

INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96

---

**Intimate Immensity** is a staged 'media poem' for three performers, two electronically controlled pianos (disklaviers), computer generated and digitally processed sounds, and interactive video and lights.

With the genesis of the Internet and the flourishing of electronic communication throughout the world, our perception of space-time is being altered. I am calling this space an Intimate Immensity. The focus of my work is on an individual's potential for an expanded emotional and aesthetic reality, how it might 'feel' in the new intimately immense CyberSpace.

**Intimate Immensity** is a duet of parallel performances between two vocalists with narrative commentary by an exotic, dancing narrator. The vocalists, a woman and a man, are seen as if in different locations (telephonic 'sites'), each performing a meditation on their sense of intimate immensity made possible by tele/cyber space. Since one of the aspects of the new space is that it is shared and has no apparent boundaries, each character gradually experiences the other's presence as well as opinions and thoughts of people throughout the world (at a key moment in the work a 'network chorus' will be seen and heard).

The narrator is a 'CyberAngel', a god-like figure, a mysterious controller of remote events. He is seen in his own space on the stage. This space has a grid of sensors which detect his movements and send this information to the computer where the information is transformed into various types of triggers. His dance-like arm movements control the performance of two pianos (Yamaha Disklaviers placed stage left and stage right). With the movement of his legs and feet he controls lights and laser discs. His hand gestures activate the sound of an actor's voice. The voice recites parables which act as commentary on the performances by the man and woman. This narration is commentary on our quest for power and control through our ongoing development of technological tools.

The vocalists face the audience while sitting in front of a computer. The eyelids of the vocalists are painted black and each is wearing a head band. A miniature camera is mounted at the end of a tiny rod attached to each head band. The camera images are sent to a computer, through special software, using the eye closures as a trigger. The result is that whenever they close their eyes the lights on the stage will dim, the acoustics of the space will be altered, altered versions of their voices are heard and, eventually, images of corridors stretching out into new spaces will be seen on screens behind each performer. In the third section the closed eyes cause the image of each vocalist to appear on the rear screens mixed with the image of the other. As the work draws to a close these images form an infinite corridor of repeated images of each vocalist behind an image of the other vocalist.

INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96

---

I am creating the music and text" and am working closely with Woody Vasulka who is creating the video images and helping to shape the look of the work. A special software-hardware package is being worked on to allow the dancer's movements to control all the media. A second software-hardware package is being developed to allow the eye closure of the two singers to become computer input devices.

-----  
Scenario

**Intimate Immensity** is in three parts without pause.

This is the text as it is finished to date. What is missing is the Angel's Text for the Concerto and the man and woman's text for part 3..[there will be more text for part 1 as well].

**Prologue**

Projected on the center top of the scrim, are two hands clenched in fists.

The Angel appears. We see him with his back to the audience..he raises one arm and extends the hand... He then does it with the other arm and hand.

He closes his hands into two fists..as he does so the hands on the screen open.

*the hands 'speak':*

"It begins with the hand. It is not enough that shape exists in the surrounding world...you must create it yourself. Before you could create it, your hands and fingers had to enact it."

At the end of the text, the Angel opens his hands and the hands on the screen again become fists.

He then gestures in the direction of the LEFT piano (still with back to audience)...it plays a low note. He does a small dance almost in place and then gestures for the RIGHT piano to play.

Dance with back to audience [short] playing piano strings.

**1st Parable**

**He suddenly stops and smiles (his back is still toward the audience). As in the beginning, he motions to make the hands speak....** [Actual: The hands on the screen are triggered by the off stage computer operator at the end of each dance and/or music phrase.]

INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96

---

*the hands,*

"The Emperor has sent a message to you, the humble subject, the insignificant shadow cowering in the remotest distance before the imperial sun; *[music thru dance]*

"the Emperor from his deathbed has sent a message to you alone.

"He has commanded the messenger to kneel down by the bed, and has whispered the message to him; *[music thru dance]*

"so much store did he lay on it that he ordered the messenger to whisper it back into his ear again. *[music thru dance]*

"Then by a nod of the head he has confirmed that it is right,

"Yes, before the assembled spectators of his death, before all these he has delivered his message.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\* *[music thru dance]* music is now continuous fast repeated notes on the pianos. Each time the dancer triggers he creates accents on single notes or arpeggios or chords or phrases.

"The messenger immediately sets out on his journey; a powerful, an indefatigable man; *[music: punctuation]*

"now pushing with his right arm, *[music thru dance]*

"now with his left, he cleaves a way for himself through the throng; if he encounters resistance he points to his breast, where the symbol of the sun glitters; *[music thru dance]*

" But the multitudes are so vast; their numbers have no end. *[music thru dance]*

"If he could reach the open fields how fast he would fly, and soon doubtless you would hear the welcome hammering of his fists at your door. *[music thru dance]*

But instead how vainly does he wear out his strength; *[music thru dance]*

still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that..nothing would be gained; he must fight his way next down the stairs; *[music thru dance]*

and if he succeeded in that..nothing would be gained; the courts would still have to be crossed; and after the courts the second outer palace; *[music thru dance]*

and once more the stairs and courts; and once more another palace; *[music thru dance]*

INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96

---

and so on for thousands of years; and if at last he should burst through the outermost gate--but never, never can that happen--the imperial capital would lie before him, the center of the world, crammed to bursting with its own refuse.

*the hands,*

"Nobody could fight his way through here, least of all one with a message from a dead man..... But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself."

The CyberAngel motions and :a> he disappears; b>the man and woman appear for the first time..

**Part 1: Immensity is within ourselves**

Immensity is within ourselves is a quiet meditation on the intimate immensity.

The vocalists sing and speak. When they close their eyes the lighting becomes dramatic [only their face and the pianos are seen] and the music is heard as if the acoustical environment has been transformed.

The computer and piano music seem to be performed by the projected hand. The music is a quiet accompaniment to the speaking and singing.

Setting: we see the man, the woman and the hands which will now play the pianos.

A-The hand seems to 'play' the two pianos.

B-The eyeleds of the man and woman are painted a color [?]. The man and woman speak and sing. When they close their eyes:

1. The lights in their 'room' goes to black and their faces are illuminated as if floating in space.
2. The piano sounds and their vocal sounds move slowly back and forth between the rear and front of the auditorium [on their side of the room].
3. The sound of the piano is altered.

Their text [still developing]

Him

"Immensity is within ourselves"

" Immensity is the movement of a motionless man."

Her

" Immensity is within ourselves."

" Immensity is the noise within a silent mind."

Interlude: short dance/music by the Cyber-Angel who emerges and then disappears again. *They sing and speak. Now when they close their*

INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96

---

*eyes the lighting becomes dramatic and, for the first time, images slowly develop behind them. As before, altered versions of their voices and the pianos are heard.*

"I move into an immense silence curdled by quiet trembles and shudders. "

"I cry out into an immense silence curdled by quiet trembles and shudders."

"I have become a prosthetic God magnificent in my external organs."

"We have become a prosthetic God magnificent in our external organs."

### **Part 2 : the Angel Concerto (the Tower of Babel).**

The CyberAngel dances. The projected hands speak.

The movements of his arms trigger a two-piano concerto (two Disklaviers playing with no one at the keyboards). The movements of his feet cause images to ripple across the stage area. We gradually see and hear the comments and images from individuals and groups from various places in the world ( the Network Chorus) ii . Throughout this scene, the singers become more aggressively operatic (bel canto) in their vocal delivery. The piano music evolves into extreme 19th century virtuosic style. The Network images and words finally merge with the intimate immensity corridors and the written network messages merge with the singing of the vocalists.

The Angel suddenly stops everything, smiles and motions the hands to speak,

#### **2nd Parable: Couriers**

"They were offered the choice between becoming kings or the couriers of kings. The way children would, they all wanted to be couriers. Therefore there are only couriers who hurry about the world, shouting to each other..."

The angel suddenly continues and the concerto reaches a virtuosic climax.

With the climax of the 'Tower of Babel', a crashing chord causes everything to come to a sudden stop and the CyberAngel disappears.

### **Part 3: an immense silence.**

The music and images return to the quiet of part 1. With their eyes closed more and more, they sing, intone and speak a series of duets. Corridors leading into infinite spaces become to emerge as projections behind them.

INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96

---

They experience the immensity and the intimate presence of another as a camera captures their faces and the computer blends each of the performer's faces with the other's corridors. As their faces become part of an infinite corridor they sing the final strains of music, quietly and slowly.

As the singers reach this quiet ending, the CyberAngel makes a final appearance and gestures the hands to speak the final Parable:

**3rd Parable: an immense journey**

"where are you going?"

"I don't know," you replied, "only away from here. Away From Here. "

" So you know your destination ?"

"Yes," you replied, " Didn't I say so? Away-From-Here, that is my destination."

"Have you taken provisions for your journey?"

"I need none," you replied, "the journey is so long that I must die of hunger if I don't get anything on the way. No provisions can save me. For it is, fortunately, a **truly immense journey.**"

Everything is quiet for a moment. Then, the man and woman open their eyes (absolutely at the same moment, as if one). The lights in their spaces become normal and the hands and the dancer disappear.

-----

INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96

---

For the residency at Purchase

The performers are:

*the man;* Tom Buckner

*the woman:* Joan La Barbara

*the CyberAngel:* Nyoman Wenten

The expected fee for 2 performances is \$12,000. (This includes transportation.)

We will be doing the final tech and rehearsals for the premiere at the Lincoln Center Festival in July '97. •The West Coast premiere will be at the Japanese American Theatre in Los Angeles on October 9 and 10. We are looking to be in residence from the 1st to the 14 of July. We will probably want to work almost every day..probably one day off in the middle...I think an 9 or 10 hour day would work for us...this would allow for tech without the performers.

[This will be the first time we have an opportunity to work w all the materials at the same time...including the set.]

Stage area: appr 30x30

lights:

standard-this will be in consultation with Kyle Lemoi [our lighting person]

sound:

- four speakers and two amplifiers [for the hall sound]
- two monitor speakers w amplifiers.

misc: work tables...etc....for set up.....

at this moment I expect to be bringing everything else including the audio mixer.

As for my lecture-demo....I am pretty flexible.....just need to know ahead so that I can get Yamaha to get the pianos to you.

**INTIMATE IMMENSITY  
BY MORTON SUBOTNICK  
DESCRIPTION  
10/24/96**

---

---

**<sup>i</sup>The Network:**

I will be creating a network event where two prominent thinkers on the subject of aesthetics and the network will hold a world wide network forum. This event will be documented and then produced to be a part of the video and audio fabric of the performance of **Intimate Immensity**.

**<sup>ii</sup>The Text:**

I am writing the text as a poem-like libretto which is sung and spoken. The text for the man and woman is loosely based on Freud's "Civilization and its Discontents" and Bachelard's "The Poetics of Space". Two of the parables for the CyberAngel are based on excerpts from Kafka's, The Castle. The remainder of the CyberAngel's text original.



## MORTON SUBOTNICK

MORTON SUBOTNICK is one of the United States' premier composers of electronic music and an innovator in works involving instruments and other media, including interactive computer music systems. Most of his music calls for a computer part, or live electronic processing; his oeuvre utilizes many of the important technological breakthroughs in the history of the genre.

The work which brought Subotnick celebrity was *Silver Apples of the Moon*. Written in 1967 using the Buchla modular synthesizer (an electronic instrument built by Donald Buchla utilizing suggestions from Subotnick and Ramon Sender), this work contains synthesized tone colours striking for its day, and a control over pitch that many other contemporary electronic composers had relinquished. There is a rich counterpoint of gestures, in marked contrast to the simple surfaces of much contemporary electronic music. There are sections marked by very clear pulses, another unusual trait for its time; *Silver Apples of the Moon* was commissioned by Nonesuch Records, marking the first time an original large-scale composition had been created specifically for the disc medium - a conscious acknowledgment that the home stereo system constituted a present-day form of chamber music. Subotnick wrote this piece (and subsequent record company commissions) in two parts to correspond to the two sides of an LP. The exciting, exotic timbres and the dance-inspiring rhythms caught the ear of the public -- the record was an American bestseller in the classical music category, an extremely unusual occurrence for any contemporary concert music at the time. It has been rereleased on Wergo cd with *The Wild Bull*.

The next eight years saw the production of several more important compositions for LP, realized on the Buchla synthesizer: *The Wild Bull*, *Touch*, *Sidewinder* and *Four Butterflies*. All of these pieces are marked by sophisticated timbres, contrapuntally rich textures, and sections of continuous pulse suggesting dance. In fact, *Silver Apples of the Moon* was used as dance music by several companies including the Stuttgart Ballet and Ballet Rambert and *The Wild Bull*, *A Sky of Cloudless Sulfur* and *The Key to Songs*, have been choreographed by leading dance companies throughout the world.

In 1975, fulfilling another record company commission, (this time, Odyssey) Subotnick composed *Until Spring*, a work for solo synthesizer. In this work, changes in settings which Subotnick made in real time on the synthesizer were stored as control voltages on a separate tape, enabling him to duplicate any of his performance controls, and to subsequently modify them if he felt the desire to do so. While the use of control voltages was nothing new, it suggested to Subotnick a means to gain exact control over real-time electronic processing equipment.

The next step in Subotnick's use of control voltages was the development of the "ghost" box. This is a fairly simple electronic device, consisting of a pitch and envelope follower for a live signal, and the following voltage controlled units: an amplifier, a frequency shifter, and a ring modulator. The control voltages for the ghost box were originally stored on a tape, updated now to E-PROM. A performer, whose miced signal is sent into the ghost box, can then be processed by playing back the pre-recorded tape or E-PROM, containing the control voltages. As neither the tape nor E-PROM produce sound, Subotnick refers to their sound modification as a "ghost score". By providing the performer with exact timings, co-ordination between performer and the ghost score is controlled.

*Two Life Histories* (1977) was the first piece involving an electronic ghost score; the bulk of Subotnick's output for the next six years was devoted to compositions involving performers and ghost scores. Some of the more notable works in this series include

*Liquid Strata* (piano), *Parallel Lines* (piccolo accompanied by nine players), *The Wild Beasts* (trombone and piano), *Axolotl* (solo cello), *The Last Dream of the Beast* (solo voice) and *The Fluttering of Wings* (string quartet). The subtlety, sophistication and control over real-time electronic processing that Subotnick demonstrated in these innovative works secured his reputation as one of the world's most important electronic music composers.

Subotnick reached the apex of live electronic processing in his work *Ascent Into Air* (1981). Written for the powerful 4C computer at IRCAM, this piece involved many of the techniques which Subotnick had developed in his ghost scores. In addition to the processing normally available to him with his ghost boxes, Subotnick was able to spatially locate sounds in a quadraphonic field and to modulate the timbres of the instruments. But perhaps the most significant aspect of this work is its use of live performers to control the computer music; the live performers, in effect, serve as "control voltages" to influence where a sound is placed, how it is modulated and by how much, etc. -- the reverse situation of the ghost score compositions. Even more remarkable is the ability of traditional musical instruments to control computer-generated sounds. The sophistication of this control is currently unavailable using the commercial MIDI devices which many electronic musicians, including Subotnick, favor today.

Since 1985, Subotnick has been using commercially available MIDI gear in works such as *The Key to Songs*, *Return* and "*all my hummingbirds have alibis*". His more recent pieces are also marked not only by pulse-driven rhythms, but also by clear diatonic melodies and harmonies.

In addition to music in the electronic medium, Subotnick has written for symphony orchestra, chamber ensembles, theater and multimedia productions. His "staged tone poem" *The Double Life of Amphibians*, a collaboration with director Lee Breuer and visual artist Irving Petlin, utilizing live interaction between singers, instrumentalists and computer, was premiered at the 1984 Olympics Arts Festival in Los Angeles.

The concert version of *Jacob's Room*, a monodrama commissioned by Betty Freeman for the Kronos Quartet and singer Joan La Barbara, received its premiere in San Francisco in 1985. *Jacob's Room*, Subotnick's multimedia opera (directed by Herbert Blau with video imagery by Steina and Woody Vasulka, featuring Joan La Barbara), received its premiere in Philadelphia in April 1993 under the auspices of The American Music Theater Festival. *The Key to Songs*, for chamber orchestra and computer, was premiered at the 1985 Aspen Music Festival. *Return*, commissioned to celebrate the return of Halley's Comet, premiered with an accompanying sky show in the planetarium of Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles in 1986. Subotnick's recent works -- among them *Jacob's Room*, *The Key to Songs*, *Hungers*, *In Two Worlds*, *And the Butterflies Begin to Sing* and *A Desert Flowers* -- utilize computerized sound generation, specially designed software **Interactor** and "intelligent" computer controls which allow the performers to interact with the computer technology.

Subotnick's most recent works include: 3 CD ROMS; *All My Hummingbirds Have Alibis* (1994), *Making Music* (1996), *Making More Music* (1998), an interactive 'Media Poem', *Intimate Immensity*, premiered at the Lincoln Center Festival in NY (1997) and *Echoes from the Silent Call of Girona* for string quartet and computer to be premiered in October, 1998.

Currently, Subotnick co-directs both the Composition program and the Center for Experiments in Art, Information and Technology (CEAIT) at the California Institute of the Arts. He tours extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe as a lecturer and composer/performer. He is published by European-American.

[*bio by Christian Hertzog from Contemporary Composers*]