

A reframing of “Pre-Assaggio Studio Performance 1” — 2020-03-07

I am in the studio in the house in Caseneuve
in the Luberon
in France

I’ve come to play the keyboard here
a beautiful-sounding keyboard
But I don’t know what to play

I’m silent

I listen

I hear the crickets outside the house

It’s midday

a warm early autumn midday

I notice the hum of the old computer

& the irregular rhythm of the seedpods

cracking as they fall to the ground

a rattling rumbling sound

a random roundelay of rustling rhythms

a backdrop to my perambulation

round & round the old square room

with its invitingly resonant acoustic

its balconies and its huge central chimneypiece

I walk & walk & walk

Perhaps this time round I will know what to play

when I stop at the keyboard

I will know how to break the silence of the sonic backdrop

underneath the hanging rug

with its red blue green patterns

that irritatingly reflect the sounds that are beginning to deafen me

Or is it that the rug is too perfect?

I close my eyes as I get close

to the keys of the keyboard

of the black grand piano

It’s a grand black pianoforte

with many stories imprinted on its hammers

Its tone formed by generations of players

players with no fear of disturbing the sonic backdrop

no fear of irrelevance

no fear at all

And it seems to welcome me

I stand before it as if before an altar

Am I prepared to sacrifice my fear

to the accompaniment of crickets

& the computer

& and the crack-crack-crack of the leaves?
I hold on to the iron frame for support
before I sit down on the piano stool
My hands touch the imitation ivories
but I can't play a note
(not because of John Cage and all the others
but because of me
I too need to find my way)
Which hand?
Which finger?
Which key?
And why?
And what do I have to say to compare
with the keyboard's own store of memories
the stories in its book board
Nothing
Nothing yet
I arise & start walking round the room

That was of course
JUST A REHEARSAL
A rehearsal for the moment
I am always putting off
A rehearsal for the beginning

But now comes the question that I have asked countless times
Is there no other way?
Do I really need to dive in
in order to experience once again the cold waters of uncertainty
from which I may emerge a changeling?
No
not now
not yet
because I need to prepare to embrace the experience of uncertainty
as I rise to the surface
and relearn the art of breathing

But I am still walking around the room
limbering listening longing looking
lapping memories of myself as I pass by my keyboarded altar
until I trust the moment
until I dare

I stop at the keyboard
The icy coldness of its iron frame seems

comforting to my hot and trembling hands
and heartless as it cools the warm flesh of my fingers
There is no either/or
My fingers have to make their own decision
My role is to trust them
Which hand?
Which finger?
Which key?
How loud?
How long?
And WHY?
The questions are innumerable
The choices are infinite
The moment is unique
unrepeatable and ever recurring

Note: this performative ‘reframing’ was written as part of the Performance Documentation workshop held at HSM and led by Nathalie S Fari. It is based on an early experiment in artistic research linked to the action of sitting at a keyboard and not knowing what to play.

The following text, also written for the workshop, is a homage to William Kentridge and his studio work as described in *Six Drawing Lessons*. Both texts form part of a project-in-progress entitled “Pre-Assaggio Studio Performance 1.”

||: I approach the keyboard as a book
as if I were a book
as if I were a voice
as if I were not what I am

I should be a story—a story to tell
but I am not a story to tell
and that is the story
that I am not a story
a story to tell

I want to get that story out of my mind
that story that is no story
and so I approach... etc. :||