Jean Penny and Andrew Blackburn

Cultures, Chance, Electroacoustic Spa	aces: Exploring performance aspects of
Cage's,	CIRCUS ON

Federation University Australia

j.penny@federation.edu.au a.blackburn@federation.edu.au

ABSTRACT

This paper probes questions of performance space analysis and understandings of artistic interculturality in an electroacoustic context through the prism of Foucault's principles of heterotopia. The investigation focusses on the construction and performance of *Memento Memori: A Malaysian Circus on The Garden of Evening Mists* [A novel by Tan Twan Eng]. Original composition: John Cage; realisation supervised by Warren Burt, Catherine Schieve and Andrew Blackburn; first performed at the Cage101 Conference at the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia, August 23, 2013. Applying Foucault's notion of heterotopia as a research model aims to provide new ways of articulating information in an experimental electroacoustic location. The layering of elements and spaces of performance, when seen through principles relating to cultures, spaces, opening/closing and functional and illusory space, creates a potential for gaining valuable insights into these interactive musical spaces.

Introduction

A project to develop a Malaysian version of John Cage's _____, ____ CIRCUS ON (1979) evolved in 2012-13 within a context of conference curation, intercultural research, and a wish to create a collection of evocations of Malaysia (where we then lived), with its extraordinary sounds, images and feelings. Cage's work is a set of instructions for turning any book into a music theatre performance without actors, which includes reading, environmental sounds, and music from various groups spread around the performance space. Tan Twan Eng's novel, The Garden of Evening Mists (2012), provided a perfect setting. It is a story of memories and loss, but above all a story of personal resolution intertwined with Malaysia's history. The construction of the work through text, images of locations mentioned in the text (Kuala Lumpur, the Cameron Highlands, and other parts of rural Malaysia), electroacoustic (collated and manipulated environmental recordings) and instrumental (traditional Malaysian and Western) sounds, and mesostics created an elaborate series of processes and outcomes. Experimentalism, inherent in Cage's score instructions ("the performance will have '...untested ideas' and the music will by adherence to the score itself be 'not yet established or finalized", Blackburn 2013) proved an intrinsic part of each performance.

This paper explores the performance as process, and performance spaces as they may be perceived through Foucault's principles of heterotopia. Using realizations of Cage's _______,

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_____ CIRCUS ON _____ (1979) as exemplars, we outline the processes involved in constructing and presenting the work, and the performances as Cagean /Foucauldian contexts. In *The Order of Things* Foucault said:

Heterotopias are disturbing, because they secretly undermine...they make it impossible to name this and that...[they] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks...they dissolve our myths and sterilise the lyricism of our sentences. (Foucault, 1970. p.48).

This description of heterotopia relates strongly to the experiences of our performances of *Memento Memori: A Malaysian Circus on the Garden of Evening Mists*, with their desiccations of speech, juxtapositions of sound and spaces, and disturbances of expectations.

Processes

Composer Warren Burt and artist Catherine Schieve collaborated with the authors on this project, creating *Memento Memori* - a 60-minute electroacoustic collage combined with live music, mesostic narration and images. The realisation processes were based on Cage's instructions for CIRCUS ON from the score notes (1979), summarized here:

- 1. Choose a book
- 2. Write a series of mesostics based on the title of the book
- 3. Make a list of places mentioned in the book
- 4. Make a list of sounds mentioned in the book
- 5. Collect as many recordings as possible from the places and sounds mentioned in the book
- 6. Using the recordings...make a chance determined total program
- 7. Reduce the collection to a single multitrack tape; then combine the recorded and live performances in any combination.

The Book

Malaysian author Tan Twan Eng's novel *The Garden of Evening Mists* is a story of memory and loss; of personal discovery and intercultural relationships intertwined with Malaysia's postwar history. Herewith, a summary of the story, set in 1949 Malaya.

After studying law at Cambridge and time spent helping to prosecute Japanese war criminals, Yun Ling Teoh, herself the scarred lone survivor of a brutal Japanese wartime camp, seeks solace among the jungle-fringed tea plantations of Northern Malaya where she grew up as a child. There she discovers Yugiri, the sole Japanese garden in Malaya, and its owner and creator, the enigmatic Aritomo, the exiled former gardener of the Emperor of Japan. Despite her hatred of the Japanese, Yun Ling seeks to engage Aritomo to create a garden in Kuala Lumpur, in memory of her sister who died in the camp. Aritomo refuses, agreeing instead to accept Yun Ling as his gardening apprentice. As the months pass, Yun Ling finds herself intimately drawn to her teacher and his tattoo art while, outside the garden, the threat of murder and kidnapping from Communist Insurgency guerrillas in the jungle hinterland increases with each passing day. *The Garden of Evening Mists* is a place of mystery and, as the story unfolds, the identities of the main characters become increasingly ambiguous. Having refused to answer Yun Ling's questions, Aritomo instead creates a tattoo on her back which gradually reveals

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unsaid truths about place and the past. Yun Ling writes to capture the story of her life as a means of dealing with the realities of her own memory loss.

Tan's writing contains many sections of text which evocatively describe sounds of the environment, creating atmosphere in the reader's imagination. Examples from the text include:

the call to prayer – "The call to prayer unwound from the minarets of the Jamek Mosque across the river to echo through the city" (p.16);

choruses of frogs – "A frog croaked. A few other frogs took up the call and then more still until the air and earth vibrated with a thousand gargles" (p.20);

insects and birds — "Insects ground out metallic, clicking sounds. The cicadas wove a mesh of noise over everything. Bird calls hammered sharp, shiny nails into the air...In the trees behind us something heavy dropped to the ground. I spun around on my heel and looked back. Perhaps it was only a reopened durian, its armour of thorns, shredding the leaves as it fell. I became aware of another sound running beneath the noise of the jungle, a vibration pitched so low it was almost soothing." (p.81);

as well as sounds from within historic buildings such as doors shutting, gates creaking, the sounds of walking on mats, and pouring rice. All of these literary descriptions combine to create an imaginary soundscape adding internal sonic richness to the experience of reading the text.

The Mesostics

Cage's instructions for devising the mesostics are lengthy and detailed:

Taking the name of the author and/or the title of the book as their subject (the row), write a series of mesostics beginning on the first page and continuing to the last. Mesostic means row down the middle. In this circumstance a mesostic is written by finding the first word in the book that contains the first letter of the row that is not followed in the same word by the second letter of the row. The second letter belongs to the second line and is to be found in the next word that contains it that is not followed in the same word by the third letter of the row. etc. If a shorter rather than longer text is desired, keep an index of the syllables used to represent a given letter. Do not permit for a single appearance of a given letter the repetition of a particular syllable. Distinguish between subsequent appearances of the same letter. Other adjacent words from the original text... may be used according to taste, limited, say to forty-three characters to the left and 43 characters to the right, providing the appearance of the letters of the row occurs in the way described above. Omit punctuation and capitalise the row, reducing all other capitals to lower case. If at the end of the book or a chapter of it a mesostic is not complete, leave it incomplete or complete it by returning to the first page of the book or chapter and continuing your search for words containing the necessary letters. Having completed the series of mesostics, identify each line by page and line of the original from which it came. Make a tape recording of the recital of the text using speech, song, chant, or sprechstimme, or a mixture or a combination of these. Ascertain its time-length. Subtract that from a total program length, and distribute the thus-determined silence between large parts and chapters of parts and at the beginning and end of the tape. You then have a ruler in the form of a typed or printed text and in the form of a recited text, both of them measurable in terms of space (page and line) and time (minute and second), by means of which the proper position... of sounds...may be determined." (Cage, 1979, p.2)

The substantial task of devising the mesostics for *Memento Memori* was undertaken by Warren Burt. An example is shown below (Figure 1) – a mesostic drawn from Chapter 15, one of the most dramatic in the novel. The words are a random extraction from a found text, but nevertheless something of the drama of the original remains.

Burt states:

For this realization, I decided to just use words generated by the "spine text." ... Imagine my delight, then, when generating the text for this chapter, which deals with the execution of the war criminal General Hideyoshi, when the text "Hideyoshi got his" was generated. Also, in this chapter, the moment of the General's hanging is immediately followed by a scene of a heron flying over a lake. This is clearly reflected in the last occurrence of the "spine text" above, starting with "To Hanging PositionEd" and ending with "treeS waTer bird'S." (Burt, 2014, p.91)

The mesostic narration featured multiple narrators, delivering about 200 mesostics throughout the performance.

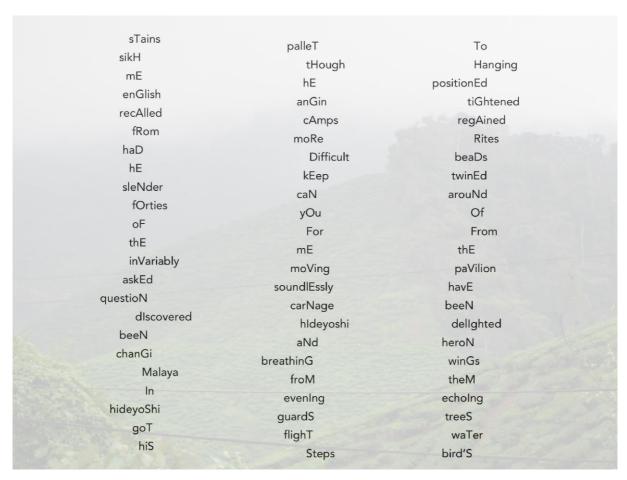


Figure 1: Mesostic constructed by Warren Burt from Chapter 15, The Garden of Evening Mists.

Gathering the materials: Places and sounds

Cage's score notes state:

Make a list of places mentioned in the book, and a list of the pages and lines where the mention is made for each. If the list once made is unmanageably long, reduce it in some chance-determined way, e.g. to a number equal to the number of pages in the book. (Cage, 1979, p.3)

Similarly, for the sounds:

Make a list of sounds mentioned in the book and a list for each of the pages and lines where the mention is made. If the list once made is unmanageably long and baffling because of the large number of kinds of sounds, establish families of sounds and extract from the whole list those related to certain of these. (ibid.)

He continues: "Collect as many recordings as possible made in the places mentioned and of sounds mentioned in the book ..." (ibid.)

The gathering of images and sounds for *Memento Memori* followed the locations identified in *The Garden of Evening Mists* and were collected in field trips undertaken by Andrew Blackburn and Catherine Schieve. The locations included around the High Court in Kuala Lumpur, and the Jamek Mosque, through towns along the Central Highway of Peninsular Malaysia, through the Cameron Highlands to the town of Tanah Rata and beyond (see Figure 2). Additional environmental sounds were recorded and manipulated by students at the Faculty of Music, U.P.S.I.

Tanah Rata is the centre of the Malaysian tea plantation area and plays an important role in the text. The location of an imaginary Japanese Garden is identifiable from within the text (p.60), and we travelled to that area, taking recordings and photographs; it is actually a winding road in heavy rainforest near a council equipment depot. Many recordings were made in various locations around Tanah Rata that feature in the text – the square, the police station, a café, the hospital and so on. The mock-Tudor, 1930's Smokehouse Hotel, built for the British to escape the heat, still sits on Jalan Tapah, in the Cameron Highlands. In the book, a Japanese historian who visits Yun Ling is said to have stayed in this quintessentially English hotel, so images and sounds were recorded there as well.

I turned off the main road and drove down a leafy road to the Smokehouse Hotel, purple bougainvillaea growing in front of its mock-Tudor façade. With its low wooden beams, thick brown carpets, heavy furniture and walls with oils of fox-hunting scenes in dusty gold-painted frames, the hotel reminded me of the country inns around Cambridge." (Tan, 2012, p.165)

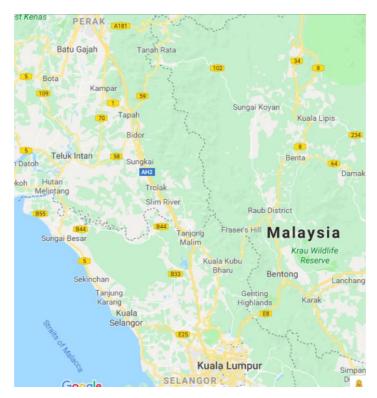


Figure 2: Map of Peninsular Malaysia, showing road from Kuala Lumpur to Tanah Rata.

Construction of composition

"Using the recordings ... make a chance determined total program ... Reduce the collection to a single multitrack tape; then combine the recorded and live performances in any combination." (Cage, 1979, p. 4)

Burt collated the various recordings following Cage's instructions using Audiosculpt¹, choosing the sounds and their order by chance – using *I Ching*. In the score, Cage recommends that, if the number of locations and sounds became impossibly large, they could be reduced through the operation of *I Ching*. Confronted with this reality of enormity, Burt, using a recreated software version of the one used by Cage himself from the 1970's, used the process to select locations for images, sound recording and reference through mesostics.

Construction of performances

Performance 1

In performance in Malaysia, the images were projected, the electroacoustic sound of the fixed collage tape was spatialised, musicians played flute, piano, gambus, rebab, traditional drums, clap sticks and serunai, and dancers appeared for part of the performance. Narration of the mestosics was undertaken by Burt, Schieve and Blackburn, as well as staff and students of the faculty. This performance took place in a large hall at U.P.S.I. within the Faculty of Music - the Panggung Budaya (Figure 3). A structured schedule of the timeline of performance was largely

¹ http://anasynth.ircam.fr/home/english/software/audiosculpt

adhered to, albeit in conjunction with a continual flux of people moving in and out, and on and off the stage.

For logistical reasons this performance was unrehearsed - it was a 'happening', capitalizing on the idea of Cagean contingencies – unpredictable and engaging with the unexpected. Visual artist Allan Kaprow remarked: "Words, sounds, human beings in motion, painted constructions, electric lights, movies and slides ... all in continuous space involving the spectator or audience; those are the ingredients...." (in Marter, 1999, p.157). In performance, the work became an intercultural meeting point, in which chance and a constant experimentation of form, sound and image and their consequent interaction were essential characteristics.



Figure 3: Memento Memori performance 1, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia, August 2013

Performance 2

The Melbourne venue, The Carlton Courthouse (Figure 4), was small, and intimate. Musicians (flute and gongs) played music fragments connected to the text, and mesostic narrators (Warren Burt, Catherine Schieve, Andrew Blackburn, Jean Penny and Troy Rainbow) were spaced around the stage and floor area, while images were projected into a cloth in the centre of the stage. The electroacoustic sound collage and recordings of piano music connected to the text were projected from various locations in the auditorium.

A repeat performance was realized; a new version of the work was re-enacted, adapted to place, instrumentalists and narrative delivery. Again, for logistical reasons, no rehearsal was possible in the space. The outcome was tightly organised chaos, cacophony, chance, and possibilities dominated by the remnant artefacts of the original performance, re-enacted and ephemeral. An abiding impact of this performance was a density of sound and intense overlapping of voices, the intimacy and geography of the space creating new spaces, levels, relationships and contingencies within the moment of the performance: an intense 'temporal flux'.



Figure 4: *Memento Memori* performance 2, The Carlton Courthouse, Melbourne, May 2018 with L-R Andrew Blackburn, Jean Penny, Warren Burt, Troy Rainbow, and Catherine Schieve (obscured).

Performance Spaces: Cagean/Foucauldian Contexts

Cage's ideals for performance have been well documented through his own writing, and that of scholars such as Kahn (1999), Patterson (2002) and Panzner (2012, 2014), amongst others. He believed that artworks and performances are occasions, events, spaces of possibility, a gathering together of potentials, and a construction of experience that forces us to thought and new responses. Further, performances are a process of continual experimentation, are unpredictable and self-transforming experiences; they are places of 'lived reality' that offer encounters from which 'things' emerge, and places of multiplicities and juxtapositions.

Christopher Cox posits:

Making no discrimination on the basis of the sources of these sounds (inorganic, biological, human, technological), Cage conceives this flux as a ceaseless production of heterogeneous sonic matter, the components of which move at different speeds and with different intensities, and involve complex relationships of simultaneity, interference, conflict, concord, and parallelism. (2011, p.155)

Cox further states, "...while texts and images involve the spatial juxtaposition of elements, the sonic arts involve a temporal flux in which elements interpenetrate one another" (ibid, p.148). The various elements that comprise *Memento Memori* contain an ontology of what this means as a 'performance'. Most important is the 'temporal flux' created as the 'elements interpenetrate one another' creating the moods, feelings and sense of the work. *Memento Memori* creates this through the encounters between the elements and the performance through which the listener receives and perceives the work: it is a place of 'multiplicity and juxtaposition'.

Foucault's main principles relating to heterotopia are connected to real places cultures and societies, juxtapositions of spaces, links to time, have a system of opening and closing, and incorporate functional and illusory space. Performance spaces can be explored through these

principles to articulate aspects of interactivity from the performer's perspective. When considered from within the context of *Memento Memori*, a correlation between Cagean performance and heterotopia becomes apparent.

Cultures and Inherent Interculturality

Foucault locates his theory of heterotopia within a society. In this paper, we relocate it to a performance context that implies a synchrony of cultures and functions. If we are to describe specific elements of cultures as belonging to heterotopias, then the recognizable artefacts in *Memento Memori* can be said to represent individual heterotopias which come together to create a larger heterotopia of multiplicities. The individual heterotopias may be extracted from the narrative as specific places (e.g. the streets of Tanah Rata, or the Japanese garden); societies (e.g. the Malaysian law courts in Kuala Lumpur, or the military); as representations of places and societies (e.g. the call-to-prayer from the mosques, or the pensol flute of the Orang Asli indigenous people); and elements that form the performance space (such as the projections and juxtapositions of sounds). Each element is both independent and connected to the whole, creating an overall and inclusive heterotopia.

The heterotopian performance creates what Panzner calls "an action taking place within an ecology, a tweaking of potentials and processes already unfolding, always with contingent or unexpected results." (Panzner, 2015, p.69). This gathering of potentials - the encounters and juxtapositions of cultures, the composition and the spatialised live elements that reinforce the somewhat inexplicable effect of the narration of mesostics - the seemingly random words that came together in performance as reflective of the essences of the book - creates another multiplicitous heterotopia and sets up a condition for possibility. As Panzner states:

The performer's object is to bring the speculative into being, to actualize a virtual potential, but to stop short of convention or signification ... The performer places the listener on the edge of understanding without embedding that understanding in the present circuits of anticipation/reaction. He or she places the listener at the edge of sense, perhaps a new sense, which could serve as a new orientation in the world. Cage's philosophical compositions give us potential in a form that is thought- sensed, while his performers aspire to give us a feeling for the structure of potential in sensible material. (ibid, p.205)

A gathering of potentials sets up a condition for possibility, which may relate to the impact of sonic encounters and how these may engender new thought. Listeners were intrigued by how the performance of *Memento Memori* affected them, and how they were drawn into an acceptance, and an opening up to difference. As performers, the event exposed new understandings of self and others also, as the unforeseen sense of the work became apparent, and the ensemble of simultaneous readings, sound and music created a lively, dramatic interactive space, and a sense of belonging in that space.

In some works, interculturality might manifest in combinations of different timbres, treatment of sonic artefacts, techniques of varied traditions or physical and sonic gestures. In *Momento Memori* it is the juxtaposition of multiple cultural elements and artefacts which creates an inherent interculturality; interculturality that requires understandings of self and the other and, in common with a Cagean performance, an ability to be open to difference. A heterotopian perspective clarifies the responses to the juxtaposition of artefacts which created meaning for recipients from different cultures and levels of musical experience.

Juxtapositions

Foucault remarked:

We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed ... we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with qualities (Foucault, 1967/84)

The juxtaposed spaces of *Memento Memori* can be listed as follows, based on categories previously documented (Penny, 2017, p.3):

- the actual space: the performance space, sonic presence and spatisaliation; the theatre that "brings onto the rectangle of the stage ... a whole series of places that are foreign to one another" (Foucault, ibid.);
- the literary space: an imaginary space that includes the text, mesostics, and a multiplicity of voices;
- the enclosed space: belonging to participants, and the collaborations between active partners the interactivity and negotiations;
- the open space: including the audience, responders, informers and contributors;
- the cultural space: artefacts, expectations, difference and interactions;
- the mediated space: the flexible, multi-layered, and transformed space; electroacoustic space, new experience and thought space.

The sum total of this set of spaces is how the whole performance space is, as Foucault puts it, "imbued with qualities". This may be illustrated further by the metaphor of a garden that is so powerfully represented in the text of *The Garden of Evening Mists*, as it signifies "...the smallest fragment of the world and, at the same time, represents its totality ..."; and further, that "... perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopia that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden. We must not forget that in the Orient the garden, an astonishing creation that is now a thousand years old, had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings" (ibid.). The Japanese garden of the book is presented as a closed environment of multiple meanings and interpretations. Two seemingly incompatible, contradictory representations of the site which juxtapose connotations of memorial (for Yun Ling) and personal stories (Aritomo).

Opening, Closing

Heterotopias assume a system of opening and closing: allowing people in or not; allowing things to happen or not; they feature encounter and assemblage; and may be open or closed to potentials. "To get in", states Foucault, "one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" (1967/84). This has apparent correlation to Cagean performance through the assemblage of artefacts, the sonic and performative encounters, and differences of experience and acceptance.

In *Memento Memori*, cultural differences created a need for permissions – for allowance to participate and for acceptance of contributions from multiple sources that were in themselves small circles of enclosed performance and culture. The dance segment in the first performance, for example, may have seemed somewhat incongruous to the whole, an enclosed performance centred around traditional Malaysian dance practice; the traditional instruments, such as gambus, serunai, and gongs, may have represented further layers of seemingly enclosed

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tradition; the western instruments, the electroacoustic collage: all of these opening into each other through the interactions occurring through the procession of characters, sounds and spectacles. The performance thus provided an opportunity to invite, to move fluidly between components and to open up the space to potentials and new responses.

Performances such as *Memento Memori* create a continual flux of in and out, of unexpected encounters, of distortions and disorientations. For the audience, possible alienation might arise from the density and cacophony of the soundscape coupled with difficulties in understanding the story or shape of the work, magnified by the seemingly unstructured performance and breaking down of conventions. In this sense, the performances become functional, 'lived realities', as exchange and experimentation occurred in situ and were given a form in the musical work.

Functional, Illusory: Electroacoustic Performance Space

The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory ... Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled (ibid.).

The performance spaces of electroacoustic music have been continually re-imagined over many decades now as "performers have sought to transform the 'empty space' into a vibrant performance space, to engage the space as collaborator and enhancer, to draw in the audience and empower the performance" (Penny, 2010, p.29). This space is influenced by many elements, including: location, buildings, forms of presentation, position of audience, etc., which in turn have an impact on the performer, often stimulating and sometimes challenging the quest to project and synthesize. Such spaces unfold as multiple heterotopias that may be "...integrated, manipulated, and developed through a blend of virtual and real elements, new flexibilities and illusions, intersections and separations. The virtual space created becomes a player in the performance that changes the relationships and positioning of performer and sound. A sense of enclosure, or disorientation, uncertain proximity and collision may result from the dialogues of spatialised voices and the diffused sound" (ibid., p.38).

In performance, the spaces come together to create a space that is both functional and illusory, aided by the properties of acoustic and electroacoustic sound, generating new rules of sonic behaviour and response. Spaces of illusion, created through juxtapositions of image, live and digital sound, dance, and simultaneous narrations in the performances of *Memento Memori* revealed and activated a space for multiple understandings and considerations, implied and explicit cultural interactions, and ambiguities of meaning reflecting the illusions of the novel and the performances.

Close

As performance paradigms increasingly incorporate electroacoustic elements, the potential for illuminating performative ontologies through philosophical perspectives continues to offer possibilities of new understandings. Cage posited performance as a form of lived reality, reflecting the processes and experiences of life, and potentially leading to change, as each work

of art and its presentation becomes an experiment on life itself. Using the exemplar of *Memento Memori: A Malaysian Circus On The Garden of Evening Mists* has permitted us to draw connections between ideas of Cagean performance and the adaptation of a mix of Foucault's heterotopian concepts concerning culture and interculturality, juxtapositions within spaces, opening and closing, and functional or illusory elements in the performance space. This has provided a way to articulate the processes and occurrences in the musical space of *Memento Memori*.

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