that are both used in the opera not as narrative, but to construct a simultaneity – to 'enact

a suspension; people are unable to get out of a static situation' – as well as to function together to hold the opera's 'exit point', the point from which the operatic work can unfold. It is in the act of friction that a 'borderline' can melt away, giving rise to all sorts of other vibrant energies hidden within.

Divided into six separate acts, the opera proved to beautifully morph, dissipate and dissolve across its timespan in a way not so dissimilar to six droplets of coloured ink entering the transparency of water. Yet each act was also clearly defined. The beginning of a new act included a 12-second pause, the dimming of lights, and the harsh, metallic, repeated sounds of a metal gate clanking shut, whilst the only piece of stage scenery – a dark, solid, screen stretching the entire vertical surface area of the stage – was repositioned to reveal more and more light, not only horizontally, by opening right to left toward the back of the stage like a door, but also vertically, by slitting into smaller, separate, pillars. All 12 performers (including Trio 1 and 2, who voice extracts from *Homecoming* and *FRONT*, as well as six actors) were also delicately choreographed. Each performer slowly unfolded their movements, being sure to take enough time between one point of reference to another, prising wide open what often seemed such desperate and frightful moments of signification. The slow, visual, pace of the opera respectfully gave licence to the listener to 'just' experience; like a meditation, there was no need to stress or strain.

Czernowin uses her own synopsis of the work to invite the audience to '[i]magine that the hall, the whole space of the hall is the inside of a head/ heart/ body ... of a person who find themselves in a difficult or hopeless situation'. Upon entering the venue, it was not long before the rounded architecture soon began to feel like a resonating sheath or membrane, an expansion perhaps of one's own corporeal space. The four instrumental soloists (consisting of one amplified guitar, one electric guitar, and two violoncellos) were hidden from view in the royal box, as was the orchestra in the orchestral pit, while electronic speakers were positioned all around. The performance encouraged one to become completely immersed, signifying that this is a work in touch with the dispersal(s) stemming from the present moment:

the opera is about more than *Homecoming* or the First World War. It is about our existence now and here. How we survive, how [we] are destined to survive and how even the smallest elements of vitality commend survival and with it perhaps hope.

Such dealings seemed to prove too much for some; an hour into the performance, and just before the start of act four, a small gathering of audience members left the auditorium. The final applause was equally telling: there was an air of hesitancy, the hall figuratively filling with huge, bubbled, question marks hovering over each individual head. Undoubtedly, this striking response had been premediated and meticulously crafted all along by Czernowin.

Yet, it was during act four of the opera that a significant shift occurred: a realisation that every devastating situation encompasses the choice to move forward. In acts two and three, for example, the electronics would fleetingly transform the sonorities of the hall into the boundaries of a circular cage in which a bird is anxiously flapping its wings, flying only in short strides, trying to find an opening to escape from such an alien environment. In act four, however, the listener seems no longer at the mercy of such confinement. Settling into the stillness of breath, the opera reaches a new and unfamiliar place, one that is nevertheless intimate, fathomable and grounded: 'in order to survive, one must find the will to continue and to find hope in the simplest element of existence, the breathing. ("in pain there is breath"—David Grossmann)'. The process and intricacies of each individual breath could be fully experienced as places of refuge in themselves. A BBC News bulletin soon emerges in counterpoint to the breath, transitioning from jingle to a speech that quickly declines into muffled nonsense. Just like the multiple other layers at work in the opera, this gesture is given time to unfold, ensuring that 'what was horizontal, becomes an array, or a collection, of verticality'. In Darmstadt, Czernowin stated, 'at the end of the evening, I hope, that one would feel not that this is a huge and rich production, but one would feel very naked'. Profoundly, the opera achieved this feat from the very beginning; the work voiced the present in a way that seemed in desperate remembrance to our own generation – here and now – if they are to have any chance of true survival from the future(s) on the horizon.

Stephanie Jones

doi:10.1017/S004029821700064X

Tectonics Festival Glasgow

For those who, consciously or not, have come to associate today's exploratory music with small ensembles, electronics or performative