

2 My Poor Room

2.1 Descriptive *Poietic* Analysis: *My Poor Room*

2.1.1 Pre-Production: *My Poor Room*

Production Phase:	<i>Pre-Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Writing</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Appropriative; Indeterminate</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Speech</i>

I developed the concept for *My Poor Room*¹ in response to my encounter with the work of Klaus Buhkert, a freelance Berlin-based radio-maker and composer whom I first visited at his private studio in the Hansa Tonstudio² complex following the 1997 Prix Italia (where I had presided over the Radio Fiction jury), and with whom I would later co-produce *Vanishing Points*, a bilingual co-production with Bayerischer Rundfunk. I was given a copy of his *Assault/Anschlag* by a mutual friend and collaborator theatre director Amelie Niermeyer. I listened to this on a Sony Discman on a train to Berlin along with *Moments of a Likeness: the Director's Cut*, which is based on a theatre performance by John Berger conceived by Juan Muñoz. These works were something of a revelation to me as a practitioner. I was already familiar with some of the radiophonic works of major composers such as Gould, Nono, Maderna, Cage, Kagel and Berio and also of the *Pop-Hörspiel* radio-makers Andreas Ammer and FM Einheit through *Radio Inferno* (I believe it was Klaus who introduced me to the work of Heiner Goebbels). Klaus had studied with John Cage while studying computer music composition at MIT and had assisted Nono at Süd-West Rundfunk. What distinguished his work from all

¹ Broadcast 01/03/99 in *The Listening Room*, ABC Classic FM.

² The famous Hansa Studio, 38 Köthener Strasse directly across from the Berlin Wall (aka Hansa by the Wall) where David Bowie produced his Berlin Trilogy: *Low*, *Heroes*, and *Lodger*, working with Brian Eno, Robert Fripp, and Tony Visconti, as well as with Iggy Pop on *The Idiot* and *Lust for Life*.

these composers for me is his particular use of montage, quite brutal in approach and unconcerned by such niceties as atmosphere dropouts. Klaus forced adjoining fragments of audio into collision, and suspended voices out of context. He used two-channel stereophony to separate rather than blend sound sources, often dialectically opposing dual mono sources. His composition in depth he described to me as a subtractive process: audio sculpting. What also struck me especially was his directorial sensibility, his consciousness of his 'directorial voice': the ideology of his *mise-en-scène*. His works are fundamentally philosophical in intent. We spent two days listening to works and sharing views on radiophonic creative practice before I left for Sydney, by which time we had agreed to begin work on a collaboration (the aforementioned *Vanishing Points*).

My Poor Room was my first project on returning to Sydney. I was keen to engage with the ideas and practices I had just been exposed to in Berlin. I decided to make a through-composed collage piece, though not one based on personal experience, as was *Assault/Anschlag*.³ The theme was determined in part by my decision to use only text sources for performance appropriated from those books I had currently on the bookshelves of my ABC office (a consciously aleatory approach), or which I could generate myself from found sources immediately to hand using indeterminate cut-up techniques. I decided not to work from a pre-determined script in production – even one developed through indeterminate processes – but rather to work in post-production from an assemblage of recorded fragments edited in a digital audio workstation in the subtractive process described to me by Klaus Buhkert regarding his *Assault/Anschlag*. Buhkert's approach involved throwing everything he could into the mix and then subtracting everything he could without the work falling apart: a method he described with an analogy as sculpting sound. My new work would be 'written with tape' using *coupage* and *collage* (*montage*: cutting

³ Klaus described a terrifying incident on a Munich train, during which he had been menaced by an armed criminal. Klaus wanted to create a kind of 'sonograph' of his own mind as he remembered it from that experience.

and arranging), an approach with antecedents reaching back to Walter Ruttmann, John Heartfield, and Andre Breton, via Brion Gyson and William Burroughs, Pierre Schaeffer, John Cage and Glenn Gould and proselytized by Klaus Schöning through commissioning and producing *Neue Hörspiele*.

I was concerned to explore intertextuality⁴ as part of my compositional (writerly) approach; I wanted to investigate how my selected texts could condition, inform, complement and rub up against each other. I intended that the audience make the links between the texts; that there be space for the audience to become co-authors of the work or at least co-producers of its meaning. I was greatly influenced in my approach by *montage* theory: Piscator, Brecht, Dziga Vertov, Eisenstein, and Meyerhold, in particular. Also the literary and aesthetic formalism of the Prague School: the notion of *faktura*⁵ and Brecht's 'the radical separation of the elements'.⁶ I also saw

⁴ Bakhtin, M.M. 1981, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin; and Todorov, T. 1984, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. W. Godzich, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. See also, Klein, M. 2005, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

⁵ Wikipedia entry for 'faktura': "The concept of **faktura** (Russian: фактура) is associated with Russian Constructivism. In the period after the Russian Revolution, new definitions of art had to be found, such as the definition of art objects as "laboratory experiments". "Faktura" was the single most important quality of these art objects, according to the critic Victor Shklovsky, referring to the material aspect of the surface. The surface of the object had to demonstrate how it had been made, exhibiting its own distinct property.

Faktura: the visual demonstration of properties inherent to materials.

-Example: Corner Counter Relief - Vladimir Tatlin, 1915". See also Gough 1999 and Battier 2003.

Battier: "As an aesthetical category, *faktura* is a lever. It highlights one of the most prominent aspects of modern art, the independence of the components of a work. More to the point, *faktura* is the category with which an artist – sculptor, painter, poet, musician or audio artist – transforms material. *Faktura*, however, is not detached from its environment. It is related to *tectonic*, which determines the stylistic aspect of the work, and to the third category retained by the Constructivists, *construction*. It is the construction which enables the actual realisation, as directed by the plans of *faktura*." (Battier 2003: 251)

⁶ See Eisenstein, S. 1943, 'The Montage of Attractions' in *The Film Sense*, trans. J. Leyda, Faber & Faber, London; Brecht, B. 1964, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. J. Willett, Eyre Methuen, London.; Heath, S. 1974, 'Lessons from Brecht', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 103-28; McCabe, C. 1975, 'Brecht Event IV: The Politics of Separation', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 46-61; and Benjamin, W. 1977, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. A. Bostock, New Left Books, London. More recently investigated in Jameson, F. 1998, *Brecht and Method*, Verso, London; Matejka, L. & Titunik, I.R. (eds) 1984, *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass; and Jestrovic, S. 2006,

parallels in my intended approach with the practice of ‘quoting’ in jazz performance and with phrase sampling in 1990s electronica. Rather than present the performance texts discretely, I would interweave and intercut them so that they ‘spoke’ to one another creating resonances that were more than the sum of their parts. I would instigate an extended dialogue between them on a common theme. I would be treating the text fragments like musical themes or motifs to which I would return repeatedly with development and variation, and the work as a whole would be approached as a single large-scale piece to be through-composed. Lastly, I thought of the juxtaposition of speech, ideas, sounds through montage as creatively producing an acoustic poetry: poetry with radio rather than poetry on radio.⁷

As I rifled through my bookshelves as a *bricoleur*, or *Messingkauf*,⁸ I lighted on a collection of the writings of the Polish painter set designer and director Tadeusz Kantor.⁹ His reflections on art and theatre are written as prose poems forming a powerful testament to both the force of the imagination and in particular the theatre as a site for the evocation of that power. Kantor also expresses an unswerving commitment to the vocation of the artist, even in the face of the ruination of civilisation through war and that of political repression. I seized on the theme of the room as the ostensibly impoverished site of the imagination, taken from Kantor’s description of his theatre as “my poor little room of imagination”. I continued working through my bookshelves to identify potential performance texts that resonated with the interrelation between physical space (or site), creativity, and politics.

Theatre of Estrangement: Theory, Practice, Ideology, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

⁷ See Street, S. 2012, *The Poetry of Radio: The Colour of Sound*, Routledge, London. Street attributes Radio’s poetic tendency to the heightening and foregrounding of speech.

⁸ ‘The particularity of my interest so strikes me that I can only compare myself with a man, say, who deals in scrap metal and goes up to a brass band to buy, not a trumpet, let’s say, but simply brass.’ *Der Messingkauf* is the ‘scrap brass merchant’. Brecht, B. 1977 [1963], *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, trans. J. Willett, Eyre Methuen, London.

⁹ Kantor, T. 1993, *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990*, trans. M. Kobialka, University of California Press, Berkeley.

I gravitated toward the following texts from my shelves: *1984* by George Orwell;¹⁰ *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Hans Magnus Enzensberger;¹¹ *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh* by Vincent van Gogh;¹² *Last Days of the World* by Christopher Barnett;¹³ and *The Baader-Meinhof Group: the Inside Story of a Phenomenon* by Stefan Aust.¹⁴ As well as making selections from Kantor's theatre manifestos, often mere fragments, I constructed a short dialogue from the exchanges between Orwell's characters Smith and O'Brien referring to 'Room 101' and what it contains: 'the worst thing in the world'. I chose two Cantos from Enzensberger's poetic suite – one combining the horrific image of Jews, and perhaps others, in a railway stockcar en route to an extermination camp with that of steerage passengers trapped below deck as the *Titanic* sank, the second Canto conjuring an image of Death as *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (echoing textual fragments by Kantor citing Edward Gordon Craig). I selected letters to Theo by Vincent van Gogh (like Kantor, a painter) describing his studio at Arles and his creative activity there. Finally, I found one complete version of Ulrike Meinhof's poem 'a letter from a prisoner in the corridor of death' about her experience in the Dead Section at Stammheim Prison (a sensory deprivation torture facility) reproduced in *Last Days of the World*, and a second, incomplete, version in a different translation in *The Baader-Meinhof Group*. The Orwell, Enzensberger and Meinhof fragments resonate with Kantor's sense of the 'reality of political terror' he experienced in post-war Poland and in the face of which he created his 'theatre and visual arts that would be different from [that] reality' (Kantor 203).

¹⁰ Orwell, G. 1974 [1949], *1984*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

¹¹ Enzensberger, H.M. 1989 [1978], *The Sinking of the Titanic*, Paladin, Glasgow.

¹² Van Gogh, V. 1958, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston.

¹³ Barnett, C. 1984, *Last Days of the World*, Rigmarole Books, Melbourne. 'a letter from the corridor of death' by Ulrike Meinhof (pp.43-44) is translated into English by Paul Buck from a French translation and was first published in *Curtains* magazine, Kent, 1981.

¹⁴ Aust, S. 1987 [1985], *The Baader-Meinhof Group: the Inside Story of a Phenomenon*, trans. A. Bell, The Bodley Head, London. The fragment of Meinhof's poem appears on p.232.

I used the ABC record library database to generate aleatory poetry using 'automatic writing' by creating a report of all track titles containing the word 'room'. I sorted the results alphabetically. I deleted multiple iterations of the same track title, and also edited it down to a useful length by discharging less evocative titles, while taking care to retain gospel-inflected titles and those referring to avant-garde works such as *A Man in a Room Gambling* (Gavin Bryars). I also inserted three additional 'track titles': one made reference to 'The Listening Room', the celebrated ABC Acoustic Arts programme (on which *My Poor Room* was later broadcast); the second insert was simply the title of the programme 'My Poor Room', and the third a reference to 'Room 101', the only title out of alphabetical order, placed at then end as a 'sonic shock' to propel the listener into the following sequence, and to resonate with later fragments from *1984*.¹⁵ I generated a second aleatory performance text from a thesaurus seeking entries under 'room'. In this way I assembled a taxonomy of room types. Using a dictionary, I created a third aleatory performance text using idiomatic expressions that made use if the word 'room'. These phrases tell us something about our relation to rooms as physical spaces. I intended these performance texts as the basis for the actors to improvise their performance and the articulation of these performance texts. I did not intend that the actors should merely recite these pieces as presented on the page. My three aleatory performance texts were to be used by actors improvising their performance in response to these texts in the attempt to create/uncover resonances between these and the appropriated performance texts.

I had a further use for the record library database report, and that was to identify music tracks that might resonate with the written texts. I found some tracks with titles that punned the theme of 'the room', and I also transcribed

¹⁵ I was later disappointed to find out I had missed an opportunity when Klaus Buhler sent me some audio CDs of his work from his Hansa Tonstudio address from his company *Another Room Music*.

some song lyrics that could form the basis for further modes of improvised performance. In the former case I included two instrumental pieces by John Cage both entitled *A Room*, and a third piece *In a Landscape*, which I was able to link to van Gogh's letters describing his landscape paintings, and which a natural wide-open space to contrast the confinement of a room. I will return to the use of these musical works in 'Pre-Production: Composing' below). I was interested in the number of track titles which used the word 'room' in the Gospel trope of the site of the Last Supper, which is in turn used metaphorically to prefigure an existence Heaven: 'In my Father's house there are many mansions'. From among these I selected: *In the Upper Room, I'm Gonna Move (in a Room with the Lord)*, and *(There's a Vacant Room in Glory) Who'll Be the One?* I made these selections because of the relevance of their lyrics, which imagine a better place to come performed in an ecstatic expression of the desire to dwell with the Lord Jesus. One of these I transcribed for the actors to perform: *In the Upper Room*. I also transcribed the lyrics to the song by Jimi Hendrix, *Room Full of Mirrors*, which describes a mental state of confinement in which ego and self-identity fracture and mediated images of the self in this space obstruct, limit and distort the clear perception of reality; and a violent destructive act of liberation.¹⁶

The texts appropriated from Kantor (see 'Production: Performing' below) describe the terrible desolation following the Second World War: 'The room was destroyed.' The memory of European culture is embodied by the soldier returning from war: 'I am Odysseus; I have returned from Troy.' Out of the ruins of civilisation the celebration of the birth of Western Literature is staged. Performing in such ruins was 'the first environmental art'. Kantor portrays his theatrical project as the ritual reconstruction of 'the room of my childhood': 'This is the room that I keeps reconstructing again and again and that keeps dying again and again'. Kantor equates the theatrical performance with a lifetime: we are all mortal, people going through life 'with the same expression

¹⁶ Hendrix's lyrics put me in mind of Aldous Huxley's *Doors to Perception*.

on their faces'. In the theatre, the imagination creates reality 'as if we were seeing it for the first time'. At the end of a performance the stage moments later resembles a nothingness, a cemetery. Performance resembles a rite of sacrifice by the priesthood of Death.

Memories are brought to life by the ritual of performance but always in the knowledge that the performance 'ends in nothingness'. Repetition in this ritual is used like a litany to signify the compression of time: theatre as a memory room. The performance site is just as impoverished as the homes of the (post-war) audience – performers and audience 'experience the same problems and emotions'. The actors must use what ever is to hand to create "the thin veil of illusion that is cast on the audience's eyes": his is a 'poor theatre' (like Grotowski's). His "little room of imagination" is the site where a childlike belief in Truth can resist the "terrorist attacks on art and culture", characterized by 'the easy accessibility of art' (Adorno's 'Culture Industry', too, perhaps). Kantor describes his sense of freedom from the act of painting in his studio when he was banned from exhibiting. The theatre for Kantor is like an empty frame of a painting waiting to be filled by the actors' presence and the audience's imagination.

Kantor describes the artist's journey (or at least his own) as a journey to his interior, the imagination, a "crossing of the River Styx. The Land of the Dead." His artistic practice is a "neverending process of destruction and rebirth" with Death at his side saying he 'was destined for more shattering experiences'. At night Death guards "the entrance to my Poor Little Room of Imagination". The artist's journey is a quest, in which he must keep moving forward towards "nothingness" open some doors while experiencing the closing and locking of doors on all sides. Kantor gains strength from moving forward despite despairing for the future, crying "Further On, Nothing!" Kantor insists on the necessity of reasserting (ritualistically re-enacting) the aim of art as the process or act of creating or imagining an unworldly (different, other) reality unbounded "by the laws of any [economic or political] system".

Kantor's describes the site of his creative practice as his "poor little room of imagination" in which the artist must create, using whatever concrete materials are to hand, and even in the midst of ruin. I would add the following ideas/themes distilled from my selection of Kantor's text-fragments: that only by enacting a ritual of creation can we be truly alive; that the artist's journey is an interior one in which the artist must confront Death (Hendrix in 'Room Full of Mirrors'); that truth in art resembles that in childhood; that the figures that populate the stage are like our memories of the dead, which resolve to nothing at the end of a performance (Orwell/Bowie, 1984, 'We are the Dead').

I selected the texts from other sources in reference to these ruling ideas. In Enzensberger's 'Eleventh Canto', he describes the horror experienced by passengers trapped behind locked doors as they become conscious that their life's journey is about to come to an end: the *Titanic* passengers are confronted by death by drowning, the extermination camp victims, death by gas. His 'Thirty-Second Canto' resonates with Kantor's comparison of the empty stage with a cemetery: in Enzensberger's "immense" room "darkened completely", *La Belle Dame sans Merci* takes a dying man in an erotic embrace. Kantor attributes his use of the image of *La Belle Dame* to Edward Gordon Craig one of the great founders of the modernist theatre.

My construction cobbled together from Orwell's novel *1984* serves to enact the ritual of political terror. Although he is prepared to sign any false confession O'Brien places before him, Smith will be tortured regardless, taken to a room (Room 101) which contains the worst thing he can imagine - a ritual designed to effect the total annihilation of his personhood. Ulrike Meinhof's poem *a letter from the corridor of death* gives a first person description of the psychological effects of political torture by sensory deprivation. She describes the disassociation of her bodily sensations and the impairment of her capacity to think or speak, and her despair of any prospect of surviving this ordeal.

Meinhof's despairing comments on the detrimental effects of incarceration in Stammheim on her sensory perception, contrasts with Jimi Hendrix's violent and cathartic self-liberation from his "room full of mirrors". The Soul Stirrers and Mahalia Jackson sing fervently of entering the 'room' in which they will be united with the best thing they can imagine: the Son of God, while 'Room 101' concludes the track title sequence in my aleatory performance texts. This particular performance text also contains the titles of The Soul Stirrers and Mahalia Jackson gospel recordings, as well as recognisable gospel song titles by other groups or artists.

Kantor's description of his sense of freedom when painting in his studio even as he is banned from exhibiting, and in the face of the "reality of political terror" and "terrorist attacks on art and culture" led me to look to van Gogh's letters to Theo from Arles in which he describes working in his studio, and also in his bedroom which he made famous in a series of paintings that he describes to his brother. Van Gogh describes his creative site (his own 'poor room') in a way that resonates with Kantor: "you will never find a live studio ready-made, but that it is created from day to day by patient work going on and on in one place" and also "Only when I stand painting before my easel do I feel somewhat alive." Van Gogh tells Theo of the necessity for an artist to have a space in which he or she can work, even if is quite humble (like Kantor's theatre). When van Gogh wants to draw Theo's attention to something he demands that he "listen". He repeatedly describes his famous painting of his bedroom (sometimes referring to the painting by name) including the bedroom furniture and the vivid colours he has used, which will form a clue to the attentive (and educated) listener that these are van Gogh's words, as does his reference to preferring "never to sell" his paintings, and that he plans to paint a "starry sky". Further clues lie in references to his uncertain state of health and mind (echoing Meinhof), to the influence of Japanese art, and finally when he signs off as "Vincent". Van Gogh shares with Kantor a representation of the rhythmic cycles of life. For Kantor it

manifests in the rebirth and death of the stage performance, for van Gogh in the return to the same orchards and fields to paint each season year by year.

At this stage of production I was concerned with assembling a number of texts (grouped loosely around a theme) on which I could develop performances with actors. I deferred any decisions regarding the sequencing of these text fragments. Nor did I seek to make a coherent statement, though I noted already that I heard resonances between texts even to the point that their authorship became at times doubtful. Approaching this as a work of collage, I assembled materials that could be brought into contact: to collide, to resonate, and to contextualize each other, to dialogue or to argue. I wanted them to work sonically like the images in a poem: to evoke, to intrigue, and to draw attention to the spaces between semantic content. I did not set out to resolve the work for the listener. It was to be an open work, a ludic space out of which the listener would create his or her own “poor little room of imagination”. In order to engage the listener, I worked only with texts that were presentational rather than representational.¹⁷ There are no ‘scenes’ as such with mimetically represented other (dramatic) worlds. The speeches are presented directly to the listener as sonic material on a level with music and sounds, and not in order to point indirectly to represent dramatic action unfolding in a fictional world. These sonic materials constitute an event (multiple events) in and of themselves not the representation of something else.¹⁸ I intended to leave it to the listener to make the associations and find the resonances between these performance texts. I would of course have to do this for myself indeterminately in post-production.

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Production Phase: *Pre-Production*

Creative Practice: *Composing*

¹⁷ See Kirby, M. 1987, *A Formalist Theatre*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

¹⁸ See ‘Production: Recording’ below for my attempts to *sound out* ‘real spaces’.

Creative Strategy: *Appropriative; Indeterminate*

Sonic Material: *Music; Original Sound*

I decided on a through-composed approach to *My Poor Room*. This was to be an indeterminate process, a collage technique based on an assemblage of sonic materials gathered and generated in pre-production (appropriated) and production (generated indeterminately) and arranged empirically in post-production. I anticipated that the arrangements would emphasize intertextuality, where speech sequences would be intercut and also overlaid to highlight resonances between them and with the overall theme of the room as a space or site of creative imagination. Appropriated music sequences would also interact with speech fragments and between themselves (see below). In the absence of a dramatic structure or developed narrative, the dramaturgical organisation of the piece would defer to compositional considerations. In post-production, I would resolve the relation between fragments and sequences with the overall structure, organising the work into movements, and using arranging techniques like theme and variation, recapitulations, repetition, contrapuntal arrangements between speeches and so on. The work was not intended to be episodic or organised into scenes as such, there were to be no self-contained sections. With no pre-determined notated score, I approached composing *My Poor Room* as if I was working with a process score: that is, a series of tasks with an indeterminate outcome.

Having appropriated and indeterminately generated an assemblage of performance texts,¹⁹ I went in search of recordings that could 'give voice' to the theme of the room as a site of creative imagination. I began with track titles suggested by a search of the ABC Record library database (see 'Pre-Production: Writing' above). I already had a copy of a Mahalia Jackson recording that included two versions of *In the Upper Room*, one a studio

¹⁹ I use the term 'performance texts' here to refer to texts which performers use to create their performances, treating them as scripts. In other places I use the term to refer to the 'writing' of the production undertaken by the director - as in a 'performance score'. This is the (often purely conceptual, sometimes written) organisation of the production dramaturgy and design.

version, the other a searing live performance. I auditioned several Gospel compilations including *The Mighty Clouds of Joy*, *The Golden Gate Quartet*, *The Staples Singers*, and *The Five Blind Boys of Alabama* before choosing two tracks by *The Soul Stirrers* *I'm Gonna Move (in a Room with the Lord)* and *(There's a Vacant Room in Glory) Who'll Be the One?* which satisfied my two criteria: a powerful small-group predominantly a *cappella* performance and the word 'room' prominently featured in the lyrics. The lyrics had to be easily distinguishable, so that they could also work as appropriated texts (sung-speech sonic material). Many tracks I auditioned were arranged with mass choirs and complex orchestration, so music and voices blended too completely for my purposes.

I looked in vain (library, record shops) at the time for the version of Jimi Hendrix's *Room Full of Mirrors* that had appeared on the LP *More Experience*²⁰, an incredible live performance from the Royal Albert Hall, which is the one I heard in my mind's ear from when I was a secondary student. Sadly, I ended up working with track 5 from the then recently (1997) released MCA CD *First Rays of the New Rising Sun* mixed by Eddie Kramer. I thought the recording was overproduced, but nonetheless felt I needed the lyrics in a voice that was at least recognisably Hendrix. I had previously rejected the idea of using a version by The Pretenders.

I wanted to contrast the popular genres with music from art music's avant-garde, bridging 'high' and 'low' culture, and to signify an aesthetic sympathy between that avant-garde and the theatrical avant-garde represented by Kantor, and by extension with my own radiophonic work. I unearthed two tracks by John Cage, both entitled *A Room* - the first for piano, and the second for prepared piano. On the same record I also found *In a Landscape*

²⁰ *More Experience* is a posthumous live album by Jimi Hendrix released in March 1972 by Ember Records. The album was promoted as a soundtrack to the unreleased film *Experience* documenting The Jimi Hendrix Experience's performance at the Royal Albert Hall on February 24, 1969.

for piano²¹. While breaking with my first idea of using the word 'room' in the title or lyrics, Cage's later work (1948) obviously ties in sonically with his earlier solo piano pieces (1943), and the title of the former resonates with van Gogh's numerous references to painting landscapes in the texts I had already appropriated. Kantor of course is also a painter, and his word-pictures depict scenes of post-war destruction and the theatrical stage as landscape. I also appreciated the contrast of the relaxed expansiveness of Cage's *In a Landscape* to the focussed intensity of *A Room*. I anticipated that *A Room* would support Kantor's manifestos, with a transition from piano to prepared piano affording a sense of musical development and heightening the intensity and sense of altered perspective. The fact that the listener would not hear the titles of these solo piano pieces meant of course that they would perform as 'in-jokes' for Cageans, their titles punning with the texts they might accompany, much as jazz aficionados laugh on hearing a quote from a jazz standard or pop tune inserted into an improvised solo, to the puzzlement of the laity (I will return to this intermodality in 'Post-Production: Composing').

I had also recently bought a CD copy of *La Légende d'Eer* by Iannis Xenakis.²² I thought this music would work brilliantly with the Ulrike Meinhof

²¹ *John Cage: Works for Piano & Prepared Piano Vol. 1*. Wergo CD.

²² I was very excited when I first bought this work and played it to composer Jim Cotter, who remarked, "You know, you and I are about the only two people in this country who like this, don't you?"

CD [45:26] Released August 1995 by Montaigne (produced by WDR): MON-782-058. "*La Légende d'Eer* (1977-1978) was composed when Iannis Xenakis was in the midst of his far-reaching explorations of mythology and philosophy. Various inspired by Plato's myth of Er in *The Republic*, Pascal's *Pensées*, and even an article on supernovas in *Scientific American*, this piece transcends programmatic considerations and presents a strange, roiling soundscape that dwarfs Xenakis' earlier electro-acoustic efforts in scope and imagination. This astonishing piece begins with an extended passage of penetrating, shrill tones that break up into unevenly staggered and twittering pulses. These gradually widen into thick bands of gliding microtonal clusters and bulging intrusions of processed noise, harsh percussive attacks, and throbbing ostinati that grow in density and intensity, only to thin out by the end in distant, glassy pitches similar to the opening. The cumulative effect is similar to the immense roar of Xenakis' *Bohor* (1962), a shimmering congeries of metallic and rumbling tones that, for its time, seemed the ultimate expression of cosmic vastness and chaos. More than twice *Bohor's* length, *La Légende d'Eer* is also richer in its materials and more polymorphous in its extended processes. Recommended for adventurous listeners and serious students of *musique concrète*, this CD poses extreme challenges and offers its

poem *a letter from the corridor of death*, which describes a breakdown of the faculties of sense perception through sensory deprivation. Xenakis creates a sonic landscape of seemingly limitless dimension, and yet simultaneously pressing needle-like into the brain. This work of electronic music feels very detached from any sense of a real space. *La Légende d'Eer* is very challenging for the listener placing it on the cusp of experimental art music and the contemporary 'noise' genre. Xenakis is often cited along with Cage, the Futurists, and Hendrix as a precursor to the contemporary noise genre

Inspired by Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*, I decided to generate sound sonic materials indeterminately, recording locations with resonant spaces where sounds readily convey the spatial dimension of the location. The most resonant recording studio available was the Orchestral Rehearsal Studio, so I decided to record myself sounding out that space playing tenor saxophone phrases that could also serve to link or bridge between sequences. I also decided to create 'concrete' sounds by manipulating objects as 'found instruments' in the Orchestral Rehearsal Studio.

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Production Phase:	<i>Pre-Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Performing</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Pre-Determinate; Indeterminate; Appropriative</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Speech; Music; Original Sound</i>

For *My Poor Room*, I engaged two performers with whose work I was familiar: Dáša (Dagmar) Bláhová and Bogdan Koça. I first encountered them both as a NIDA Directing student seconded to a production of *St Joan of the Stockyards* by Bertolt Brecht at the Seymour Centre Downstairs Theatre

(Sydney) directed by Beverly Blankenship²³. Dáša and Bogdan both impressed me with their rigorous acting technique and their outstanding creative practice in experimental performance. I recognised in them a particular 'cultural capital' in the form of their creative practice as performers and aesthetic disposition as artists that would enrich my project. I was looking for performers who could improvise with found text, were not afraid to take creative risks, and were not limited to a realist style of performance. I sent both performers copies of the performance texts they would be recording two weeks before the studio date in order to allow them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the selection.

I chose these East European actors in part because of the excerpts from Kantor and Enzensberger texts that alluded to historical events in Eastern Europe. I was not concerned whether the listener would find them credible as in a representative performance, because I envisaged this production as being framed in more presentational mode. For example, I assigned the role of the interrogator O'Brien (a male character) in the collaged scene from Orwell's *1984* to Dáša. She also performed excerpts from the letters of the Dutchman Vincent van Gogh, and from the writings of Tadeusz Kantor - both in the words of a male given in the first person. Nonetheless I anticipated their respective accents (Dáša from the Czech Republic, Bogdan from Poland) would signify, supporting a certain melancholic tone I heard in these particular texts, and that they would be able to draw on their own personal histories to respond to the Kantor, Orwell and Enzensberger excerpts (both had escaped Communist Europe, and both have since returned to their countries of origin).

I paid particular attention to the quality and character of performance in the appropriated music sonic materials in the gospel genre. I wanted to introduce the ecstatic fervour of Mahalia Jackson and The Soul Stirrers in their

²³ Beverly Blankenship adopted a multicultural principle in casting this production.

respective songs to extend the range of performance in contrast with the subdued introspective mode inscribed in the Meinhof and van Gogh pieces. I was excited to find a live version of *In the Upper Room* from Mahalia Jackson that could serve to mark an intensification in performance from its alternate version, even to the point of overloading the recording apparatus and creating distortion artefacts. Its emotional power ‘spills over’ the confines of the musical form in which it is presented; the timbre (grain) of the voice is an unmistakable marker of religious fervour, signifying an excess of passion, the inability of the body or the recording apparatus to contain this emotional energy. This ‘excess’ in expression is also marked in the distortion and feedback that characterizes Jimi Hendrix’s guitar style.

For *My Poor Room*, I decided to perform on the tenor saxophone. I needed some musical bridges or links between sequences that were musically related and which would be heard developing as an independent thread, rather than feature as stand alone musical events. I also opted to perform on some found idiophones to ‘sound out’ the Orchestral Rehearsal Studio, and also performed some gestures to sonically manifest the presence of the human body in the space (see ‘Production: Performing’ below).

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Production Phase:	<i>Pre-Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Recording</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Pre-Determinate; Indeterminate</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Speech; Music; Original Sound</i>

I approached Recording in the Production phase of *My Poor Room* by generating sonic materials as a process of pre-composition. In this I was guided by my understanding of the creative practices of Pierre Schaeffer’s

musique concrète and Luc Ferrari's *anecdotal music*.²⁴ I would be creating sound objects, phonographically recorded sonic material that could be cut, ordered, processed radiophonically and layered and generally organised into a radiophonic work of composition. This approach would necessarily entail a significant degree of redundancy in the sound generation process in order to afford sufficient creative choice in the writing and composing of the work in post-production.

I intended to record speech in the Drama Studio. The actors would be working both singly and together. I decided to defer arranging and distributing individual lines of speech from the shared texts until I had the actors in the studio and could hear the arrangements instantaneously (see 'Production: Writing' below). The actors would need to perform both with and without headphones depending on the particular text fragment. Some were internally focussed (the Meinhof performance text for example) others more playful and performative – outwardly directed (such as the aleatory poems). The headphones would help the performers with the more intimate-scale speeches.

On completion of the speech recording I planned to record improvised performance on a tenor saxophone, some audible improvised movement gestures and to generate sounds indeterminately on found idiophones (noise-makers) in the Orchestral Rehearsal Studio, on a portable DAT recorder and stereo microphone. I decided to gather location ambiences after completing the speech recording in the Drama Studio, and music and sound recording in the Orchestral Rehearsal Studio. I deferred the exact choice of locations, but planned to travel to the city centre with Andreij and walk the streets in search of promising ambiences to record with the portable DAT recorder and stereo microphone.

²⁴ See Schaeffer, P. 2012 [1952], *In Search of a Concrete Music*, trans. C. North & J. Dack, University of California Press, Berkeley; Caux, J. 2002, *Almost Nothing with Luc Ferrari*, trans. J. Hansen, Errant Bodies, Berlin; and Judd, F.C. 1961, *Electronic Music and Musique Concrète*, Neville Spearman, London.

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2.1.2 Production: *My Poor Room*

Production Phase:	<i>Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Writing</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Indeterminate</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Speech</i>

I recorded selected fragments from the following texts to generate speech sound materials for the indeterminate processes of writing and composition in post-production. I deliberately set out to record more speech material than I could incorporate in the finished work. The commitment to redundant generation of sonic materials is essential to my writerly (and compositional) approach. The contents of those recorded speeches that were incorporated into my arrangements can be found in the transcripts (thesis volume two). I note their assignment between the two voices below.

From Tadeusz Kantor I recorded: 'The Ithaca of 1944' (Dáša); '1944. The Underground Theatre. *The Return of Odysseus*' (Bogdan); 'Memory 1988' (Bogdan); two excerpts from 'The Milano Lessons 12' (Bogdan); two excerpts from 'Memory 1988' Kantor (Dáša); 'A Painting' (Dáša); 'Poor Reality. The Reality of the Lowest Rank' (Dáša); 'From the Other Side of Illusion, or the Fairground Booth Stage Symbolism' (Dáša); 'The Informel Theatre. *The Country House*' (Bogdan); 'The Impossible Theatre' (Bogdan); 'Digression Continued: Stage Illusion and its Ur-Matter' (Bogdan); 'From the Beginning, in My Credo Was...' (Dáša); 'A Painting' (Dáša); 'Reality of the Lowest Rank' (Dáša); 'A Painting' (Bogdan); 'My Early Paintings' (Bogdan); two excerpts from 'Embellages' (Bogdan); numerous excerpts with ellipses 'Infernum' (Bogdan); 'To Save From Oblivion 1968' (Bogdan and Dáša in unison) in an impromptu arrangement; 'The Real "I"' (Dáša); 'The Situation of an Artist 1977' (Dáša); 'A Painting 1990' (Bogdan); and 'Metamorphoses' (Bogdan). Dáša and Bogdan both recorded different excerpts taken from 'From the

Beginning, in My Credo Was . . .’ and ‘Infernum’.²⁵ I also recorded adlibs of *repeated* selected phrases performed by Bogdan & Dáša separately (see Production: Performing below).

From Hans Magnus Enzensberger I recorded: ‘Eleventh Canto’ (Bogdan and Dáša); and ‘Thirty-Second Canto’ (Dáša).²⁶ From George Orwell:²⁷ a scene I constructed from fragments of *1984* read by Bogdan and Dáša plus several adlibs around the text (see Production: Performing below). Two of my three aleatoric performance texts were recorded singly by Dáša and Bogdan, and then in a ‘head arrangement’ developed on the studio floor. The third of these, created from song titles, was only recorded in a head arrangement. From *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh (Vol.III)*²⁸ I selected: No. 534 (Dáša); No. 535 (Bogdan); No. 535 (Dáša); No. 555 (Dáša); No. 594 (Dáša); No. 604 (Dáša); and No. W14 (Bogdan). This letter contains parallels with Kantor the painter. My van Gogh selections continue with two excerpts from No. W15 (Dáša); No. W15 (Bogdan); No. B22 (Bogdan); No. 594 (Bogdan); No. 555 (Bogdan) which includes a clue that it is written by van Gogh; No. 534 (Bogdan) which also includes a clue that this is van Gogh; and No. 554 (Bogdan) which concludes by identifying the writer by his first name as van Gogh. Though both actors often quote from the same van Gogh letters, they never both record the same passage.

I assigned both actors Ulrike Meinhof’s *a letter from a prisoner in the corridor of death*. I made a ‘head arrangement’ for two voices once again of the

²⁵ All Tadeusz Kantor excerpts taken from: *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990*, trans. M. Kobialka, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1993.

²⁶ Enzensberger, H.M. 1989 [1978], *The Sinking of the Titanic*, Paladin, Glasgow.

²⁷ Orwell, G. 1974 [1949], *1984*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

²⁸ Van Gogh, V. 1958, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston.

excerpt appearing in Aust,²⁹ and did the same for the complete piece in Barnett.³⁰ Having recorded both translations, I asked the actors to *reverse* the arrangement between their two voices, to swap ‘parts’. Then I called on each actor to perform both versions singly, and each time at a frenetic tempo with its overtones of panic and fear, to contrast with the subdued introspective duet. Finally, I asked Bogdan and Dáša to play with the lyrics transcribed from the Hendrix song *Room Full of Mirrors*, and the Jackson song *In the Upper Room* in a free improvisation. I had also transcribed the lyrics to *(There’s a Vacant Room in Glory) Who’ll Be the One?* for the actors to record, but in the end I opted not to record it due to my perception that the actors were spent. I had, of course, already formed the intention to appropriate the lyrics (as sung speech) from the original performances and recordings.

Most texts were either assigned to the specific actor’s individually or were shared in a ‘head’ arrangement made on the studio floor just prior to a take. Two of my aleatoric pieces were recorded using both approaches with each actor reading singly and in an impromptu arrangement for two voices. With the Ulrike Meinhof text I opted to reverse the arrangements on subsequent takes as well as recording each performer singly, in order to maximise my options for arranging their vocal delivery in post-production. In this way, I engaged in the writing process in the studio recording sessions as well as deferring writing processes to post-production. These deferred processes involved the sequencing and arrangement between text fragments as well as the internal arrangement of the distribution of voices.

The actors contributed actively to the writing process in production through both selection and interpretation of their performance texts – the pieces I describe as ‘aleatory’ above. They made impulsive and spontaneous choices in shaping the production of speech through the encouragement to play;

²⁹ Aust, S. 1987 [1985], *The Baader-Meinhof Group: the Inside Story of a Phenomenon*, trans. A. Bell, The Bodley Head, London. The fragment of Meinhof’s poem appears on p.232.

³⁰ Barnett, C. 1984, *Last Days of the World*, Rigmarole Books, Melbourne.

setting aside usual performance concerns of dramatic context, character, narrative, and 'logic of action'. They also freely responded to the invitation to spontaneously select and present individual phrases from longer selections. Bogdan and Dáša inflected the quotes from van Gogh, Meinhof, and Kantor producing speech through the conventional method of psychological identification with the texts: performing expressively.

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Production Phase:	<i>Production</i>
Creative Practice	<i>Composing</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Indeterminate; Appropriative</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Music; Original Sound</i>

In addition to the vocal arrangements of speech outlined in 'Production: Writing' above, I recorded tenor saxophone, concrete sounds, and ambiances all created indeterminately. Inspired by Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*, I decided to generate sound sonic materials indeterminately recording in locations with resonant characteristics, where sounds readily convey the spatial dimension of the location. I also decided to create 'concrete' sounds using objects in the recording studio. Andreij suggested recording in the Orchestral Rehearsal Studio as the Drama Studio was too 'dead'. Also, in response to my request that we record some of the practical sound effects: doors windows and so on from the Drama Studio, Andreij suggested that to save time we might source such sounds from a radiophonic production he had heard that had aired on The Listening Room and that used exactly these sound sources in a *musique concrète* composition.³¹ Should the composed sounds not suit we could try and source the studio takes from sound engineer Phillip Ulman who recorded that project. On Andreij's initiative, the last thing we recorded for this project in the Drama Studio was the sound of a large

³¹ Roz Cheney, 'New and Curious Objects'. Various, *Alpha*, 1994. CD: EMI 4797582. The Listening Room compilation No.3.

paintbrush on canvas: brushstrokes, stippling and a broad sweep suitable for use as a sonic 'wipe' in editing. Andreij had a clear concept for the sound he wanted to achieve, so I operated the Control Room DAT recorder, while Andreij 'performed' the manual paintbrush effects that I could already foreshadow relating to either the van Gogh or Kantor material.

On the day after completing the speech recordings with Bogdan and Dáša, I went with Andreij to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Rehearsal Studio (Eugene Goosens Hall). Andreij took with us a portable DAT recorder and stereo microphone. First we recorded me playing tenor saxophone. I played a succession of short Bb minor blues phrases improvised spontaneously. I intended these to work as bridges and links in the final radiophonic composition, rather than to underscore any of the performances. They would be used in particular to mark transitions between authors. I produced a range of phrases of varying duration, but also ending in varied levels of tension from suspenseful to fully resolved. My choice of minor blues derived from my desire to create a melancholy tone in keeping with both the Kantor and much of the van Gogh material.

I performed in the centre of the hall, a large studio space with wooden parquetry floor, with the microphone quite close (1m), and then after auditioning my first takes on headphones, I opted to perform facing a corner of the hall to create a big-sounding delay on the saxophone and not facing the microphone – recording mostly reflected sound with the microphone at more of a distance. In this way, I used the saxophone to 'sound the room', to excite the acoustic reverberation built into the hall's architecture, one tailored to orchestral music production (and audition). I recorded enough phrases to satisfy myself that I would be able to create a sense of progression, tension, and resolution across several phrases linking speech performances.

The studio was home to a Bösendorfer grand piano but this was kept locked. I asked Andreij whether it would be possible to gain access to it, but he said it

was a requirement that with each use the piano had to be booked and prior to use a piano tuner be engaged to maintain its tuning. This was not feasible in the heat of the moment, so I asked Andreij to assist me in wheeling the piano aside so we could record me sliding objects across the studio floor. As we did so, the piano emitted some magnificent rumbling, and distinctive creaking and cracking sounds as it worked its way across the wooden floor. I decided immediately to record these rather wonderful sounds.

Next I recorded objects sliding across floor of Hall. These included a bunch of keys, loose coins, assorted blocks of wood, my wallet, a DAT tape in its plastic case, and a few books – essentially whatever objects were either in my pockets or scattered around the studio perimeters. Then we recorded my footsteps. I wore heavy hiking boots to the ABC especially that day. These footsteps were intended to signify the taking of a journey – both an artistic and a life journey – and perhaps even metonymically for the soldier returning from war: “I am Odysseus. I have returned from Troy”. I advanced towards and receded away from the stereo microphone and in circular motion coming nearer to and passing the microphone. I made both long and short, fast and slow approaches and recessions. We managed to capture a deep echo of these footsteps in the Hall. Finally we recorded me flipping auditorium seats up in the empty auditorium, then clapping – first stationary, and then while turning, to change the resonance characteristics – and in order to indicate the end of the performance and the now empty auditorium featured in Kantor (especially in its analogy with the graveyard after dark).

The following day, Andreij and I set off for the city centre with a portable stereo DAT record rig to capture ambient sounds (see also ‘Production: Recording’ below). We were scouting for large resonant spaces, an indeterminate process of Composing as we were at the mercy of what we could find. I had in mind the interior Sydney Cenotaph in Hyde Park and the Art Gallery of NSW, and one of the Art Deco banks in Martin Place. The Sydney War Memorial was compromised as an ambience for me by the

sound from an AV installation and the nearby Elizabeth Street traffic. We were unable to gain access to some promising but secured commercial buildings in the CBD. We were able to record in the Commonwealth Bank in Martin Place with its magnificent Art Deco façade and interior. The predominant sounds available there, though, were printers and ringing telephones. We made our way to the Art Gallery of NSW and recorded in one of the main galleries (dedicated to 19th Century works), which was a large space with high ceilings and hard reflective surfaces. The gallery itself is isolated from city traffic and afforded the attendee an experience of absorbed contemplation in the artworks. Unfortunately, this did not translate into an ambience. There was very little in the way of acoustic events or a signature soundscape to record. As we made our way back to the ABC, Andreij remembered a dental surgery building in the CBD that dated back to the Art Deco period and that featured the original lift with cage-style doors. He thought the characterful lift might represent a particular kind of 'room'. After some time searching we located the intended building but its façade had been made secure from pedestrian access. Luckily, not too far away we found another building of the same period and style. This building also contained its original lift also and we recorded entering, elevating, exiting and descending the lift. I was excited, apart from the glorious sounds of the lift, because I could foresee (hear?) tangential references to the Heiner Goebbels/Heiner Müller piece *Der Mann im Fahrstuhl* (*The Man in the Elevator*) and a sonic image for the descent into the underworld (with the crossing of the River Styx) that figures in the Kantor material.

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Production Phase:	<i>Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Performing</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Pre-Determinate; Indeterminate</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Speech; Original Sound</i>

In preparation for recording, there was little of the kind of work around the table that is common in radio drama production: there were no characters to develop as such or narrative to establish or scenic action to create. I offered the actors the opportunity to work on the texts 'around the table' but they were both disposed simply to 'play', and were keen to start recording. They were both very experienced performers, comfortable with experimental performance, and had had the opportunity to look over the texts, which I had sent to them prior to our recording session. The actors were performing poetry, journal entries, letters, and prose literature in dialogue form. Most of these texts took the form of direct address to the reader/listener. Our focus was on the thoughts behind the words, and the words used to express the thought, and the play of words as a mode of performance. To help the actors find an appropriate rhythm and tempo for their performances of the Kantor and van Gogh fragments I played them some of the Cage pieces that I intended to use under them. I discussed with Bogdan and Dáša performing these speeches while hearing the music over headphones, but as the rhythmic qualities and shape of the music were not closely tied to their desired performance, the actors were perfectly capable of achieving the intended result without using this particular technique.

We began recording speech with Kantor texts in solo performance. Beginning with Dáša, then Bogdan. I alternated the actors often (about every 20 minutes), so they would not lose intensity or concentration. I recorded one passage, of three phrases describing performance as a ritual sacrifice to Death as a duo in unison, in two passes. Bogdan counts them in as they can only hear each other over headphones (Bogdan on the studio floor, Dáša in the 'dead room'). At least two Kantor passages were recorded by both actors. I opted to record these solo texts first as they are technically simple to set up, and gave the actors the opportunity to 'settle in'. I asked them to speak only when they had formed an image of what they were describing or felt an impulse to form an expression. I cast these actors because of their affinity with the experimental performance tradition of theatre as represented by

Kantor, and because of their East European heritage (Czech and Polish). They gave a rather melancholy-sounding performance, which suited the texts. I was interested in exploiting the cultural associations in operation when these accents are produced and received aurally.

I distributed the texts between the actors on the extremely simple basis of alternating voices between each fragment of texts. The exception being the longer passages where I identified a new 'impulse', as it were, and switched performers with the incoming impulse. By working through each source of texts in turn and in sequence I was able to ensure a rhythmic distribution of voices tied to sense groups (the semantic equivalent of musical phrases or passages) in the speeches, so that when they were layered a complex rhythmic interaction of textual authority and voice would be engendered. The Kantor texts were recorded in record-script sequence, alternating between actors to keep them fresh. The so-called 'record-script' was a series of photocopied excerpts from the source texts and some cut-up pieces of my own devising. They were in no particular order but were grouped simply according to source. The sequence in which the texts were presented to the actors is in *no way* resembles the edited and completed production. The actors worked relatively independently of me as a director once they had convinced themselves they were clear about my intentions for each strand of speeches.

During one attempt at an intense passage by Kantor Bogdan stops. He hears that I am about to comment, and asks politely but urgently that I not do so, so he can jump right back into his performance without losing the moment or his own momentum. This interaction goes to the heart of the necessity for the director/producer to create the conditions and climate (atmosphere) conducive to *free play*. Attempts to overdetermine the performance will almost certainly stifle the performers' creative process. The director needs to keep a weather-eye (ear) open for the needs of the actors in the spectrum from support in the form of close detailed direction through to giving permission for free play and

imagination (without judgement). On performing 'Digression Continued: Stage Illusion and its Ur-Matter', Bogdan stops performing momentarily, saying he becomes very emotional saying this passage. Reflecting on theatre practice from Cold War Poland, I believe, brought Bogdan into the emotion memory of his time twenty years previous when he was active and celebrated within contemporary experimental Polish theatre, which he was forced to leave behind in place and time as he fled the Iron Curtain. As a director this incident of course could only reinforce for me my intuition that casting these fine East European actors would charge the work with an inimitable authenticity.

I asked the actors to perform the Eleventh Canto by Hans Magnus Enzensberger as a duo in stereo. They both alternated lines of text and vocalized some in unison. I ran tape over the rehearsal we undertook for level as the actors settled into the arrangement. This run-through was also for the actors to get comfortable with and if need be adjust the level of their partner's voice in their headphones. Bogdan counts in "one, two, three." When Bogdan draws attention to a mistake he understood he had made in the read-through, Dáša reassures him that it is not important as it sounded good anyway. They nevertheless go over the fragment of text that gave Bogdan cause for concern. Bogdan cues Dáša with an "and" as in the fourth beat of a pick-up bar of music in common time. The cue is used for the intake of breath to allow the actors to co-ordinate the first phrase in close unison. After completing the run-through Bogdan requests, "Let us record it." This is not only an indication that he is ready, but also affords Dáša the opportunity to raise any concerns of her own before recording. I take this as my cue to start recording immediately. Bogdan counts in again. It is a brief take as Bogdan stumbles. He jokes that he is hungry, so this would place this exchange at late in the morning (or even early afternoon, but) prior to lunch. Bogdan counts in once more. A short way into the take Bogdan misses an entrance and apologises to Dáša, taking the blame for having interrupted the take. Bogdan apologises again after the completed take for having made mistakes,

this time to me as producer. Dáša reassures Bogdan again and reasserts that it does not matter, “if it works, it works!” I suggest a re-take understanding that Bogdan is not happy with the performance, but also because I hear an opportunity to develop a greater level of represented anxiety in the performances. The following take is for me an improvement, but I want to achieve a tighter synchronisation in the performance. The next take works very well. I often thank the actors after a take before making further demands as a director. It is important to show the actors that they are valued and appreciated as it helps them give of their best, and what is more it is their due – they really are performing to a very high standard!

I choose next to work on an exchange I have devised from George Orwell’s *1984*. I do so because it requires the same setup as is used for the Enzensberger piece. Dáša voices O’Brien and Bogdan voices Winston from the interrogation scenes prior to Winston being taken to Room 101. I think it is interesting to have a female O’Brien. Bogdan plays Winston as someone who is disintegrating psychically. They record in one take. I ask Dáša for some assorted voicings of “Room 101” to provide extra material or ‘coverage’ (to take a term from film production) for the upcoming arrangements.

Dáša then records the second passage from Enzensberger solo: the ‘Thirty-Second Canto’. After the first take, I ask her for a further three each successively closer until the last is hardly voiced at all. This afforded a very intimate performance from Dáša. It may be that I was aiming for but struggling to get a proximity effect, as the ½-inch capsule of the Sennheiser MKH40 makes this more difficult to capture. I selected this passage as it resonates very well with the Kantor texts – especially the reference to Death as an eroticized female. In fact I use it as a way of drawing the listener to a place where he or she is unlikely to be able to determine whether this piece belongs to Kantor or to Enzensberger, and to question whether it is of any consequence; the passages clearly ‘speak the same language’ – another aspect of *intertextuality*.

I recorded Bogdan next who, working with one of my collage texts, gives an intentionally flat reading of the names of the many types of rooms. The approach is very matter of fact and emptied of emotion or attitude. Bogdan then performs phrases or compound nouns incorporating the word 'room', this time rendered more expressively. Dáša records the same performance texts. I worked with them both to achieve an even rhythm and steady tempo, to allow me to edit fragments of each performance together. For me this section formed a 'found poem' generated by using a thesaurus to generate texts for performance. Bogdan joined Dáša in the studio but separated once again with Dáša in the 'dead room'. They recorded the same passages again, this time in unison, with Bogdan counting them in once more. The tempo drags the first time through, and they lose synchronisation slightly, which I cover with a short pickup to cut in when editing later.

I followed this with a free improvisation on the 'room' phrases, in which the actors alternated phrases picked out spontaneously and at random from those available. These immediately took on a more expressive character, and they were played by Bogdan and Dáša as if part of a dramatic scene. There is a long pause at the end of the take as they run out of phrases to use. They break into laughter after my 'okay' from the control room.

Next, while they are both in the studio, I ask Bogdan to voice some selected phrases from the Kantor and to improvise some variations on their delivery. The selected phrases were: 'Further on, nothing'; 'My poor room of imagination'; 'Memory'; 'Nothingness'; 'Death'; and 'The room'. Dáša, not realizing that we were recording in dual mono, makes a distracting clothing noise (in fact of absolutely no consequence), and so I restart the recording. Dáša explains that she understood she was 'off-mic' (she is of course right). In the control room at the time the source of the noise was not immediately clear from my perspective, so I judged it safer to interrupt the recording and

begin again. When Bogdan has finished and while the audiotape is still rolling, Dáša repeats the exercise in her own way.

Bogdan remains in the studio to record excerpts of letters from Vincent van Gogh. He has trouble with a particular section and after a few attempts identifies the low placement of his music stand supporting the text as the problem. Andrei goes into the studio to adjust it for him. Phrasing, hesitations, and self-consciousness (the passage sounding *read*) prompt a few more takes. As issues are arising only in individual phrases, I am confident the passage as a whole can be cut together from the numerous takes, and as I am not getting a good complete take, I decide to move on. The next passage yields a couple of mispronunciations, with the painter 'Seurat' requiring an exchange between Bogdan and me (over the talkback) to hit on an agreed pronunciation. A hesitation at the end of the passage prompts a pickup of the final statement. Next, Bogdan records a couple of letters interrupted only for me to correct pronunciations of 'Theo' and to keep the energy up at the conclusion of the letter. This last is not as impressive as the previous take: Bogdan makes three attempts, the first interrupted because of articulation, and the second because he is not happy that the interpretation is consistent with his previous performance. I am able to compensate for the low energy of the original take by simply increasing the volume later in the mix.

Dáša then records a different selection from the van Gogh letters. In her first take, Dáša interrupts her performance to return to the beginning. The second time through has a better flow to it. During the recording of this second passage I interrupt the take to correct her articulation of 'notwithstanding' – apparently not easy for a Slavophone. The next passage was recorded with a number of articulation problems and without a clear sense. I decided not to use of this in the final edit – there was some subject overlap (and therefore unwanted redundancy) also with the letters recorded by Bogdan. The studio recording creates the impression that Dáša was not breathing frequently

enough. I found more pronunciation problems: 're-canvassed' and 'laths'. Dáša's re-take finishes well. On the next take, I judge that the sigh in Dáša's performance would be interpreted as the actor sighing and not van Gogh, so I asked Dáša to re-start the take. Dáša picks up at a misarticulation on 'foliage'. A complex sentence necessitates a halt to the recording process in order to go over it again and so master the phrasing required to carry the sense. Rather than focussing on picking up the phrase, I ask Dáša to go to the beginning of the passage once more in the belief that she will be more confident in her phrasing this time through. The take fails to convey the desire to impart news inferred in the letter, although the reworked phrasing succeeds. Overall this was a self-conscious performance from Dáša, in which she foregoes the sense of the text in her effort to monitor her own voice. This passage was discarded during post-production, possibly in part due to its weak delivery.

The next recorded passage begins with an immediate misarticulation and soon runs into pronunciation issues, this time with French words, with which Dáša is not familiar and needs some coaching. I asked both actors to sight-read van Gogh's letters, and so some issues were to be expected, but I foresaw they would be trivial to address. There was some humour shared around Dáša's pronunciation of 'eyes', which came out sounding like 'arse'. I interrupt the take. This prompts Dáša to recount a story where she played a love scene in her first acting job in Australia, a major television drama series, when she had asked her lover to 'look in my eyes' with the same pronunciation. After coaching Dáša in French pronunciation, we resumed. The take was marred by pronunciation of French words again. More coaching. This time Bogdan also attempts to coach Dáša, which makes her even more confused. We manage a barely adequate pickup of the phrase. Next 'Gauguin' causes its own issues, prompting further coaching from Bogdan and me (from the control room). The performance now seems more energized but I make a final pickup because of an ambiguous articulation of 'fourteen' sounding like 'forty'.

Then we record a shared performance in dual mono of the Buck translation of the Ulrike Meinhof piece. I interrupt the take because of stomach noise and then for a mic 'pop' on the plosive in "impossible". A mistimed entry from Bogdan prompts a pickup on the way through. With the tape still running, Bogdan and Dáša read through the Bell translation of an extract from the same poem (in Aust's book). The take is fine first time through. Andrei requests another pickup by Bogdan from the Buck translation, where Bogdan's mike popped on "impossible".

The actors then swap parts and re-record the two Meinhof pieces. The first attempt is interrupted by Bogdan's stomach. Bogdan then interrupts his own performance due to an early mispronunciation on "bulb" and picks up the phrase. The take proceeds well. Bogdan's performance is hardly voiced as if about to disappear. Dáša's voice is intimate and without hope. I record a pickup of just the tuneless whistling from both actors at Andrei's request as the console's gate has suppressed the sound of whistling in the previous takes as it slipped below the active threshold.

Dáša's solo is recorded at a much faster tempo version for both Meinhof translations. Two phrases are picked up: one for noise underneath the voice, the other for a mispronunciation of "awareness". Bogdan follows with the same task – a fierce rendition in one take.

Bogdan then records the lyrics to *Room Full of Mirrors* and *In the Upper Room* as poetry. He can be heard on the studio tapes briefly reading though in preparation for the one reflective take. Dáša gave a more whimsical reading in one successful take.

The session ends with a dual mono recording of song titles containing the word "room". I encouraged the actors to play with the expression of these titles. I asked them to play these titles as speeches from a drama. I interrupt

the take when Bogdan performs lines assigned to Dáša. Dáša jumps a page accidentally. Bogdan loses his place in a synchronized passage of room numbers prompting a pickup on the fly, counted in by Bogdan. Bogdan later picks up where he misread the script. The section finishes with a couple of unison phrases. I ask for a re-take, giving the actors the opportunity to try something different, as the recorded take was certainly usable. Bogdan counts them in again. This take is more playful in expression. They play to each other more. Bogdan again loses his place in the list of room numbers and counts them in again into this sequence. Dáša expresses her excitement about how well the sequence was working. Then Dáša twice loses her place prompting restarts. The next run through of the sequence works very well and continues to the end. The room number sequence provides a natural climax in this last performance and so the remainder of the section ends up being discarded in post-production. The performance definitely shaped the writing process here.

For a description of the practice and process of performing in the production of sound and music sonic materials see 'Production: Composing' above. I chose a Bb minor blues scale to improvise on the tenor saxophone in order to express and convey musically the melancholic tone of the Kantor and van Gogh texts as performed by Bogdan and Dáša to mask the transition from one writerly source to the other, to link them thematically, and to either extend a moment out of one speech or to set up an intro into a succeeding speech. In order to sustain interest and the momentum of the sequence, I frequently improvised phrases that did not resolve - especially to the tonic. The heavy footsteps – boots on floorboards – were executed purposefully, as if in pursuit of a destination, on a journey - courageous in the face of despair. The sliding objects were recorded speeding across the floor to create short sonic events that could punctuate the arrangement of the work, or rather the sequences within it. Giving these objects considerable kinetic energy enabled them to excite the hall's resonance, lending significance to the resulting sounds. The seats in the auditorium were flipped up in a way that also activated the

acoustic resonance in the hall, but did not represent in any realistic sense the departure of an audience, working rather for a musically percussive effect. I performed my handclaps with the intention of performing the tonal variation in both direct sound and acoustic reverberation as I turned away from the microphone and masked the clapping from the microphone with my body.

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Production Phase:	<i>Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Recording</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Pre-Determinate; Indeterminate</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Speech; Music; Original Sound</i>

I began recording in the Drama Studio, ABC Sydney one morning in January 1999. The actors worked using headphones (Beyerdynamic DT100s) to assist them with feedback on the finer nuances of their performances. It can be argued that they are 'sounding' or that they 'perform' the audio technology: the microphone as their instrument. Andrei Shabunov favoured Sennheiser MKH40s (1/2-inch end-addressed cardioid patterned) at this time. Having appraised Andreij with what I was hoping to achieve vocally, I deferred to his considerable expertise and experience in the matter of microphone selection and placement - just as in post-production I would rely on his affirmation (taste) regarding my choices in track balance and editing rhythm. Developing this kind of working partnership requires not just confidence and trust in the capabilities and sensibilities of one's colleagues but also taking them into one's creative confidence. One microphone was set up in the 'dead room' the other on the studio floor. It may be possible for the listener to identify them by close listening to the voices. The actor playing the 'secondary' voice in any developing arrangement was stationed in the 'dead room'. That dual mono passages were recorded in different spaces can be heard by the low levels of spill between mikes. The dead room was left open at Andreij's suggestion for actor comfort and to aid communication. I preferred to use the 'dead room' for

the more interior solo passages such as excerpts from the van Gogh's letters. Some passages were recorded entirely separately (i.e. solo) and then edited together in post-production.

Working close to the microphones led to interruptions due to actors' stomach noises, and issues with the acoustic artefacts of vocal production such as a dry mouth or throat or audible swallowing. The actors were accustomed to and comfortable with stopping and jumping back to previous passages to improve their performance *in their own estimation*. Sometimes this might be due to inflection, energy and intensity, and at others due to articulation problems: mispronunciation or stumbles, or perhaps misinterpretation as in rushing the tempo. I accepted the first take where it was delivered impeccably. Often though, I would request pickups, particularly at the end of long passages where energy is prone to flag, and where the actor must leave the audience with an appropriate sense of expectation, closure, or anticipation. The duo passages were rehearsed on mic so that the actors were able to become secure in the arrangements, and of course vocal levels were established prior to each change of configuration (after an actor break or swapping texts, for example).

Prior to recording, I had determined the order in which the assorted texts might be recorded according to two main priorities: firstly that of the order of their perceived importance to the project, measured against both actor and studio availability, if pressed for time, I did not want to find myself without essential text fragments as speech on tape; remembering that there was a degree of redundancy built into the selection of texts (less than I anticipated as it turned out due to the density of composition created in post-production). Secondly, I was concerned to work with the actors on the more exacting texts first while they were still fresh and energetic (though of course actors and their voices often do not come to life until later in the day); saving the free play with texts until such time as they had relaxed into their work rhythms having 'nailed' the more challenging pieces and their voices had warmed up. I began

recording with Dáša, then Bogdan. I alternated the actors often - about every 20 minutes - so they would not to lose intensity and concentration.

The texts were recorded in the following sequence: manifestos by Tadeusz Kantor recorded solo; the Hans Magnus Enzensberger 'Eleventh Canto' (as a duologue); a short devised exchange from *1984*, (also as duologue); the 'Thirty-Second Canto' Enzensberger (Dáša only solo); the two aleatoric 'room poems' recorded both solo and dual mono (arrangement improvised in the studio); improvised duologue built on select Kantor words and phrases; excerpts from van Gogh letters recorded solo; the Meinhof (Buck translation) text arranged in an alternating dialogue; the Meinhof (Bell translation) text fragment arranged in an alternating dialogue; both Meinhof arrangements in reversed vocal order; complete Meinhof translations as solo (Dáša then Bogdan) in fast tempo; lyrics from *Room Full of Mirrors* and *In the Upper Room* solo (Dáša then Bogdan); and finally the cut-up poems from song titles as arranged in the studio for two voices. This process completed the generation of speech sonic materials for *My Poor Room*.

By reversing the arrangements between voices for the Meinhof translations, I was able to allow myself choice in Post-Production in the arrangements between more 'present' and more 'interior' voices as each actor recorded each alternate passage but from different setups. During recording of the dual mono arrangements, I monitored Bogdan on the left and Dáša on the right of the stereo output of the mixing console. I did not record the transcribed lyrics to *Who'll Be the One?* On hearing them rehearsed in the studio, I was not convinced this approach worked well enough in this instance; and so I abandoned the idea in the knowledge that I had the Soul Stirrers sung version to work with in post-production.

Andreij recorded the music and sound I produced in the Orchestral Rehearsal Studio (Eugene Goosens Hall) at ABC Ultimo on a stereo DAT recorder through an X-Y coincident pair of MKH40 microphones mounted on a

spreader bar. Andreij monitored his recordings using headphones. See 'Production: Composing' above for a description of the recording process for the various sounds. We took some time to find something reminiscent of a Gene Ammons-style reverberation on the tenor saxophone without access to an echo chamber. This Andreij achieved by finding an appropriate balance between the direct saxophone sound and its reverberation around the Orchestral Studio. I moved much closer to and pointed my saxophone bell at the corner of the Eugene Goosens Hall, while Andreij kept his microphone pair closer to the centre of the Hall. I ended up playing with my back to the microphone before we captured the desired sound. When recording the assorted objects sliding across the Hall, with the recording of heavy footsteps, and with that of the grand piano in motion, I took care to capture the extremes of apparent movement in the stereo spectrum as well as in 'depth of field' near to far. I was surprised by the particular tonal shifts in the sound I created while rotating on the spot clapping my hands – not something I had anticipated – one of those creative 'accidents'.

Andreij took a portable stereo recording rig with us on location, based on a Marantz DAT recorder and a Sony ECM-MS957 stereo microphone. We travelled to and around the city on public transport and on foot, so the rig in question was pretty light. Andreij monitored once more on headphones. I checked the sounds we were gathering intermittently by listening back to takes on site. We began our location recording at the Sydney War Memorial. Although the acoustic properties of this architectural monument were excellent for my purposes, the audio for AV installation there was intrusive as was the nearby Elizabeth Street traffic reverberating around the walls of the Cenotaph. At the Art Gallery of NSW we found hardly any recordable sound level whatsoever. The people there were so few and so quiet that the great rooms of the gallery would not resonate significantly. The experience was very much like being in the holy Temple of Art. We had indifferent success identifying appropriate corporate building foyers which although reverberant carried little people traffic, while cheerfully resounding with the city traffic ambience. The

real ‘find’ of our acoustic fishing expedition came from the half-remembered acoustic experiential memory Andreij had retained from a dental appointment in a dental surgery building on our way back from the Art Gallery. Andreij recalled the sound of the 1920s building’s cage-door lift and rightly surmised it would be perfect for *My Poor Room*. After tramping up and down the street for a while we located the building but it was no longer accessible to pedestrians without security access. Luckily we found a building almost identical in style and era very close by featuring a lift complete with metal concertina-trellis safety door as well as lift door – nice and creaky – perfect for a descent into the Underworld. See also ‘Production: Composing’ above for further description of the location recording for *My Poor Room*.

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1.2.3 Post-Production: My Poor Room

Production Phase:	<i>Post-Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Writing</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Indeterminate</i>
Sonic Material:	<i>Speech, Music, Original Sound</i>

Having generated and gathered sonic materials in the production phase, I was now ready to develop the work out of the assembled materials. There was no script to follow, so Andreij Shabunov and I first loaded all the sounds into a Fairlight MFX3 editor recently introduced into some ABC Audio Arts editing suites. Our approach was to be that of ‘writing on tape’ to use the phrase Klaus Schöning uses to explain the practice of Neues Hörspiel, and which may be said to have originated with Walter Ruttmann (*Wocheende*, 1930). Almost immediately, Andreij was called away to cover for another sound engineer off sick who was scheduled to work on a project with an imminent airdate. There was nothing for it but to press on without a sound engineer. This was somewhat problematic, as I had no experience with the Fairlight

editor myself. Andreij was able to give me a brief introduction before rushing off to complete a documentary urgently.

I began the writing process by loading the speech from each actor onto separate tracks. To these I added a music track, a track for atmospheres, and another for spot effects. As I overlaid certain texts from Kantor and from van Gogh with different texts, I added a second track for each actor allowing one track each to be foregrounded (as more 'present') and the other to be processed (vocal FX) and therefore to recede sonically in comparison. I cleaned up each actor's performance of each of their respective text fragments, removing any false starts or mistakes, and where desirable synthesizing the best available performance from more than one take. I ordered the speech materials from each actor by grouping them according to their written source. I also grouped separately songs, avant-garde orchestral music, atmospheres, and manual SFX. I did not work in preparation with the atmospheres and manual SFX, as I wanted to be able to sift the available sounds against the speech context alongside which they would be layered and arranged. As I mentioned above, I wanted to approach the creation of *My Poor Room* as a through-composed work. With no script, this became a matter of composing by ear. The form would evolve from the resonances between texts (including song lyrics), sounds and music. New 'threads or themes would be introduced as needed to further the development of the emerging structure.

My point of departure for this project was the theatre manifestos of Tadeusz Kantor who wrote them in a form of prose poetry. I had identified certain themes around the central one of the theatre as a 'poor little room of imagination'. Kantor employs the metaphors of the theatre as a landscape (both scene and painting), the empty theatre auditorium as a graveyard, the characters and actions onstage as memories (shades), and Death as the ruler of Art. He also sees Art as means of both resistance and salvation under political oppression. For Kantor the journey through life for an artist is a quest

through which the artist must confront (his or her own) death. The knowledge that all must die can give rise to despair, but Kantor elevates this realization to a battle cry: “Further on, Nothing!” So in constructing *My Poor Room* out of the sonic materials I had generated or appropriated, I began to structure the work around the theme of the artist’s journey and the concept of ‘the room’ as a site for the imagination: creative, ecstatic, terrifying. I decided to use Kantor to frame the work, and to highlight the resonances between themes within his own work, and with that of my other selected textual fragments (see Pre-Production: Writing’).³²

I chose to begin *My Poor Room* with heavy footsteps on the wooden floor of the large hall approaching from a distance the microphone directly from the centre of the stereo spectrum. These footsteps could be those of an actor striding downstage or of a soldier returning from the War. Bogdan declares that he will not ‘hide anything’ and that he has faced despair often in his life with the cry: “Further on, Nothing!” His voice is drenched in reverb. The footsteps come to a halt before ‘This cry would be repeated many a time in my life’; the boots turn and walk away, cueing a melancholy Bb minor blues phrase on a tenor saxophone. Both the phrase and the footsteps were auditioned in context with the speech and chosen from among the various alternatives. I followed this by establishing the theme of ‘the room’ with both Bogdan and Dáša presenting my cut-up texts taken from thesaurus entries of the names of rooms and expressions that incorporate the word ‘room’. The two performers begin in unison over the tenor saxophone decay, but then diverge in phrasing. I alternate which of the voices leads, filtering and drenching the secondary voice in reverb to give it an unreal spatial context. I transition between them using moments of ‘present’ unison speech. I go on to layer the typology of rooms with a new series of idiomatic expressions: ‘room for improvement’, ‘make room’, ‘smallest room in the house’. These latter

³² There were only two omissions from the recorded Kantor material altogether including just the last few lines of one of the passages. These cuts were made on the basis that these texts were just a little too explanatory.

expressions were overlaid from both individual takes by the actors and from an improvised dual mono take in which the two performers spontaneously select names from and perform the room typology.

To contrast starkly Kantor's cry of despair, I now introduced Mahalia Jackson's powerful, slow introduction to her ecstatic gospel song, 'In the Upper Room with Jesus' accompanied by florid piano runs and bowed double bass. Paradoxically, this introduction sounds almost melancholic or at least reveals a deep longing as Jackson foreshadows a large sweep to the ecstatic heights her performance and her 'witness' will eventually attain. This emotional tone segues easily into Bogdan's next speech from Kantor, the end of the musical phrase will be drenched in an artificial reverb to mask the edit as we cut away from Jackson's performance. Bogdan declares himself to be a witness to 'the genocide and terrorist attacks on art and culture'. He makes no attempt to embody 'the character' of Kantor, but makes the words his own expression. In order to assert and defend the value of the individual (so devastatingly crushed in 1984), Kantor withdraws to the stage where he can create a world as he did as a child, through imagination. I intercut Bogdan's speech with one from Dáša in which "Death carefully guarded the entrance to my poor little room of imagination". Death is twinned with love: "I could not tell one from the other' – so it is potentially Love in fact that guards this entrance. The speeches of both actors echo the title *My Poor Room* in the phrases 'my little room of imagination' (Bogdan) and 'my poor little room of imagination' (Dáša). I intend to infer for the audience at this moment that my radiophonic work will be about the imagination, and sites of the imagination in its various forms.

I return the audience to Mahalia Jackson, who has in the meantime picked up her tempo, and gained some backing vocalists, "Oh, it's in the Upper Room, talking with my Lord. Yes, and your-". Here I cut away abruptly, leaving the word "God" for the audience to echo in their own minds, as I introduce the piano version of *In a Room* by John Cage with the soft but busy passage from

the opening. I use this music to underscore Dáša's description of a memorable performance of the tale of Odysseus played out on stage in 1944, in a war-torn theatre space in Kraków: 'I am Odysseus. I have returned from Troy'. Kantor reflects on the mythic power of this stage image: the returned soldier on the stage of a ruined theatre building. Out of utter devastation, great stories, fantastic worlds could still be imagined among the "everyday realness". I overlaid Dáša's speech with one on a similar theme from Bogdan. "The room was destroyed by the war activity of 1944. Odysseus returned to this room rather than to a mythological Ithaca." The war-torn landscape was not imagined but the reality that enveloped the audience, which now "was inside the work of art". The ravaged theatre building's walls "were a substitute for a Greek horizon and its sunny skies." Towards the end of this section I joined Cage's *In a Room* played on prepared piano onto the previous piano version - a quite subtle transition masked by the speech.

I then reintroduced footsteps over the prepared piano decay. These continue as Bogdan begins my aleatoric performance text developed from song titles featuring the word 'room'. I end these footsteps as Dáša makes her vocal entrance. This section was arranged for both voices on the studio floor. I decided to intersperse brief interchanges between Bogdan and Dáša with samples taken from the Roz Cheney's musique concrète work, *New and Curious Objects*: doors creaking, venetian blinds, a sash window, in their various iterations. All of these sounds drew attention to architectural features of a typical room. Some of the song titles had particular resonances: *A Man in a Room Gambling*, a work by Gavin Bryars and Juan Muñoz, is a key work in contemporary avant-garde music and radiophonic art in which company *My Poor Room* signifies its aspiration to take its own place; *I'm Gonna Move in the Room with the Lord* which I feature later in the version recorded by The Soul Stirrers; and *Make Room in the Lifeboat for Me* which resonates with the 'Eleventh Canto' of Enzensberger that pictures the sinking *S.S. Titanic* later in the work. In Production I had directed the actors to treat each title as if it were a phrase lifted from a dramatic scene, and to experiment with investing each

fragment with passion and in an imagined context. In pre-production I had deliberately inserted the additional phrase 'My Poor Room' to echo the title. Among the curiosities, were delightful moments of improvised dialogue between unrelated and unmotivated expressions: indeterminate dramatic vignettes emerged. The titles proceed in alphabetical order except for my decision to place 'Room 101' which I introduced incongruously to make an emphatic end to the section and to anticipate the exchange based on *1984*. I had recorded over thirty more song titles beyond 'r' in the alphabet, including *There's a Vacant Room in Glory* – but I discarded these as redundant in post-production, the idea felt to me to have run its course. This decision was also partly prompted by a need to discard some of the material I had generated which could not all be contained within the broadcast programme format. The list of rooms grows in intensity, urgency and tempo to its climax, taking an unexpected turn with 'Room 101!' as associations overflow the textual patterning that had just preceded.

After a moment's stillness, long enough to hear the reverb begin to ring out on the two actors' voices, I continue with an *a cappella* version of *There's a Vacant Room in Glory* by the Soul Stirrers. The juxtaposition between that site of (almost) unimaginable horror, Room 101 located in the 'Ministry of Love' or 'Miniluv' (*1984*), and of a room in Glory with God (*John 14:ii*) could hardly be more extreme. It is said that Orwell based Room 101 on the conference room at the BBC where broadcast staff members were 'vetted' for their political affiliations and tendencies. I pick up on the political terror hinted at with 'Room 101'. The Soul Stirrers fade very slowly under Dáša speaking Kantor's statement about the need for an art and theatre 'different from the reality of political terror' and police surveillance, one created in an act like that of a demiurge or as if in a dream: "the highest freedom that is demanded by art." This speech is bookended by another gospel recording by The Soul Stirrers: *I'm Gonna Move in the Room with the Lord*, whose title was among those recited in the moments previous. The lyric attests to the supreme fulfilment of religious ecstasy: "You know my soul's been filled by God

Himself.” This song fades under the sound of brushstrokes on canvas (performed by Andreij Shabunov). Dáša voices Tadeusz Kantor’s drive to keep painting even though he was banned from exhibiting – his artistic voice gagged by the forces of political repression. The brushstrokes continue, linking the speeches of the two painters.

The gentle piano music of Cage’s *In a Landscape* supports a segue into the letters of van Gogh beginning with one describing the rooms of his house in Arles which he is in the process of converting into an artist’s studio, and which feature in some of his most famous paintings. The mode of writing and Bogdan’s voice signal a change in textual source although the theme of painting links this and Kantor’s previous speeches performed by Dáša. The references in the letter to the bedroom with its white deal furniture and the promise of a picture of a ‘starry sky’ offer clues as to the identity of this new ‘voice’. I interrupt the Cage piece at the conclusion of a phrase to reintroduce the sound of brushstrokes as Dáša suggests that the interior of van Gogh’s bedroom might be considered ‘the most unbeautiful thing of all’ – now known to us as the subject of some of the painter’s greatest works. Dáša’s presentation of the van Gogh material is set in an enhanced ambience – a reverberant space to foreground her constructed spatial context. Cage returns at the end of Dáša’s speech to link it to Bogdan’s performance of a Kantor speech that describes his work painting a table scene, echoing those represented by van Gogh. The end of a Cage piano phrase disappears into a superimposed, diffuse reverb tail, making way for more brushstrokes as Dáša quotes van Gogh asserting the importance of working in his studio for his mental health (and echoing Kantor’s earlier speech: ‘Although I painted solely for myself, I needed to do so). Her speech ends with a large sweep of the paintbrush and the reintroduction of Cage’s *In a Landscape*. Bogdan continues Kantor’s reflections on his painting, asserting his need to represent the human figure even as he strived for a sphere beyond the boundaries and materiality of form. Once again the speech ends with a very large brushstroke

(sounding like an auditory ‘wipe’). Heavy footsteps lead away from the microphone into the distance.

I now introduce Bogdan performing Kantor speeches that describe the relation of his painting practice and his theatre as his “little room of imagination”. I intercut these with a separate Kantor text on the same theme performed by Dáša, who now enters as the footsteps cease. Almost phrase by phrase, these are interspersed by sounds of objects sliding across the Eugene Goosens Orchestral Studio floor. The stereo placement of Bogdan (L) and Dáša (R) allow the listener to maintain the thread of both Kantor texts at this point. The effect is to hear the same theme developed through different expressions voiced separately. The listener is free (forced) to listen either to one or the other voice, or to engage in a complex process of attending to both while noting both their resonances and their variations on the current theme. I made this somewhat easier for the listener, and made the presentation somewhat more musical, by carefully spacing the speeches as they are intercut, introducing a further element of tension and release as each voice defers the resolution of the other’s expression. I mark the end of this exchange of Kantor texts with another melancholy minor blues phrase on the tenor saxophone. Happily, the overtones present in the saxophone decay blend exquisitely with the notes of the incoming piano, forming a kind of upward glissando.

I reintroduce Cage’s *In a Landscape* which leads into a similar formal structure to that which has just preceded with the two voices performing letters (in parallel) from van Gogh to his brother Theo (who is now named, giving a further clue to the identity of the author). Bogdan cites references to van Gogh’s need to paint for his mental health and his need to find courage along with the sense of being alive that producing art brings – all of which closely echo the words of Kantor presented just prior by Dáša and Bogdan. Van Gogh is confined to his room for months at a time due to depression, yet he nevertheless asserts the importance of working on the same scene

repeatedly. Lastly, he reports that he has finished a painting of his room. I interrupt the piano piece again, once more drenching the tail in reverb to mask the edit in the recording.

I break the delicate mood of the piano piece with the sound of a bunch of keys sliding across the Orchestral Studio floor and the resumption of heavy footsteps - broken off abruptly after only two steps. Dáša begins a Kantor text on the shared experience of actors and audience. Her and then Bogdan's phrases are interspersed again by objects sliding across the floor and further abrupt snatches of footsteps. Bogdan speaks here of the poverty and everyday realness of Kantor's theatre. The exchange ends with another Bb minor blues phrase on the tenor.

I introduce the next passage with the sounds of the paintbrush. Bogdan performs a van Gogh letter describing a painting of his bedroom, including the deployment of colour. Overlaid on top of this is an excerpt from another letter performed by Dáša that picks up the Kantor theme of the artist's quest for self-knowledge through creating art. As she finishes the speech I mark a change with another large brushstroke and the reintroduction of *In a Landscape*. As Bogdan continues the letter, I now overlay Bogdan's voice quoting colour references from different van Gogh letter. This secondary voice is placed in the background by using attenuation, rolling off lower frequency detail and a splashy reverb to enhance any sibilance which cuts through Bogdan's deep voice present in the primary speech; or possibly by attenuating the secondary voice's dry signal and mixing the reverb return at a comparatively high level. Once again the listener is drawn into attempting to support multiple threads of thought simultaneously (Bogdan against Dáša and then Bogdan against his own voice). I once more space out the recorded performance temporally through editing. This unsettles the speech rendering it unstable, as I make it ambiguous as to whether the speech will continue with a new phrase or will be juxtaposed and interspersed contrapuntally with a secondary voice. It is this contrapuntal construction that expresses the

compositional idea of an audio collage in which the intertextuality at play resonates texts with each other vertically, whilst my use of montage creates echoes on a temporal axis – horizontally. With the introduction of Bogdan's last van Gogh speech in this section, I prepare for the introduction of Bogdan reading from Kantor: I move Bogdan in the stereo image from the set-up for his secondary voice (off-centre to the left) as he speaks, into his set-up for his delivery of the primary text: dry, close, central and present. This last speech, as it were, comes out of the shadows, so as not to be taken as secondary to the Kantor text that follows.

I end the Cage piece abruptly, not waiting for the conclusion of a musical phrase. To mask this operation I send the musical tail into an obvious echo effect. Heavy footsteps walk from close 'downstage' in relation to the audience (listener) to 'upstage'. The Kantor text describes the tawdriness of theatrical illusion and the authenticity of the 'backstage'. As they footsteps disappear upstage, they suddenly reappear downstage repeating the gesture in a kind of 'jump-cut'. It is as if the shades of actors are forever condemned to walk offstage. Over the sound of the steps following Bogdan's speech, I introduce the sound of a book sliding across the floor of the hall. This sound bridges the introduction of Dáša performing another Kantor text reflecting on the life of a performance and the presence of Death that follows it, motivating us to search for 'the remnants of life' in the empty auditorium sounded by my solitary handclapping once the steps have faded. I return to Kantor's reflections on the relations of Death as the ruler of Art several times, constituting a significant theme for the *My Poor Room*. On this occasion, Kantor (Dáša) compares the empty stage to a cemetery. After more steps receding upstage, Bogdan resumes his reflection on the theatrical illusion perpetrated on the audience: "this inferno of machinery worked by the hands of the theatrical proletariat".

I introduce the first half of a longer tenor saxophone question-and-answer phrase to form a bridge into Bogdan's next speech this time from van Gogh,

and so in this respect masking the change of ‘voice’ by the same actor. The van Gogh excerpt contrasts with the disillusionment of the sham reality/shameful existence of the stage, as he asserts his desire not to engage with the art market – recirculating the myth that van Gogh never sold a painting in his lifetime, providing yet another clue to the identity of the speaker (or at least of the one for whom the actor speaks). The answering minor blues phrase on the tenor saxophone echoes the paradoxical and melancholy situation of the mythic genius artist who cannot succeed commercially. The theme of artistic despair is in turn answered by Dáša’s performance of a Kantor text in which he apparently abandons painting (or it could be a particular work) screaming with despair and cursing, ‘I made a mad decision to leave its space, never to return.’ This is the last we hear from Kantor directly on painting, setting up the conclusion of the section featuring intertextual dialogue between Kantor and van Gogh. John Cage’s *In a Landscape*, reintroduced abruptly at the end of the Kantor speech, underscores the last of the van Gogh letters in *My Poor Room*, this time read by Bogdan, in which the identity of van Gogh is revealed definitively: “I will make you sketches of the other rooms, too, some day. With a good handshake, ever yours, Vincent.” In pre-production I selected this particular closing as it aligned itself closely with the themes of ‘the room’ as the site of creative work and expression. Rather than end this section with Cage, I opted to introduce a powerful swell in Mahalia Jackson’s performance ‘*In the Upper Room, Lord, In the Upper Room, yeah -*’ under ‘ever yours’, fading the Cage piece and lifting Bogdan’s volume to ride the crest of Jackson’s vocal, ‘Vincent’ falling in between the singer’s phrasing.

Jackson’s gospel performance is cut abruptly where she would take an in-breath. I make a significant change in the sonic register with the performance by both actors of Enzenberger’s ‘Eleventh Canto’ from *The Sinking of the Titanic*. My arrangement was created in the studio based on the rhythmic tension between unison and individual expression (textural density) and the alternation of voices (rhythm in tonality, and spatial rhythm). This section introduces the theme of the room as the site of the imagination from the

perspective of political terror as non-persons are transported in horrific conditions to their eventual extermination. This poem can be read as the scene in both the railway stockcar and the gas chamber; but Enzensberger also draws comparison with the fate of the steerage passengers locked below decks as the *Titanic* sank in order to secure the safety of 1st and 2nd Class passengers – another kind of political terror.

From the scenes of political violence I move perspective on to ‘the room’ as the site of psychological experience and perception with an excerpt from the remix of Jimi Hendrix’s Huxleyesque *Room Full of Mirrors*, in which the singer takes his spirit and destroys his egoistic view of the world (“All I could see was me”), revealing the reality of the world as it truly is for the first time (shades of *Doors to Perception*). At the conclusion of the opening vocal, I introduce for the first time the piercing electronic tones of the beginning of Xenakis’s *La Legende d’Eer*. The Xenakis piece evokes the image of the shards of glass from Hendrix’s shattered mirrors as well as the brain explosion described by Meinhof as part of her experience in solitary confinement in the Dead Section of Stammheim Prison prior to her supposed suicide. The Xenakis music underscores Meinhof’s vivid description of the effects of sensory-deprivation torture as she is confined to her cell. This text is arranged for two voices and from two source translations into English (one partial) and one from a second language (via French).

I open with the Buck translation, Dáša then Bogdan alternating lines (recorded separately). I treated Bogdan’s voice with a bright reverb while keeping Dáša’s vocal dry. In Buck’s translation each of these early phrases begins with the word ‘Feeling’.

Feeling your head explode (feeling your brain box on the point of bursting a bulb)
 Feeling your spinal cord ride up your brain through the force of being compressed.
 Feeling your brain a dried fruit.
 Feeling oneself endlessly unconsciously and as if electrically controlled.
 Feeling them steal your idea-association.

Feeling your soul piss from your body, as if no longer able to hold water.³³

I faded the Xenakis out as I intercut the Meinhof poem with Kantor speeches read by Dáša in a spacious reverb on the theme of Memory, which for Meinhof is under siege. Kantor's "memory room" "keeps dying again and again". It is a room that is "pulsating the space of reality". I overlap the tail of Dáša's speech with the beginning of the Bell-translated excerpts read by Bogdan, in which Meinhof describes the sensation of the cell moving as she becomes dissociated from her senses. I reintroduce *La Legende d'Eer* and use Meinhof's description of her cell moving to jump across to the Buck translation again with Dáša leading, alternating lines with Bogdan. I then fade the Xenakis before continuing with Kantor's memory, presented by Bogdan of theatrical performance as a ritual performed by a death cult. Meinhof as a political revolutionary is witness to her own ritual sacrifice by the State. She shares in Kantor's despair: "No trace of life. Now really, further on, Nothing!" I pick up the description of the cell moving once more in the Bell translation before bringing the Xenakis back in. The musical pattern here is that I will fade out the Xenakis whenever introducing Kantor's intercut texts, at other times underscoring Meinhof with his uncompromising electronic music. This helps to orient the listener as to the identity of the speaker, or at least to separate them out heightening the sense of dialogue, balancing difference and the resonant themes in the writing. Dáša echoes the image of the cell moving from the Buck translation, Bogdan repeats the image using a new phrase from Meinhof, which Dáša repeats before continuing. The actors then alternate lines from Meinhof's description of her disoriented state.

I fade the Xenakis out, before Bogdan performs Kantor's vision of theatrical performance as a rite of Death's priests, from which he seeks to hide in despair in his 'poor room of imagination'. Meinhof/Dáša, who has not long to live in her cell, repeats the description of the cell moving from the Bell translation. Her voice no longer seems present but is diffused in reverb. It

³³ Barnett, p.43.

has lost its resolution, its sharpness of definition. The Xenakis music reappears before both Bogdan and Dáša describe Meinhof's loss of the power of speech and even language. The whistling sounds (represented here by the Xenakis tones) are an intolerable form of torture. On top of this, I overlay Dáša's voice speaking from Kantor's description of the disappearing of narrative in memory. Her voice echoes, rehearsing its own disappearance, as Kantor's actors rehearse their own on the stage, ending 'in nothingness'. Xenakis underscores the staggered unison delivery by Bogdan and Dáša of Meinhof's realization that she will not survive this. Xenakis out.

Bogdan performs Kantor's confrontation with Death in the figure of Yorick's skull from *Hamlet*, which Kantor identifies as that of his mother. I intercut this speech with an echoing unison chant describing theatrical performance as a ritual sacrifice. The Kantor speech echoes the central theme of *My Poor Room*: "I shut myself in my poor room of imagination. I kept repeating with despair: further on, Nothing!" Xenakis in. Both voices alternate descriptions of loss of self, memory, and language by Meinhof. Xenakis out. Bogdan performs Kantor's speech on "the spatial dimension of memory" and human life as banal repetition. Xenakis in. Both voices deliver the end of the Buck translation of Meinhof's letter from Stammheim's Dead Section describing the impossibility of communicating her experiences, of putting it into words, and her utter despair of escaping her situation. The Xenakis piece ends on a long electronic tone. Mahalia Jackson crashes in at the climax of a performance of *In the Upper Room*. However, this is not the recording used previously but a live performance delivered so powerfully that the recording apparatus is all but overwhelmed. Jackson's performance powerfully expresses the yearning for deliverance from suffering in this life. The threatened potential if not actual distortion of the recording apparatus serves as an index to her depth of emotion.

As Jackson recovers from her peak, conveying now the sweetness of talking with Jesus, I fade her recording slowly, over which I place the sounds of the elevator I recorded on location with Andreij. I hear in this an oblique reference

to Heiner Goebbels *Man in the Elevator*, which I had included in the list of song-titles early in *My Poor Room*. I also hear this sound as working as a metaphor for the descent into the underworld as the cage doors close and the lift descends. I present two intercut texts by Kantor. Bogdan performs the description of Kantor's confrontation with 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' in his journey to the Land of the Dead trying to retain the memory of his human form, crossing the River Styxx as had Odysseus. Dáša performs Kantor's account of his artistic journey, overcoming despair, leaving behind familiar forms of expression. The lift cage door slams closed behind 'him'. When Dáša resumes the theme of the artist's journey first introduced early in *My Poor Room*, I reintroduce Cage's *In a Room* in the piano version. Bogdan voices Kantor's question whether it is Death who rules Art, Dáša ending on Kantor opening up to 'pure imagination' armed only with his battle cry, "Further on, Nothing!" I fade out the Cage piano.

I introduce the last new 'voice' into *My Poor Room* at this moment. It is an assemblage of lines from *1984* making reference to Room 101. I had used the simple procedure devised by Gerhard Rühm for *Ophelia und Die Wörter* of collecting all the relevant utterances into a single text. My devised text is performed by both actors, with Dáša voicing O'Brien and Bogdan, Winston. Bogdan leads by offering to sign any confession placed before him. I reintroduce Cage's *A Room*, but Dáša does not answer Bogdan but performs instead Enzensberger's 'Thirty-Second Canto' from *The Sinking of the Titanic*. This poem parallels the scene from *1984* as taking place between friend and foe in a darkened room. The Cagean piano ends. Bogdan demands to know what is in Room 101. Dáša answers him in the mediated (chorused) voice of O'Brien. The Cage piece resumes. Bogdan/Winston performs Kantor's description of Death standing at his side: "As she would say, I was destined for more shattering experiences with her (Death/O'Brien) at my side." I use the slamming of the lift cage door as a motif for no return/escape from the infernum/Miniluv. Dáša describes the way Death comes for the young man in the second part of the canto. The Cage piano ends. Dáša questions Winston

as to his feelings towards Big Brother, concluding that it is time for Winston to go to Room 101. I continue with Cage's *A Room*, as Dáša (Kantor) compares the situation of an artist with someone on a journey or quest, who finds more and more doors being locked around him (like Winston), "Many of them he must close himself to open some others." I repeat the lift-cage door-closing motif once more, and take the piano out. Over Dáša, Bogdan repeats Kantor's journey towards 'pure imagination' that Dáša has presented moments before, a recapitulation of this principal theme, with variations. I return to *1984* with Dáša telling Winston what is in Room 101: "the worst thing in the world."

I reintroduce approaching footsteps into the arrangement, signalling to the listener that we are entering the concluding phase of *My Poor Room*. The steps halt before Dáša (Kantor) asserts the necessity of keeping moving forward towards nothingness (pure imagination). Her vocal phrases are interspersed with tenor saxophone again in a minor blues in two pairs of call and response phrases. Between the second pair, Bogdan concludes his recapitulation of the Kantor passage Dáša introduced, ending on "The final frontier of the space started to recede and embraced a new unknown dimension: pure imagination. Further on, Nothing!" Footsteps approaching once more resonate the theme of 'the artist's journey'. They stop, turn, and recede making for the "little room of imagination" upstage. Dáša begins a description of the function of repetition – "a signal of shrinking time" over the repeated word "repetition". Over this incantation, I lay Bogdan's concluding remarks from Kantor, "it is the psyche that creates and exhibits reality as if we were seeing it for the first time. And I think this is all". Bogdan ends on the exhortation to: "Remember everything. And forget everything."

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Production Phase: *Post-Production*
Creative Practice: *Composing*

Creative Strategy: *Indeterminate; Appropriative*

Sonic Material: *Speech; Original Sound; Music*

Working on the composing in post-production for *My Poor Room*, I focused on several tasks. Firstly, the sequencing of the materials overall with an ear to rhythm, density, texture and timbre, constructed in relation to the thematic development of the work. As the piece had not been scored prior to production, I essentially created a collage work on the theme of ‘the room as the site of imagination’. By extension the work is self-referential in reflecting on the radio as a utopic (nowhere) space for the imagination. Over and above the semantic properties of the speeches, I was guided by my ear, or a practice of ‘composed listening’, in developing the contour and rhythm of the work. I was also consciously composing with space(s). I had already recorded and selected sounds that easily yielded spatial information and character. I now set about creating spaces around the dry studio recordings of the actors using artificial reverberation. This enabled me to introduce rhythm into the aspect of presence versus distance for the actors’ speeches. Speeches became hierarchized in their significance, but dynamically rather than statically, as I blended dry with processed vocals as I mixed. The speeches became more or less insistent as they appeared more or less present to the listener, alternating between approaching and receding. Paradoxically for a work on this theme, I ended up not using the location recordings of spaces I made with the exception of the cage-door lift.

In developing the contour of the work, I began by establishing the theme with a playful interaction between sounding out spaces and the language used to describe and evoke various rooms. This was overlaid with a more sombre thread concerned with the restoration of culture from a ruined landscape. I set the Kantor pieces to John Cage’s *A Room*³⁴ in its piano version, a restless

³⁴ *A Room* (for piano) (1943) 1’59” – track 1. *A Room* (for prepared piano) (1943) 1’55” – track 4. *In a Landscape* (for prepared piano) (1948) 7’16” – track 5. *John Cage - Works for Piano and Prepared Piano - Vol. I* (1943-1952). Wergo CD: WER 60151-50. 1988. Performed by Joshua Pierce.

somewhat-pointillistic work, and spliced it with the version for prepared piano. I worked with the van Gogh excerpts to develop a more positive emphasis on the room as a site for creative imagination. I underscored this with Cage's *In a Landscape*. This lent the speeches a spare, delicate and beautiful soundscape. The use of Cage's piano works created a sonic link between the van Gogh and Kantor speeches, which were linked thematically by references to and the idea of 'painting'. As the work progressed, I introduced the darker themes of the political terror real and imagined and their effects on the imagination within the confines of a prison cell. This I underscored with Xenakis's *La Legende d'Eer*. This music struck me as simultaneously both claustrophobic and expansive, while undergoing a process of disintegration. The Orwell scenes were unaccompanied, stark, with O'Brien voiced as if from a surveillance system over a small speaker.

I worked with the tenor saxophone minor blues phrases I had improvised in Production by arranging short sequences of phrases, which I employed to link and retard certain speeches. The phrases were selected for their melancholy tone – usually associated with Kantor's declaration of despair: "Further on, nothing!" I also made extensive use of tenor saxophone to bridge between speeches by Kantor and Van Gogh to structure the work by signalling a shift in textual 'voice' (i.e. between one author and the other).

I used sequences of footsteps to rupture the flow of speech emphasizing hard cuts. The recurrence of the steps created a sonic motif for *My Poor Room* around the trope of the artist's journey. The energy of the footsteps charged the intercut phrases. I tried to match the tempo of the steps with the tempo of the actor's delivery, which was quite even. I used the sonic artefacts made by 'sounding' rooms, both in my sound recordings from the orchestral rehearsal studio and those appropriated at Andreij's suggestion from *New and Curious*

Subjects by Roz Cheney³⁵ (featuring sounds of windows, blinds, doors etc.), to create a dialogic relationship with speech phrases evoking rooms from my aleatoric performance texts. This formed simultaneous semantic and sonic investigation of rooms that I intended would enrich each other. At one moment I arranged an extended montage of sash-window sounds from the Cheney composition under the unison voices of Dáša and Bogdan: “Jumping Room Only”/“Leave a Little Room.” “No Room” is accented by heavy processed footsteps, while “Quiet Room” (whispered in unison) is accented by a heavy delay with high levels of feedback. The actors build up considerable rhythmic tension in the unison chanting of room numbers ending with the out-of-sequence “Room 101”.

The gospel songs: *In the Upper Room* (Mahalia Jackson in two different performances); *I’m Gonna Move (in a Room with the Lord)* (Soul Stirrers) and *(There’s a Vacant Room in Glory) Who’ll Be the One* (The Soul Stirrers); resonate with Kantor’s “almost like a prayer/or like a litany” from ‘Memory 1988’, and also with van Gogh’s erstwhile aspirations to become a pastor. I selected each of these pieces also in part because of their emotionally intensity and passionate delivery. Their emotional power ‘spills over’ the confines of the musical form in which they are presented. This is particularly the case with the second of the Mahalia Jackson performances where the timbre (grain) of the voice is an unmistakable marker of religious fervour. Her ecstatic rendition leads us into Kantor’s underworld across the River Styxx. I also auditioned a CD version of *In the Upper Room* recorded by Jackson with a big band but rejected it as too smooth. *Who’ll Be the One* is the second gospel song to be introduced. I placed this at the end of the room number sequence that ends the song-title aleatoric performance text. Coming immediately after “Room 101” and under Kantor’s references to “political terror” and “police vigilance”, so the song lyric phrases “who’ll be the one?” and “it could be you – could be me” implies that we are all vulnerable to be

³⁵ *New and Curious Subjects – musique concrète* by Roz Cheney. CD *Alpha* EMI – 4797582 track 1: 17’40”. Published 1994.

incarcerated and interrogated in a 'vacant room' prepared just for us individually – a theme taken up in the Orwell scenes later, making this a formal preparation. I introduce the third gospel song, *I'm Gonna Move (in a Room with the Lord)*, soon after, making a feature of the presence of the gospel metaphor of the room. This hopeful and steadfast song resonates with (and immediately precedes) Kantor's defiant act of painting while banned by the State, and also anticipates van Gogh's description of moving into his new studio at Arles. Thus the liberation that comes with the exercise of creative freedom is juxtaposed with the liberation of the soul from the burden and cares of the world.

Hendrix also sings of a spiritual liberation in *A Room Full of Mirrors*. I incorporated this single excerpt between the conclusion of the Enzensberger's 'Eleventh Canto' in which he overlays images of an underclass fatally trapped in two modern modes of transport: the railway cattle-truck en route to an extermination camp and the steerage quarters below decks on the *SS Titanic*; and Ulrike Meinhof's *a letter from a prisoner in the corridor of death*, which vividly portrays her psychological torture in the Dead Section of Stammheim Prison. Hendrix's music featuring cowbell percussive rhythms and driving bass guitar overlaid with distorted guitar feeding into a delay, and modular synth tones also processed with delay effects. These synth tones segue easily into the Xenakis piece that follows, as if Hendrix's music has been stripped down to this one component. I created the excerpt by first of all losing the pickup bars, entering instead with the first lead guitar phrase. The excerpt lasted for the first verse and then I sent the last phrase to a long delay with high levels of feedback to create waves of guitar sounds that diminished under the incoming Xenakis. This effect on the Hendrix both mimicked the waves that Xenakis instigates and extended the excerpt long enough to allow for a melding of the two pieces of music without permitting the Hendrix piece to develop any further: two forms of musical stasis underpin one another.

The Xenakis piece *La Legende d'Eer* underscores Ulrike Meinhof's poem. As the Meinhof text is intercut with some from Kantor, the Xenakis drops out intermittently. The excerpts used are taken from the opening of the work. They received no treatment beyond cutting and fading. I develop a pattern whereby the introduction of a Kantor speech signals the end of a passage from Xenakis. When the Buck translation (the complete version) resumes, I reintroduce the Xenakis. Sometimes the Kantor segments are followed by an effected version from the Bell translation. In this case the Xenakis is retarded until the Buck translated version resumes. An exception to this usage occurs with the description by Meinhof of the 'whistling' itself laid under a Kantor passage on the fading of memory. I am playing here with the sonic imagery of Xenakis' electronic tones and their resemblance to whistling. The next occasion I reintroduce an excerpt from *La Legende d'Eer* is again prompted by a Kantor reference to "memory". This time the music underscores the effected voices of both Dáša and Bogdan in an asynchronous unison duologue about Meinhof's despair at leaving Stammheim alive, and the relation between time and space. I also underscore the speech with Xenakis during a subsequent duologue in which Dáša and Bogdan trade lines in sequence. Following yet another Kantor reference to memory, the two actors once more trade alternating lines underscored by a final excerpt Xenakis through to the conclusion of the Meinhof texts.

At this moment I reintroduce Mahalia Jackson singing *In the Upper Room*, but from a different recording which fails to contain Jackson's powerful voice and clearly overloads the signal path. This forms the emotional highpoint of *My Poor Room* and concludes Meinhof's scene of political terror. Jackson now leads the speakers into the afterlife where they meet not a New Testament God (or his Son) but where they are confronted by the River Styxx on their journey as artists. The descent into 'the infernum', 'the land of the dead', is signalled by the sounds of a lift cage-door closing, the lift descending, and the doors opening and closing. The Kantor speeches place the artist at the threshold where he or she must struggle to keep the memory of the human

form or lose it. The lift door opens as Bogdan utters Kantor's cry of despair again: "Further on, Nothing!"

As Dáša and Bogdan make reference to confronting Death and coming to the end of their artistic journey, I reintroduce John Cage's *A Room* in the piano version laid under the Kantor texts until Dáša repeats the cry "Further, on Nothing!" a second time. The Cage recording serves to structure *My Poor Room* as a coherent whole. The return to both the piano piece and to Kantor's theme of the artist's journey through an unreal terrain to confront death signals to the listener that the work is moving towards a formal conclusion. The two actors deliver the same speech about the artist continuing his or her journey in the face of despair but temporally displaced from one another. These speeches restate the theme introduced at the beginning of *My Poor Room*. I arranged these speeches as a counterpoint to the artist's confrontation with death and the diminishing of possibility as one nears it. They are performed introspectively and so function like a subtext to a main idea that is more outwardly directed. Musically, they are restatements of an identical theme voiced with a different (vocal) instrument. The use of such repetition is deliberate here so as to anticipate and prepare the figurative and literal repetition that closes *My Poor Room*. First though, intercut with Kantor's summing of his theme(s) is the last iteration of political terror: the Orwell material from Winston Smith's interrogation in *1984*, which is presented without musical accompaniment - the Cage resuming along with the Kantor threads.

As I observed the similarity in Kantor and Enzensberger's representation of Death as *La Belle Dame* I encouraged an ambiguity between these authors by underscoring both their intercut phrases by Cage's piano version of *A Room*. At the conclusion of Dáša's presentation of the contrapuntal speech described above, I introduce the Orwell material. This gives Smith's speech offering to confess a context of despair and facing (almost) unimaginable horrors. The Cage piece resumes with the opening of Enzensberger's 'Thirty-Second

Canto' from *The Sinking of the Titanic*. By intercutting the speeches from Orwell, Enzensberger, and Kantor expressing the anticipation of Death's appearance both figurative and literal, each speech serves to retard the development of the others creating suspense and heightening their individual affect. I repeat the sound motif of the lift doors closing after Death's pronouncement that Kantor is "destined for more shattering experiences with her at my side" which precedes the end of Enzensberger's Canto; and again after "trying to find an exit or rather a passage - he sees more and more doors being locked around him/I heard myself say, 'further on Nothing!'" This last lift cage-door closing anticipates the end of the 1984 material that seals Smith's fate – the door to Room 101. It also brings to an end the last of the passages from John Cage, which have been deployed in *My Poor Room* to drive the work forward with its restless energy and unsettling pointillistic intervals. It is clear from the end of *A Room* that *My Poor Room* is drawing to its conclusion.

At the end of the 1984 material when Smith affirms that he knows what awaits him in Room 101, I reintroduce the footsteps with which I opened *My Poor Room*. Coming at this time they sound as much like a guard approaching to escort Smith to Room 101 as the steps the artist takes on his journey. I also intersperse a sequence of melancholy tenor saxophone phrases in minor blues, similar to those used at the opening of this work, between Kantor speeches (Dáša) describing the artist journey towards nothingness. As the saxophone passage resolves, the footsteps recur and Bogdan finishes his contrapuntal passage with "Further, on Nothing!" The composition of *My Poor Room* ends with a coda built on Dáša's voice repeating the word "repetition" as a kind of (soot voce) 'shout chorus'. Over this and more present in the mix, she describes repetition: "Almost like a prayer/or like a litany/is a signal of shrinking time". Her refrain continues under Bogdan who offers the idea that our minds create reality as we experience it. He brings *My Poor Room* to a close with the paradoxical command: "Remember everything. And forget everything!"

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Production Phase: *Post-Production*
Creative Practice: *Performing*
Creative Strategy: *Appropriative; Indeterminate*
Sonic Material: *Speech; Music; Original Sound*

Some of the recorded performances of speeches (pre-determined and indeterminate) were discarded. In the case of the indeterminate material, I judged some of the performances unsatisfactory. I opted not to persist with them in Production, as they were already redundant since they were improvisations around the lyrics of songs already to feature. Others I discarded once I had developed an arrangement to my satisfaction, as in the case of the song title aleatoric performance text, which ends its progression through the alphabet prematurely in order to create a thwarting of expectation on the part of the listener.

Performances of pre-determined speech were discarded once alternate voicings were incorporated into my arrangements. In my indeterminate approach to writing and performing in pre-production and production, I deliberately generated redundancy in the recordings in order to create flexibility and choice in composing. I worked with alternate tempos, distribution across solo voice, and created variations in arrangements for two voices (including overlaying the same voice in two distinct performances), which I then combined in Post-Production. On a few occasions I discarded good performances where the semantic content proved redundant in my arrangements or where the text exhibited a tendency toward explanation rather than verbal action. I retained only well-executed performances, editing out the usual misarticulations, stumbles, pick-ups and re-takes, to render a polished performance.

The appropriated music was edited and distributed in the arrangement to structure *My Poor Room* as a whole. To facilitate this, I added decay and reverb tails to music excerpts, and in one case (Hendrix) I restated (through the use of a delay effect) the last phrase of the excerpt as a coda. The sonic performance gestures in *New and Curious Subjects* by Roz Cheney were cut up and distributed as intermittent punctuations for my aleatoric performance text on rooms. I spliced two versions (piano and prepared piano) of *A Room* by John Cage to create a continuous performance under Kantor's description of the Polish post-war urban landscape. The Cage piece concludes with the end phrase processed through a long reverb with high level of feedback to create waves of sound before splicing on the concluding piano decay to end the piece. To my ears, this achieved the effect of increasing tension and sonic interest. I sought this effect also in my treatment of my tenor saxophone performances. I selected from numerous recordings those phrases that rendered the appropriate tone (generally melancholic) and that ended on notes of unresolved harmonic tension. The last sequence of phrases was formed from a longer single phrase so that the unnatural segmentation and intercutting of the passage contributes to a sense of tension and suspension before resolving.

I had been conscious of the performative element in recording footsteps and generating sounds using objects in the orchestral rehearsal studio. From the numerous takes I made selections according to how they interacted expressively with speech. The footsteps, for example, were used extensively as a sonic metaphor for the artist's quest: approaching, turning, receding. These 'performed sounds' changed their meaning in relation to different speech contexts and relations.

Production Phase:	<i>Post-Production</i>
Creative Practice:	<i>Recording</i>
Creative Strategy:	<i>Indeterminate</i>
Sonic Material	<i>Speech; Music; Original Sound</i>

I began the post-production phase of *My Poor Room* by loading the studio and location DAT recordings, and re-recorded the appropriated music from compact disc and cassette, into a Fairlight MFX3 editor (2i8o) coupled with a Studer 961 (12i2o) mixing console. We had not completed this task before Andreij Shabunov was re-assigned to a separate project with an urgent airdate. Before he left, he was just able to provide me with a quick lesson on the basic operation of the Fairlight editor. I would however be able to access technical support from Andreij and other Audio Arts sound engineers. As I came to terms with the complexity of structuring the work, I added more active tracks. I organised my recordings into a sonic palette to the right of the project timeline, and dragged audio clips into the developing arrangements on the left of the timeline.

It had often been my approach in post-production to identify sections that warranted a common approach and to treat these at the same time so as to maintain continuity of timbre between related sections. I thought of this as a 'structural' approach. With *My Poor Room*, I had resolved to approach the arrangement of speech, music and sound in a linear fashion and as through-composition. The editing suite I worked in had no built-in signal processing equipment, so I postponed decisions regarding such processes until the mixing phase. As I developed my arrangements new levels of complexity emerged as I created new resonances between previously unrelated speeches, and between speech and music and sound.

After five days of editing, I was informed that the production due to begin work in the suite I was using the following week had had to be postponed as the project had not been ready to go into production. As I was starting to gain

confidence with the Fairlight, it meant I could continue the process. A similar event (a producer falling unwell this time) presented me with yet another five days in post-production. This afforded me unprecedented access to an editing suite and enabled me to take the project to a level of complexity that I could not have anticipated. Andreij was able to re-join my project the following week and we transferred *My Poor Room* to a mix facility based once more on a Fairlight MFX3/Studer 961 Mixing Console set-up. I had expected that Andreij would be available to me for one day to mix, so I was delighted to find that, in lieu of the fact that he had been taken off my project previously, I was to have that five-day period working with him as sound engineer re-instated. After almost fifteen days editing and arranging, it was time to progress into the mixing phase.

As *My Poor Room* concerns itself so much with the idea of the built space, I was disappointed to find we were unable to access the Lexicon 480L reverberation unit, which was (is) exemplary in its creative possibilities and great sounds. So, we worked with the Lexicon MPX1 instead.

The use of reverb treatments is mandated by the theme of 'the room' as the site of creative imagination. As well as structuring a hierarchy of vocal lines musically, and steering the listener's attention dramaturgically, my use of reverb also serves to create spatial relations between speakers on a close-distant axis. The drier the voice, the closer the speaker appears to the mind's eye and vice versa. Reverbs combined with delays determine the relation of voices primary (dry) to secondary (wet). This approach extends to the doubling of the same voice from different takes as in the aleatoric performance text featuring a typology of rooms. In order to lead the listener to focus on a new voice, I tended to treat the outgoing voice by adding more reverb FX return level at the very end of its speech so as to contrast with the drier incoming speech. This approach also served when intercutting speeches from alternating voices. I made one voice more present (dry) and therefore more dominant with the secondary voice (wet) and so functioning as

counterpoint to the dominant line. In the case of the first Enzensberger Canto I afforded the two voices equal presence/ dominance appropriate to a shared, rather than overlaid, text. The second Canto is performed dry. The vocal reverbs were usually quite diffuse and featured significant feedback and discernible echo. See treatment of appropriated music above under 'Post-Production: Performing'. For the aleatoric piece based on song titles, the voices are relatively dry with just a vocal plate to support the voice. Interspersed with these voices are some footsteps processed with heavily modulated reverb creating a flanger-like effect. The whispered voices on "Quiet Room" are processed with a heavy delay with a treble frequency boost. I differentiated between outwardly-directed speeches and those which presented themselves as more intimate. The latter speeches I left untreated to represent 'voices in the head': interior monologue. I make pronounced use of dynamic reverb in the Meinhof piece where I saturate the more intense versions of the piece in reverb increasing the ratio of the reverb return to dry voice over time to create a sense of dislocation, of coming adrift. I treated Dáša's performance as O'Brien from *1984* with a chorused reverb to give an obviously mediated sonic texture to her voice.

On Bogdan's first entrance and at the very end of *My Poor Room*, he appears dead centre for what is in effect a prologue and epilogue. I placed Bogdan to the right of the stereo field and Dáša to the left for the opening part of *My Poor Room*, gradually developing a spatial rhythm to maintain sonic interest on the part of the listener by varying the placement of their voices in the stereo field, complicated by occasionally arranging the same voice to overlay itself with alternate speeches. 'Interior voices' tend to be placed in the centre, while the same voice when overlaid on itself is panned somewhat left and right – usually with one more heavily drenched in reverb to establish the primary and secondary vocal lines. Another device I used to reinforce the hierarchy between voices is the use of a high-pass filter presumably on the mixing console (although it is possible that it was achieved through a clip-based signal process executed by the Fairlight). This effect served to 'thin out' the

voice, leaving it with less 'weight' and therefore less insistence. This use of equalization contributed to the conscious variation in vocal timbre.

Andreij 'printed' the reverb and EQ treatments so that they could be mixed dynamically with the dry vocal. Panning, while variable between speeches, was static. This approach obviated any need to mix in sections. The complete work was mixed down to DAT recorder in one pass.

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