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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Poems of Sheer Nothingness: A Song Cycle on Occitan Troubadour Texts

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Aaron Michael Helgeson

Committee in charge:

Professor Roger Reynolds, Chair  
Professor Sarah Creel  
Professor Susan Narucki  
Professor Sheldon Nodelman  
Professor Rand Steiger

2013

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The Dissertation of Aaron Michael Helgeson is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

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## VITA

- 2005 Bachelor of Music, Oberlin Conservatory of Music
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- 2005-2007 Teaching Assistant, University of California, San Diego
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Poems of Sheer Nothingness: A Song Cycle on Occitan Troubadour Texts

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Roger Reynolds, Chair

*Poems of sheer nothingness* is an original song cycle for soprano and chamber ensemble that sets the poetic introductions of five early troubadours in their original Occitan. Written between the 12th and 15th centuries in southern France, these five

introductions originally served as preambles (themselves sung) to a much longer song. In *Poems of sheer nothingness* the subsequent love songs are done away with, leaving their introductions in isolation to provide commentary on poetry, songwriting, and the relationship between words and music.

The textual introduction describes some of the compositional techniques found within the song cycle, tracing their origins in the phenomenological philosophy of Franz Brantano, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Martin Heidegger. These include the concepts of sonic phenomena, sonic objects, eidetic variation, and the auditory scene. Text setting and the composer's original translation and transliteration of the five Occitan texts are also discussed. Musical examples accompany the text throughout, which is followed by a complete score of the five songs.

*POEMS OF SHEER NOTHINGNESS:*

AN INTRODUCTION

## Introduction: Text and Translation

*Poems of sheer nothingness* is an original song cycle for soprano and chamber ensemble that sets the poetic introductions of five early troubadours in their original Occitan. The work takes its title from the opening lines of the first song in the cycle:

<i>Farai un vers de dreyt nien:</i>	I'll make a poem of sheer nothingness:
<i>Non er de mi ni d'autra gen,</i>	it will not be about me, or about any other,
<i>Non er d'amor ni de joven,</i>	it will not be of love, or of youth,
<i>Ni de ren au;</i>	or of anything else;
<i>Qu'enans fo trobatz en durmen</i>	it was, rather, composed while
<i>sobre chevau.</i>	sleeping on a horse.

Written by Guillaume IX Duke of Aquitaine – widely considered to be the first troubadour to write love songs in Occitan – this lyric introduction presents a beguiling and ultimately humorous preface to a much longer song about the unrequited love so typical of the period's poetry.<sup>1</sup> In fact, many such introductions (themselves sung) exist throughout the troubadour literature, offering commentary on the poet's craft. However, in *Poems of sheer nothingness* the subsequent love songs are done away with, leaving their introductions in isolation as emotionally charged commentary on songwriting (apologies, apprehensions, regrets, inside jokes) in an ancient and unfamiliar tongue.

A Romance language originating during the 10th century in the area known as Occitania – encompassing regions of France, Italy, Spain, and Monaco – Occitan as it was spoken during the Renaissance has all but disappeared. While approximately two million

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<sup>1</sup> Press, Alan R. *Anthology of Troubadour Lyric Poetry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 1-12.

native speakers continue to use the language, the sound and vocabulary of modern Occitan has evolved over the centuries into its own distinct dialect and is not completely reliable as a model for the language used by the troubadours.<sup>2</sup> This causes certain difficulties in setting these texts for the singing voice, as the pronunciation of the words cannot be directly observed. However, in consultation with the Université de Toulouse Le Mirail in France and Spanish early music scholar Jordi Savall, the original Occitan pronunciation of the five introductions used in *Poems of sheer nothingness* was approximated especially for this project using a number of scholarly re-creations of the original songs as they might have been sung from recordings by Brice Duisit<sup>3</sup>, Paul Hillier<sup>4</sup>, the Troubadours Arts Ensemble<sup>5</sup>, and Savall<sup>6</sup> himself. The resulting diction, along with scansion and word-for-word translation, can be found in the accompanying score preceding each song.

What follows in this textual introduction is a discussion of *Poems of sheer nothingness* and its devices. While the poems and their setting will be addressed at various points, the introduction will focus predominately on musical matters (of which text setting is one). *Poems of sheer nothingness* is not merely a demonstration of the ideas found in this text, nor is this text a formal analysis of the work. Rather, it describes some of the compositional techniques found within the song cycle, tracing their origins in the phenomenological philosophy of thinkers like Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

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<sup>2</sup> Paden, William D. *An Introduction to Old Occitan* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1998), 5–7.

<sup>3</sup> Duisit, Brice. *Las Canons Del Coms De Peitieu*. Alpha Productions. 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Hillier, Paul. *Proensa*. ECM New Series. 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Troubadour Arts Ensemble. *La Troba: Anthologie Chantée Des Troubadours*, Vol. 1. Brilliant Classics 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Hesperion XXI. *The Forgotten Kingdom*. Alia Vox. 2011.

## Phenomena in Sonic Perception

In order to investigate how concepts from phenomenological philosophy are applied to techniques of composition found in *Poems of sheer nothingness*, a preliminary discussion of phenomenology as it applies to sound (and music in particular) is necessary.

The foundations of phenomenology as a philosophical practice were laid in the 19th century by Franz Brentano, a philosopher and psychologist known for his brand of "descriptive psychology" whose 1874 text *The Psychology of Empirical Observation* is often cited as one of the seminal texts in the phenomenological movement.<sup>7</sup> In this work, Brentano introduces one of the central notions of phenomenological philosophy that influenced thinkers like Edmund Husserl (a later student of Brentano's) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty would later take up...

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction towards an object (which is not here to be understood as meaning a thing) or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way.<sup>8</sup>

What is described here by Brentano as the "intentional inexistence" would later be posited by Husserl as the *intentional object*.<sup>9</sup> Brentano's statement above, then, has three important

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<sup>7</sup> Moran, Dermot. *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Brentano, Franz. *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, Erster Band, Zweites Buch, Erstes Kapitel (Hamburg: Meiner, 1973), 124-125.

<sup>9</sup> Moran, 73-74.

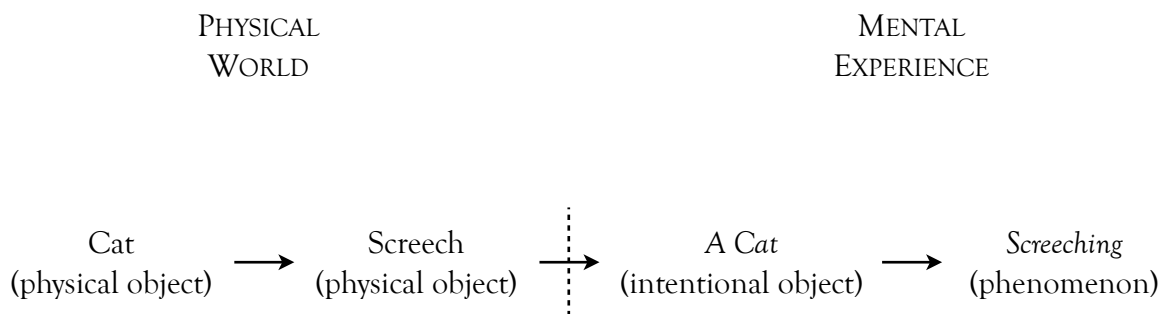
points relating to the notion of the intentional object: 1) that experience is always directed toward an object 2) that this object is mental, not physical, and 3) that the object is included in but stands distinct from the phenomenon of its perception.

As an example, imagine that I hear the sound of a cat screeching outside my window. If I were to tell someone about it, I would typically say, “there’s a cat screeching outside my window!” I say this because *a cat* is the intentional object, that which my perception is directed towards (I hear a cat screeching outside my window). It is important to distinguish here between the physical object that we call the cat – its body and movement in space, its voice as it travels through the air – and the mental object that our perception is directed toward – its appearance. This is not to say that my perception of a screeching cat has nothing to do with the cat's physical form. On the contrary, as Brentano's statement suggests, these two are intimately linked (as shown in Figure 1). However, the fact remains that what's in my mind when I hear the screeching sound is not the actual physical being of the cat (how uncomfortable that would be), but the mental image of it. Note that one typically wouldn't say “there’s a *sound* outside my window,” unless they didn't perceive anything more than the sound, in which case the sound itself becomes the intentional object (I hear an unidentifiable sound screeching outside my window). Whether the intentional object is *a cat* or *a sound*, however, the phenomenon experienced remains *screeching*. This latter example points toward a special category of intentional objects which will now require the term *sonic objects*.

## Sonic Objects

Sonic objects will be defined here as those intentional objects whose mental appearance manifests itself primarily in the aural domain. Like other intentional objects, sonic objects give rise to but stand distinct from their aural phenomena. Unlike intentional objects in the visual domain, however, sonic objects are often more ambiguous with respect to their correlates in the physical world,<sup>10</sup> allowing for several different objects to give rise to the same perceptual phenomenon.

Take the example of *murmuring*: a phenomenon where distinct sounds are presented to our perception so rapidly and unintelligibly as to coalesce into a single ambiguous stream. The perceptual phenomenon of *murmuring* can come about through all sorts of different circumstances – your friend Megan walking by on the sidewalk while talking unintelligibly to herself under her breath about work that day, an irregular



**Figure 1** The flow of experience from physical object to perceptual phenomenon

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<sup>10</sup> Ihde, Don. *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany : State University of New York Press, 2007), 77.



heartbeat heard through a stethoscope, or the muffled sound of a distant river. Though the perceptual phenomenon of these three sonic objects can be thought of as the same, they remain three separate intentional objects. We would never confuse Megan for an irregular heartbeat, or a river. These sonic objects remain distinct from one another, even though each gives rise to the perceptual phenomenon of *murmuring*.

Of course, one could also call this phenomena *muttering*, or perhaps *warbling*. Although the name of the phenomenon might be related to its actual experience (through onomatopoeia for instance), the recognition of the phenomenon in our perception is not dependent on calling it such. For example, though I might not have a name for the type of sound the air conditioner makes when it's been running for too long, and though it doesn't sound precisely the same every time I hear it, I still recognize it of-the-same-as the other instances where the sonic object gives rise to a particular perceptual phenomenon when I think to myself, "It is doing *that thing* again." In the case above, then, the *it* (the intentional object) is the mental image we know as Megan, and the *thing* we experience (the phenomenon) is *murmuring*.

How can the phenomenon of *murmuring* be harnessed musically by the composer? The fourth song in *Poems of sheer nothingness* (*No sap chantar qui so non did*) attempts precisely that, by employing several trill-like objects in the flute and clarinet. Like a conventional trill, this sonic object results from the rapid alternation of one or more fingers added to the normal, stable fingering of a sustained tone. Unlike a conventional trill however, the resulting number of alternating tones is not one but several, performed as patterns of three or four notes in quick and repeated succession.

Figure 2 shows two groups of such trill objects with the fingerings used to perform them. The trills in Group A are all actual examples that appear in the flute and clarinet in the latter half of the *No sap chantar qui so non di*. Each trill takes advantage of the performer's rapid twitch muscles and independence of the hands. For example, the first trill is performed on the flute by holding all three keys down in the left hand to sustain the note G, while alternating rapidly between the first and third key in the right hand using the index and ring fingers to trill the notes F and Gb respectively. The result is a trill between three pitches that is executed so quickly as to make the identity of the central pitch (the pitch the player trills "from") ambiguous.

The trills in Group B are hypothetical variations not found in the song, but which represent several musically plausible transformations of the trills found in Group A. That is, the only difference between them is their level of pitch transposition. However, those in Group B cannot be performed as rapidly or cleanly on the two woodwind instruments due to the fingerings they require. This results from a physical impedance caused by the fact that the fingers involved in ornamenting the central pitch are either in the same hand, exhibit weak twitch response, or both. Therefore, even though they are identical in every other respect (trill contour, number of ornamental notes, dynamic envelope, tessatura, etc.), the trill patterns in Group B cannot give rise to the perceptual phenomenon of *murmuring* in that they lack the necessary speed for their pitches to "coalesce into a single ambiguous stream." In other words, the trills in Group A and Group B don't share perceptual constancy with respect to the phenomenon of *murmuring*. Both groups exhibit

GROUP A  
(ACTUAL)

Fl.

Fl.

Cl.

Cl.

GROUP B  
(HYPOTHETICAL)

Fl.

Fl.

Cl.

Cl.

Figure 2 Two groups containing eidetic variations of the “murmuring” sound object (one actual, one hypothetical) from *No sap chantar qui so non di*

constancy of individual musical parameters, but the former exhibits constancy *with respect* to a particular perceptual phenomenon (*murmuring* in this case).<sup>11</sup>

### Eidetic Variation

This constancy is achieved in part by the repetition of a small set of variations on the same basic trill pattern. As discussed above, the musical parameters of the trill object remain largely the same from instance to instance. However, each individual manifestation of the object is presented with a slightly different appearance – perhaps the trill uses only three notes this time and four notes the next, or it appears in the low register rather than the middle register, or the flute rather than the clarinet.

Phenomenologists refer to these different appearances as *eidetic variations* (from the Greek *eidos*, meaning sight): presentations of intentional objects that are unique and distinct from one another. As Matheson Russell suggests...

... [T]he same object can be “given” in consciousness with a great many experiential variations: not just as near/far, dim/bright, moving/stationary, etc., but also as an imagined being, a material being, a person, etc. All these variations are variations in the noema of the act, the “object-side” of the act.

The same object can be intended with the same sense in different acts (e.g. I see the glorious Sydney Harbour Bridge; I think about the glorious Sydney Harbour Bridge). On the other hand, the same object can be intended in the same kind of act with different senses. For instance, a piece of fruit may now be perceived as

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, these slower trill patterns could be conceptualized as “relating to” or “motivic developments of” *murmuring*. However, this kind of conceptualization has more to do with experiential phenomena associated with thinking (or perhaps seeing) than those associated with listening.

something desirable, later as something repulsive (perhaps because I am feeling off-colour); and yet it remains the same object.<sup>12</sup>

If one were to use eidetic variation as a musical model, it would stand apart from the more traditional model of developmental variation. Whereas the latter transforms, the former simply reveals. This revealing is often arrived at simply by a change in perspective. Consider Russel's bridge. Through repetitions and variations of its appearance (up close, far away, in sunshine, in fog, while driving on top of it, while hiking an adjacent hill), our first mental image. This is not to say that we do not recognize it as a bridge until all of these variations have been experienced. On the contrary, phenomenology contends that objects are experienced all-at-once (*Zugleich*) as a totality rather than as a summation of partial views or individual dimensions. Each instance of a physical object creates a complete mental image of its corresponding intentional object, and this mental image may then be altered and refined upon subsequent eidetic variations.

This structure of eidetic variation is employed through the deployment of musical material in *No sap chantar qui so non di*, as shown in Figures 3A and 3B. All music in the song performed by the voice and piano are drawn from a pair of continuities, both of which are shown in their entirety in Figure 3A. These continuities were composed as if to be presented linearly ("from left to right") and in total. However, each is then fragmented into a number of different partial repetitions, which are then combined into composites. Three such partialities are shown in Figure 3A, with their resulting composites shown in Figure 3B as they appear in the score.

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<sup>12</sup> Russell, Matheson. *Husserl: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 84.

VOCAL CONTINUITY

A single staff of music in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music consists of a series of notes with stems, some of which are beamed together. Above the staff, three horizontal lines with arrows at both ends indicate continuity spans. Span 1 is the longest, covering the first two-thirds of the staff. Span 2 is shorter, covering the first third. Span 3 is the shortest, covering the first quarter. Each span is enclosed in a circle with its corresponding number (1, 2, or 3) inside.

PIANO CONTINUITY

A piano accompaniment score consisting of two staves in treble and bass clefs. The music features chords and moving lines. Above the staves, three horizontal lines with arrows at both ends indicate continuity spans. Span 1 is the longest, covering the first two-thirds of the piano part. Span 2 is shorter, covering the first third. Span 3 is the shortest, covering the first quarter. Each span is enclosed in a circle with its corresponding number (1, 2, or 3) inside.

A piano accompaniment score consisting of two staves in treble and bass clefs. The music features chords and moving lines. Above the staves, three horizontal lines with arrows at both ends indicate continuity spans. Span 1 is the longest, covering the first two-thirds of the piano part. Span 2 is shorter, covering the first third. Span 3 is the shortest, covering the first quarter. Each span is enclosed in a circle with its corresponding number (1, 2, or 3) inside.

Figure 3A Vocal and piano continuities of the opening sonic object in *No sap chantar qui so non di* with three separate spans

## COMPOSITES

①

S. sap \_\_\_\_\_ chan - - - tar

Pno.

②

S. ni \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

③

S. motz \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

Figure 3B Composites of the spans in Figure 3A as they appear in *No sap chantar qui so non di*

Each of these composites is constructed from a unique combination of vocal and piano fragments. For example, the only time the vocal pitches B4 and G#5 appear simultaneously with the piano arpeggio spanning C#4 to C7 is in m. 26 (Composite 2 of Figure 3B). The vocal notes may and in fact do appear later, as does the piano arpeggio, but never in combination with one another. The voice and piano themselves cycle through their material with each repetition, until each continuity has been exhausted. However, any repeated material in the voice is constantly given new harmonic context by the unique combination with piano material, and vice versa. In this way, the sonic object comprised of these two instruments is continually experienced from different vantage points. Musical experience, however, is temporal and thus sequential. We are not privy to the entire piano and vocal object upon its first fragmentary appearance. Therefore, each presentation of these fragmented continuities already form a complete sonic object, one whose mental image is constantly revised and reformed with each eidetic variation.

Sometimes the register and contour of the sonic object accommodate delivery of Geoffrey Rudel's text, emphasizing the linguistic aspects of the object. Such is the case in mm. 4-5 (Composite 1 in Figure 3B), where the extreme high register is mitigated by the highly adaptable vowel "a". At other times, they complicate the text, emphasizing instead the sonic aspects of the vocal line, like mm. 8-9 where the vowel "i" appears twice above the staff. This tension between the vocal object and its textual delivery structures the perception of the song, in the end arriving in a more easily discernable registration on the words *l'auxiretz mai valra* and thus playing out in experience what is stated in the text: "The more you listen, the better it will be."



## Vocal Objects

Vocal objects, then, are a special case of sonic objects which contain verbal components. The above discussion emphasized the importance of ambiguity in structuring sonic objects. In *Poems of sheer nothingness*, this ambiguity is present in the text itself. For instance, consider the fourth line of Raimbaut d'Orange's poem found in *Una chansoneta fera*:

*E far l'ai tal que sen sela*

This phrase could be translated as "I'll make it so its sense is concealed" or even more plainly as simply "I'll conceal its sense." However, deeper inspection reveals a play on words. The word *l'ai* is also a homophone for the word *lai*, which itself has double meaning as the noun "plaintive song" and adverb "to her." Similarly, the word *sela* can be read either as the verb "conceal" or the possessive pronoun "hers." Considering these puns, another plausible translation could be, "I'll make her song such that its sense is hers."

This ambiguity is emphasized in the setting of the text by dividing the phrase into smaller segments which, when sung one after the other, repeat various combinations of the words that have double meaning: *E far* (I make), *far l'ai tal que* (make it/to her such that), *que sen sela* (that sense is concealed), *sela* (hers).

Don Ihde addresses this type of double meaning in his phenomenology of speech...

In dissemblance or in double meanings [...] a partial polyphony of speech may be experienced. [...] In a moment of seduction the ambiguous phrase carries with it the intense desire that it be taken as an invitation to further meetings. Here the doubled voice may be discerned on the fringes of the experience of language.

A fully doubled voice is subject to the alternations of concentrated attention. A “divided attention” shows itself as weighted toward one of its focuses. I walk along, mindlessly humming a ditty, all the while thinking in inner speech. Yet once noted reflectively, the discernment of the rapid alternation of the onset of the humming tones followed by the onset of “thoughts” shows itself. Here the near distance of inner and outer soundings show a difference of a wordless musical humming and worded thought.<sup>13</sup>

Raimbaut's text for *Una chansoneta fera* offers a parallel to Ihde's world of inner and outer speech in its use of puns and hidden meanings, which the musical setting emphasizes by presenting two separate "worlds" of sonic objects: one world in which the voice utilizes the text of the poem, the other featuring melismatic vocalise on the vowel "a". Each of these inner and outer worlds is accompanied by its own configuration of sonic objects in the instrumental ensemble. The world of the text is accompanied by raspy bridge sounds in the strings and sparse microtonal glissandi in the flute and clarinet. The vocalise, on the other hand, is paired with sustained and florid chordal timbre trills in the flute and harmonic bariolage in the strings. These sonic objects continue to appear consistently and exclusively with one or the other vocal material.

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<sup>13</sup> Ihde, 143.

## Auditory Fields

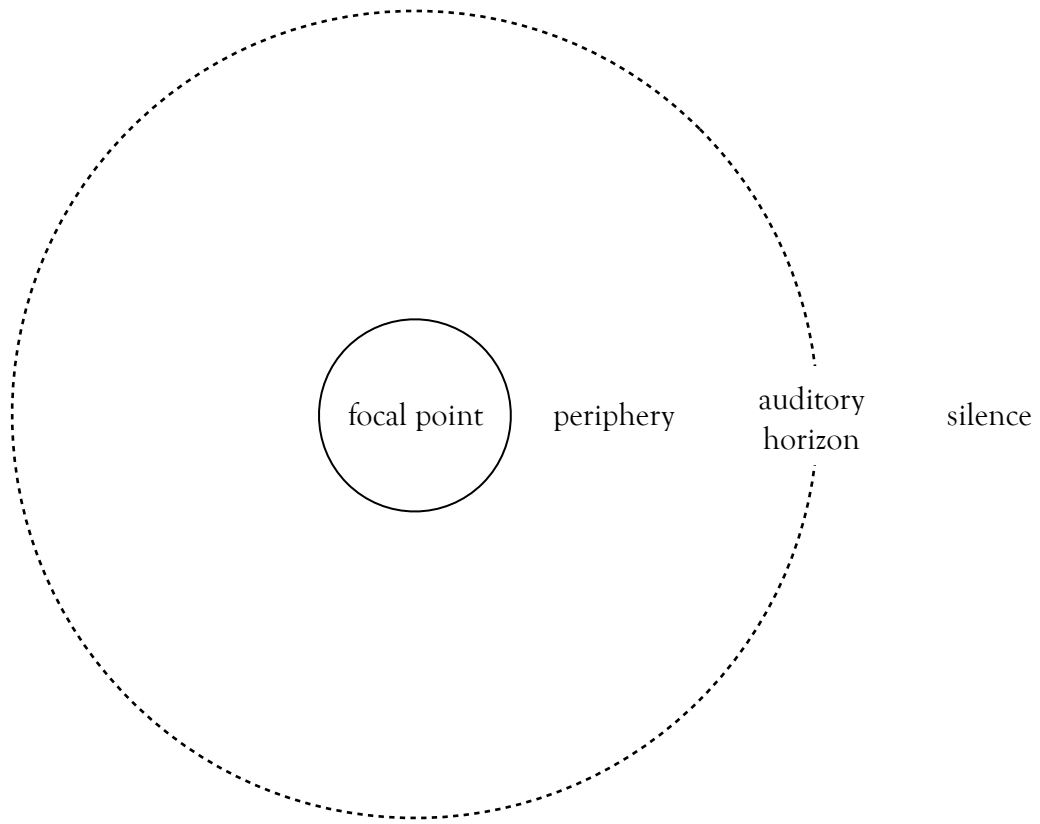
In phenomenological practice, these constellations of intentional objects are referred to as *perceptual fields*. Ihde defines the perceptual field (here in visual terms) as...

(i) a focal core, that which stands out before ... the central "object" [...]; (ii) the peripheral fringe, situated in relation to the core but never absent even if not explicitly noted; (iii) shades off to (iv), the horizon, which is the 'border' or limit of the visual field and its "beyond." [...] But beyond the "edge" of the visual field nothing is given as present, the "beyond" of the horizon is an absence, or emptiness (iv). Thus horizon has two meanings from the outset.<sup>14</sup>

If the same logic were applied to the auditory domain, Ihde's definition of the auditory field could be summarized as the auditory and temporal span in which sonic objects appear as simultaneously present. In this sense, the auditory horizon serves as both the temporal span beyond which sonic objects cannot be simultaneously apprehended, and the threshold of audibility (silence). Figure 4 offers a diagram of Ihde's description, the solid line indicating the focal point, the dotted line indicating the horizon. Figure 5 uses the same diagrammatic approach to chart the auditory field of the "text world" of sonic objects at the opening of *Una chansoneta fera* mentioned above. The voice and breathy string bridge objects are contained within the focal point, as they are the most continuous and often repeated in their various eidetic variations. The flute and clarinet microtonal glissando, the piano trills, and the string artificial harmonic tremolos all hover in the experiential periphery (even though they are the most salient) due to their infrequent presentation.

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<sup>14</sup> Ihde, 38-39.



**Figure 4** Diagram of the perceptual field

The image displays a musical score for the opening of *Una chansoneta fera*, enclosed within a large dashed circle. The score is organized into several staves, each representing a different instrument or voice part, with dynamic markings and performance instructions.

- Vln. & Vcl. (Violins & Violas):**
  - At the top, a circled section shows a single note on a five-line staff with the instruction *p sost.* (piano sostenuto).
  - Below this, a staff shows a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte).
- S. (Soprano):** A staff below the circled section shows a vocal line with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano).
- Fl. (Flute):** A staff in the middle shows a complex melodic line with dynamic markings: *mp*, *mf*, *mp*, *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*.
- Pno. (Piano):** A staff at the bottom shows a piano accompaniment with dynamic markings: *mp*, *f*, and *mp*.
- Cl. (Clarinet):** A staff on the right shows a clarinet part with a dynamic marking of *mp* and a *gliss.* (glissando) instruction.

Figure 5 Auditory field for the opening of *Una chansoneta fera*

Note that the string bridge noise, while inside the focal point, skirts the auditory horizon. This is because these sounds remain barely audible throughout, and thus have no real auditory features to bring into focus. This phenomenon serves two important functions within the music. First, it acts as a surrogate for silence, allowing for a consistent presence when all other sonic objects have receded beyond the auditory horizon. Second, it raises the loudness threshold at which sounds become inaudible, allowing for the voice to enter at and fade away to "*niente*" in places like mm. 23-24. If these objects were surrounded by true silence, the phenomenon of *coming from nothing* and *returning to nothing* would likely be compromised. Therefore, the horizontal string object's nature as a surrogate for silence allows for the experience of other important sonic phenomena where they otherwise might not appear.

In addition to structuring the sonic vocabulary of the music, the notion of the auditory field as a compositional tool also has significant formal applications in the song cycle, the most extensive of which can be found in *Farai un vers de dreyt nien*. Besides the opening and closing lines of the song, Guillaume IX's text is formulaic in its metric arrangement of the negative articles *non er* (not one) and *ni* (nor):

*Non er de mi ni d'otra gen,  
Non er d'amor ni de joven,  
Ni de ren au;*

The setting of this text found in *Poems of sheer nothingness* takes advantage of this by offering many eidetic variations on the arrangement of the text, as in mm. 15-40:

*Non er de mi ni d'otra gen,  
Ni d'otra gen non er d'amor,  
Ni de ren au;*

*Ni de joven non er d'amor,  
Non er de mi ni d'otra gen,  
Non er d'amor non er de mi,  
Ni de joven;*

The articles *non er* and *ni* act here as pivots to and from different textual fragments, creating a vocal object (similar to that found in *No sap cantar qui so non di*) whose identity changes with each eidetic variation. However, they also serve elsewhere as pivots between different vocal objects, and different auditory fields, as demonstrated in Figure 6 where *non er* and *ni de* are used to introduce new sonic objects in both the voice (sprechstimme) and the instrumental ensemble (clusters in the piano and breath tones in the flute).

Using moments like these as focal points throughout *Farai un vers de dreyt nien*, a schematic for the entire song can be charted showing the network of auditory fields (Figure 7A) and the formal path through them (Figure 7B). The general strategy is to establish a collection of sonic objects generally associated with the voice as focal points, while instrumental and more occasional vocal sounds remain in the periphery. These peripheral sonic objects are then moved into the focal point, using previously unheard objects to fill the newly evacuated periphery and therefore pivoting to a new auditory field. Much like visual saccades where the eye traces a path around an image until a complete mental picture is established, the formal trajectory traces different paths back and forth between auditory fields until all paths have been exhausted, completing the sonic object that is the song as a whole.





The image displays a musical score for the piece "Farai un vers de dreyt nien". The score is arranged in a traditional orchestral layout with various instruments and vocal parts. Several specific musical passages are highlighted by dashed circles, representing auditory fields. These fields include:

- Flute (Fl.):** A passage marked *sffz, mp, sub.* with a *5* fingering.
- Violin (Vln.):** A passage marked *sffz, mp, sub.* with a *5* fingering.
- Soprano (S.):** A passage marked *f, poss.* with a *3* fingering.
- Piano (Pno.):** A passage marked *mp* with a *8<sup>va</sup>* marking.
- Clarinet (Cl.):** A passage marked *f, poss.* with a *7* fingering.
- Soprano (S.):** A passage marked *mp, sub.* with a *5* fingering.
- Flute (Fl.):** A passage marked *mf* with a *8<sup>va</sup>* marking.
- Violin and Viola (Vln. & Vcl.):** A passage marked *mf* with a *5* fingering.
- Soprano (S.):** A passage marked *mf* with a *5* fingering.
- Violin (Vln.):** A passage marked *mp* with a *5* fingering.
- Violin (Vln.):** A passage marked *pp* with a *5* fingering.
- Soprano (S.):** A passage marked *f, poss.* with a *3* fingering.

Figure 7A Auditory fields from *Farai un vers de dreyt nien*

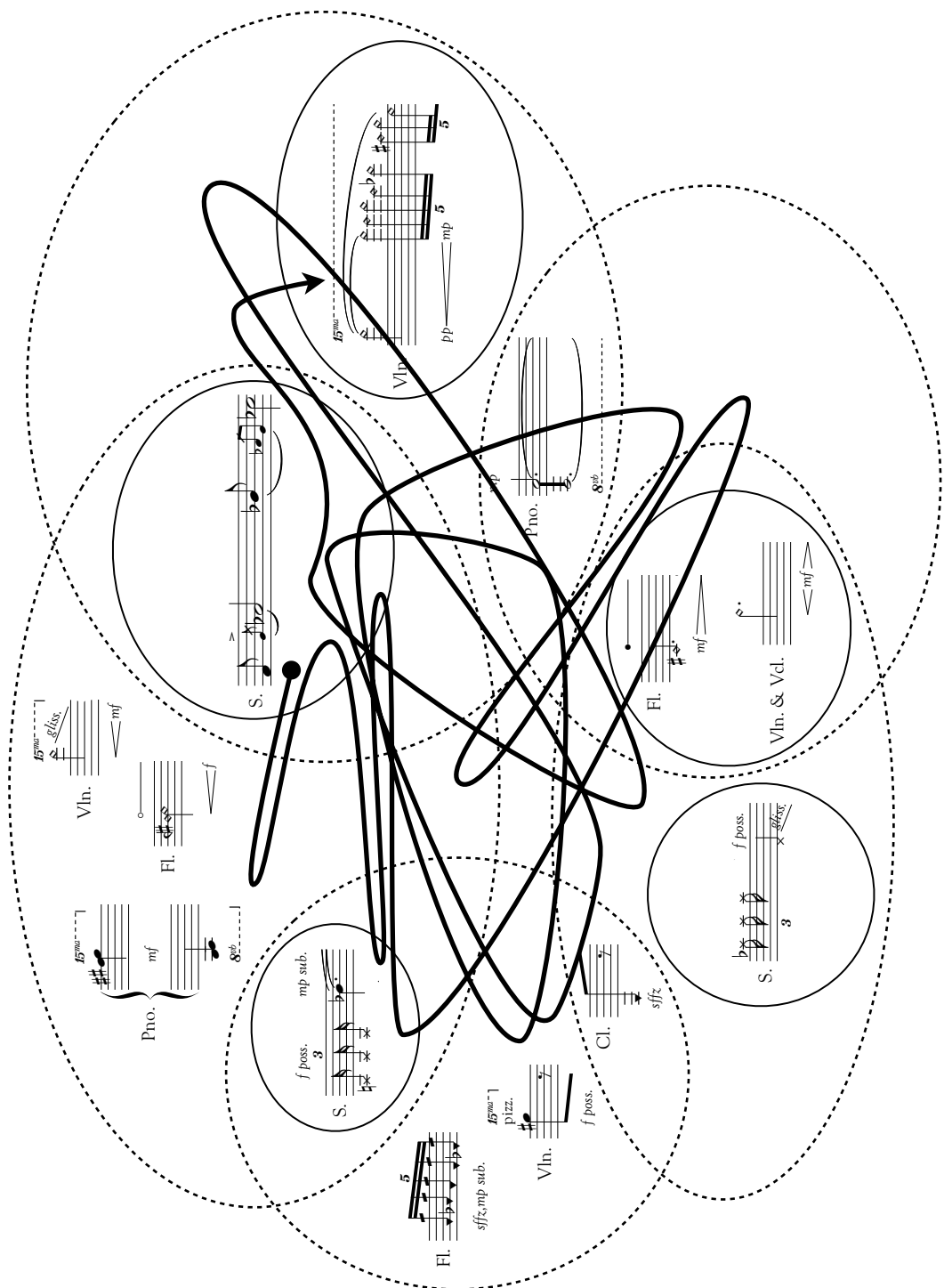


Figure 7B Formal path taken through the auditory fields in *Fanai un vers de dreht nien*

## Conclusions

Allowing perceptual experience to guide compositional decision-making has ramifications at every level of musical structure. At the level of musical material, the intersection between the physical properties of an instrument and its performer (e.g. a flute and its player's hands) with the experience of perceptual phenomena (e.g. *murmuring*) guide the creation of sonic objects. At the level of musical structure, the accumulation of sonic objects (breathy string tones, rich flute chords, vocal melismas) allows movement in and out of distinct sonic spaces that, when coupled with a text, can take on significant forms of meaning (inner and outer worlds of expression). Finally, the perceptual phenomenology of auditory fields allows for a new conception of musical form, one which focuses on the circularity of memory and inexact repetition.

Should such music be called phenomenological? Of course! All music is properly phenomenological in that phenomenology seeks to describe experience in all its forms, and all music presents aural experience. However, the music found in *Poems of sheer nothingness* aims itself precisely at the limits of perception (of audibility, of aural memory, of verbal meaning), and so perhaps it offers a more direct opportunity for a listener to investigate their perception as it takes place. It does so in much the same way as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and others attempted to analyze lived experience: by seeking out unusual and extraordinary moments of human perception, and bestowing upon these previously marginalized experiences the status of meaning and significance.

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