

Eliane Radigue: OCCAM IV for viola solo / Julia Eckhardt
(introduction to Cd release Occam – Shiin 2016)

Occam IV is set up as an itinerary which the bow covers along the four strings of the viola, low to high, letting natural harmonics and bow-harmonics emerge. Most of the piece takes place on the three lower strings which are tuned in the quite neutral spectrum of G (G-G-D). The highest string (A) is used mainly for noise at the very end of the piece. The sound is continuous, it emerges from silence and withdraws back into noise and silence.

Bowing on harmonic nodes increases their presence in the sound without replacing the fundamental. It alters the sound in an unobtrusive manner and makes it iridescent, as if looking at it from different angles. It is the most appropriate way I could find to interpret the given image of a watercourse, always and never the same. Bow harmonics are delicate and difficult to control, deviating from a node by a fraction of a millimetre will bring about a huge change or even a break when touching on a Wolf tone.

I visited Eliane for the solo piece about fifteen times. I improvised on the given mental score and she decided which parts to keep, to skip or to work on. However the main means of guiding the development of the piece is Eliane's very special, active and concentrated listening. Eliane herself calls the pieces co-creations yet there is no doubt about who is the author. The personal relationship is essential for the collaboration, including respect, trust, generosity and availability on both sides. This finds an extension in the ensemble pieces which followed the solo's.

As in the meantime widely known, the transmission of the work is done orally and mentally through words and an image without a physical representation. The image which was given to me by Eliane is one of a lake, next to the triple framework of imagery of waves, Willem van Ockham's paradigm of 'the simplest the best' and the connection to a science fictional world. The lake's name will stay un-revealed, to avoid the illusion of mere illustration. Starting to develop the piece I imagined contemplating this lake at a relaxed speed which allows to observe changes, depths, shallows, colours, and reflections. This was the scaffold which in a later state of the creation wasn't needed any more and could be forgotten.

As the piece evolved and became more and more determined, some sort of notation became necessary to remember and memorize it. I tried recording, attributing images or colours, writing technical instructions and textual descriptions. The clumsiness of all this made me aware of the lack of vocabulary for the essence of music, the sound quality, for which we have no names except comparisons and technical instructions for sound production. It might still be possible to find words for the 'primary' qualities in extreme sound, but almost impossible when it's all about shades, as in Eliane's music. I ended up notating a map describing the path the bow covers, trusting that with the right concentration time would do the rest of the work. This leaves also enough elasticity for the music to adapt to different contexts.

There were sometimes long periods between work sessions in which the piece was let to rest and ripen. They were essential to its becoming in the holistic approach in which the time of the piece is embedded into all time, and the waves of the sound are embedded into all waves. Everything is connected, this piece does not cut out a part for itself. The challenge is to resist ego and wanting to be master over time.

Performances need to be prepared carefully, not only because of the physical effort of the continuous sound. One has to get in a certain state to play this music. High concentration and total body control are necessary to be able to resist any kind of forcing upon the natural flow of the sound in time, the sound which at that moment seems to become a sort of primary material, an element, it simply is. Often people ask of what I think when I play, more specifically if I still keep the initial image in front of my inner eye. I don't, and actually in the ideal case I'm near to that state which seems impossible to reach, the thinking of nothing. Like trying to seize the moment when you fall asleep, which I tried often as a child. As if I could dissolve in concentration, completely centred, driving on pure intuition.