some Surrealist methods

for voice and oboe

devised by

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Elspeth Piggott
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some Surrealist methods (2012-3)

Dedicated to Elspeth Piggott and Giacomo Pozzuto.

Premiere Elspeth Piggott (voice) and Giacomo Pozzuto (oboe), Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, University of York, 10th January 2013.

Text André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, 1924. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane.

Duration c.15 minutes

Lighting Light brightly only where needed.

Costume At the performers’ discretion.

Stage Plan The performing area is a long rectangle, not too deep, sufficient to allow for space behind and in front of the chair and music stand centre stage. A melted clock should be placed somewhere onstage.

Stations 1 and 2 are locations of independent activity; Station 3 and stage centre are locations of interaction. Dashed arrows plot the movement paths.
Performance Notes – General

- Red directions are for Voice.
- Blue directions are for Oboe.
- Green directions are for both.
- Accidentals carry throughout the bar.
- Giant comma = tutti pause.
- Rubato may be used liberally.
- Tempo markings may be adapted to suit the performers.
- (U/D)SL = (up/down)stage left.
- (U/D)SR = (up/down)stage right.
- (U/D)SC = (up/down)stage centre.

The communication of words – their characters, meanings and all possible connotations – are the most important elements of this piece. Focus on their interpretation and communication to the audience.

Musical notation is used to express a specific way of delivering the words. Keep the narrative going in passages of determinate notation! Avoid focusing on ‘musical performance’ there and lapsing into a different feel.

Part I is a musical essay on the creation of Part II. While the six sections should have their own feel and sense of purpose, performers should maintain the communication of absurd self-awareness and meaningfulness whenever they reach a sudden non sequitur, the likes of which define the flow of Part II. Do not allow much pause between sections.

- Black text subtitles should be delivered by Voice.
- Theatrical directions at the start of each section are colour-coded and italicised.
- Musical and theatrical directions are colour-coded and italicised.

Part II should have the feel of a fast-paced collage, a discontinuous “clip-show” of characters and emotions, all performed with the highest possible levels of energy.

- Musical instructions are italicised.
- Theatrical instructions are underlined.
- N.B. While Voice recites the text of POEM, Oboe does not but instead responds to the text simultaneously by improvising around it.
Performance Notes – Oboe

- Multiphonics: expected sounding pitches are notated with fingerings.
- Flutter-tonguing: if necessary, replace these with trills.
- All trills (except timbral trills) are to the semitone above.
- Supplementary to all instructions, phrases and extracts of pieces that you remember can be put into this piece at any moment they come into your head, or when you feel the need to play them.

Performance Notes – Voice

Create a wide range of highly expressive and individualistic persona, delivering the texts with as much nuance and characterisation as possible.

- Timbre should range from a full singing voice to a normal speaking voice. Use your full range and exploit all pitches and dynamics.
- However quiet, the words must always be heard.
- Extremes of range are encouraged, as are ornamentation, such as vibrato, portamento, trills, any extended vocal techniques, any accents and voice types (e.g. through impersonation and caricature). Be selective to avoid repetition and maintain stamina.
- Unspecified pitches (invisible noteheads) = a pitch contour to be interpreted in a singsong, Sprechstimme style. Articulation is notated on the side of the invisible notehead. In To make speeches, the contour matches Oboe’s line.
- Cross noteheads = spoken text.
Programme Note

Part I. SECRETS of the MAGICAL SURREALIST ART
  Written Surrealist composition or first and last draft
  How not to be bored any longer when with others
  To make speeches
  To write false novels
  How to catch the eye of a woman you pass in the street
  Against death

Part II. POEM

This theatre piece takes two texts from André Breton’s First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924), forming two parts performed attacca. A collaborative devised process aimed to build a narrative from these texts, through aural and visual relationships between Oboe and Voice: two parts of a whole, two wholes apart. The ‘Secrets’ set out in Part I are epitomised in Part II – ‘the most random assemblage possible (observe, if you will, the syntax) of headlines and scraps of headlines cut out of the newspapers.’
some Surrealist methods

Part I. Secrets of the Magical Surrealist Art

Oboe and Voice march on from SR, bowing mechanically as soon as the audience claps, then continue to their first positions. Voice carries a score in the form of a book (or the Manifesto, or any book if performing from memory). When seated, she flicks swiftly through to the right page.

Voice reads knowingly:

*Written Surrealist composition*

or

*first and last draft*

Oboe is stood still, aimed at Voice’s head. Voice is seated, relaxed; regal and stuffy; extravagant. Oboe makes click sounds like a typewriter as Voice reads. Oboe pauses just after Voice pauses, with one exception.
After you have settled yourself in a place as favourable as possible to the concentration of your mind upon itself, have writing materials brought to you. Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. [From here, Oboe begins to introduce short bursts of pitch, rhythmically mimicking “Yes!”, “Yes Mum!”, “OK”, “I can do that”, etc.] Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything. Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not remember what you’re writing and be tempted to reread what you have written. [sing] The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard. [pitch bursts are more frequent; speak warily.] It is somewhat of a problem to form an opinion about the next sentence; [pitch bursts are louder and growing.] it doubtless partakes both of our conscious activity and of the other, if one agrees that the fact of having written the first entails a minimum of perception. [comforting] This should be of no importance to you, however; to a large extent, this is what is most interesting and intriguing about the Surrealist game. [Pause abruptly, looking dead ahead knowingly. Carry on as normal as if nothing happened: factual and disenfranchised; just clicking.] The fact still remains that punctuation [Oboe bursts] no doubt resists the absolute continuity of the flow with which we are concerned, [slightly more upbeat] although it may seem as necessary as the arrangement of knots in a vibrating cord. [start making jerky sideways movements during a couple of pitches; leisurely] Go on as long as you like. Put your trust in the inexhaustible nature of the murmur. [sung animatedly] If silence threatens to settle in if you should ever happen to make a mistake – [spoken, accusatory] a mistake, perhaps due to carelessness – break off without hesitation with an overly clear line. Following a word the origin of which seems suspicious to you, place any letter whatsoever, the letter "l" [bottom D at every “l”] for example, [wondering a thought to herself] always the letter "l," and [sung religiously] bring the arbitrary back [spoken] by making this letter the first of the following word.
Voice wanders to Station 2, saying, bored:

How not to be bored any longer when with others

Oboe, bored, goes to sit on the chair, legs crossed. Voice pauses to consider the topic. As Voice talks, Oboe clicks with more frequent and longer bursts of pitch that attempt to match the contour of Voice’s intonation. Voice moves crossly around Oboe, at last expressing frustration at him before sauntering away.

[pause] This is very difficult. [a short pause, then far more energetically – walk round Oboe to SR] Don’t be at home for anyone, and occasionally, when no one has forced his way in, [rising in intensity] interrupting you in the midst of your Surrealist activity, and you, crossing your arms, say: [suddenly placated] "It doesn't matter, there are doubtless better things to do or not do. [rising in intensity again] Interest in life is indefensible. Simplicity, [frustrated, to Oboe] what is going on inside me, is still tiresome to me!" [throwaway, sauntering away to SL] or any other revolting banality.

Voice and Oboe move to their stations.
Voice proclaims:

To make speeches

Oboe and Voice go to their stations and stand strong. They deliver energetic, vociferous speeches. Oboe plays just after Voice as if out of time. Oboe pauses when Voice pauses. Voice only continues after a pause when Oboe is silent.

Text included below for reference.

Just prior to the elections, in the first country which deems it worthwhile to proceed in this kind of public expression of opinion, have yourself put on the ballot. Each of us has within himself the potential of an orator: multicoloured loin-cloths, glass trinkets of words. Through Surrealism he will take despair unawares in its poverty. One night, on a stage, he will, by himself, carve up the eternal heaven, that Peau de l’ours. He will promise so much that any promises he keeps will be a source of wonder and dismay. In answer to the claims of an entire people he will give a partial and ludicrous vote. He will make the bitterest enemies partake of a secret desire which will blow up the countries. And in this he will succeed simply by allowing himself to be moved by the immense word which dissolves into pity and revolves in hate. Incapable of failure, he will play on the velvet of all failures. He will be truly elected, and women will love him with an all-consuming passion.
To make speeches

104 < 120 (Oboe out of time with Voice)

excited

\[mf\]

\[\text{disapprovingly}\]

Voice

Just prior to the elections, in the first country which deems it worthwhile to proceed in

Play JUST after Voice like a slightly delayed/out of sync track.

Oboe

becoming alarmed

\[f\]

\[\text{neally} \quad mp\]

this kind of public expression of opinion, have yourself put on the ballot.

singsong advice

Each of us has within himself the potential of an orator:

\[p\]

\[p\]

multi-coloured loin cloths, glass trinkets of words.
soulful

Through Surre-al-ism he will take de-spair un-a-wares in its po-ver-ty.

tentative

One night, on a stage, he will, by him-self, carve up the et-er-nal Hea-ven, that Peau de l’ours.

spoken grumpily through gritted teeth

He will pro-mise so much that a-ny pro-mises he keeps will be a source of won-der and dis-may.

* Flutter-tongue if possible, otherwise, replace with semitonal trills.

patronising (back to singing)

In an-swer to the claim of an en-ti-re peo-ple he will give a par-tial and lu-di-crious vote.
c. $\frac{3}{4} = 120$ (Oboe in time with Voice)
as sickeningly saccharine as possible

He will make the bitterest enemies partake of a sentiment which will blow up the countries. And in this he will succeed simply by allowing himself to be moved by the immense word which dissolves into pity and revolves in hate.
Incapable of failure, he will play on the velvet of all failures.

Gross

He will be truly elected,

Avaricious

and women will love him with an all-consuming passion.
Voice, with irritation:

To write false novels

Oboe moves USC to Station 3, always looking at Voice. When playing, Oboe pays no attention to Voice. Voice delivers a lecture from Station 2, moving DSR in the last sentence.

Grave quasi recitative: prophetic with intense energy

[sung wild and fast] Surrealism will allow you to: all you have to do is set the needle marked “fair” at “action,” and the rest will follow naturally. Here are some characters rather different in appearance: their names in your handwriting are a question of capital letters, and they will conduct themselves with the same ease with respect to active verbs as does the impersonal pronoun “it” with respect to words such as “is raining,” “is,” “must,” etc. They
will command them, so to speak, and wherever observation, reflection, and the faculty of generalization prove to be of no help to you, you may rest assured that they will credit you with a thousand intentions you never had.

Thus endowed with a tiny number of physical and moral characteristics, these beings who in truth owe you so little will thereafter deviate not one iota from a certain line of conduct about which you need not concern yourself any further. [Pause - Oboe cues recitative]

[sung – teach!] justifying point by point this moving or comforting denouement about which you couldn’t care less. Your false novel will simulate to a marvellous degree a real novel; you will be rich, and everyone will agree that [spoken, flatteringly] “you’ve really got a lot of guts,” [sung] since it’s also in this region that this something is located.

[spoken, matter-of-fact] Of course, by an analogous method, and provided you ignore what you are reviewing, you can successfully devote yourself to false literary criticism.
Voice starts confidently but becomes doubtful of the answer:

*How to catch the eye of a woman you pass in the street*

Voice stands thoughtfully, stumped. Oboe moves bashfully, cartoonishly towards Voice: kicking the dust, turning towards her and away, eyes darting around hopefully, all the time playing approximately 125 very high staccato F’s (F7). Oboe gets very close to Voice: when he cannot bear it any longer he freezes, then as the pressure overpowers he shuffles away.

Voice does not notice Oboe.
Voice, expressionless:

Against death

Oboe returns to where he came from. Voice drifts slowly to the chair. Both are subdued.

Text included below for reference.

Surrealism will usher you into death, which is a secret society. It will glove your hand, burying therein the profound M with which the word Memory begins. Do not forget to make proper arrangements for your last will and testament: speaking personally, I ask that I be taken to the cemetery in a moving van. May my friends destroy every last copy of the printing of the Speech concerning the Modicum of Reality.
Against death

Grave

Voice

\( \text{c. } \frac{3}{4} = 96 \text{ bewitched, smooth} \)

\( p \)

slowly release Bb key to change multiphonic

and increase beating:

Oboe

\( sff \rightarrow p \)

\( \text{f} \rightarrow \text{fff} \)

\( p \text{ poss.} \)

Spoken, naive

death, which is a

secret society.

It will

fearful

\( mf \)

Slightly slower \( \text{c. } \frac{3}{4} = 80 \)

Mem-ory-be-gins.

Do not for-get to make pro-per ar-range-ments for your

\( p \)

\( \text{PPP} \)
pushing forward to the end: passionate

f - sf sf sf

last will and testament:

colla parte ad lib., pushing forward

pp sempre cresce.

mf p f

14

I ask that I be taken to the cemetery.

ff

17

in a moving van.

pp sf pp mp

21

May my friends destroy every last copy of the printing of the

mp

25

Speech concerning the Modicum of Reality.

mf

* If necessary, all flutter-tonguing may be replaced with trills to the semitone above.

Long pause.

Attacca.
Part II. POEM

*Oboe and Voice move to their Stations to begin POEM together.*

**Stage Directions**

‘The most beautiful straws…’

‘On an isolated farm... A carriage road’

‘a pair... of silk stockings...’

‘A leap into space...’
'PARIS…'

'Watch out…'

'Know that…'

'The wandering singer…'
(Voice)

Stand frozen, looking forward. Glance at the music.
Burst into a mocking laugh.
mocking disbelief at what you see

A burst of laughter

of sapphire in the island of Ceylon

dainty

The most beautiful straws

HAVE A FADED COLOR

comically cast off

UNDER THE LOCKS

Turn to face forward.

(a gap)

bleak

on an isolated farm

with hand gestures, wander slightly to SL

FROM DAY TO DAY

throwaway

the pleasant

grows worse

Get up

gruff

A carriage road

Now stride to SL, reaching into the distance...

takes you to the edge of the unknown

...instead pick an imaginary apple from a tree
Save frozen, looking forward. Glance at the music. Imitate Voice's laughter with sucking-in sounds.

A burst of laughter of sapphire in the island of Ceylon

Voice approaches; ignore her

The most beautiful straws

HAVE A FADED COLOR

no pitch  subdued clicks  UNDER THE LOCKS silent

Leap out: drop low and rise throughout (raise Oboe high):

on an isolated farm

lots of scrambled notes, the odd multiphonic

FROM DAY TO DAY

the pleasant grows worse

Laughter!

A carriage road takes you to the edge of the unknown
THE DAILY ARTISAN OF YOUR BEAUTY

Madam, coffee

hands together

preaches for its saint

choir boy voice

a mischievous outburst

A STAG

Voice Love a - bove all

Oboe

grumpy and teary

Love above all

Everything could be worked out so well

PARIS IS A BIG VILLAGE

Surprise! Watch out for

the fire that covers

brief choir boy

THE PRAYER

Hands are a fire that tickles Oboe

Indicate where on the weather map (Oboe)
Try to play jazz

Coffee

Preaches for its saint

The daily artisan of your beauty

Madam,
a pair

Of silk stockings

is not

Draw a horizon with Oboe

Rapid bursts

A leap into space

Petrified squawking

A stag

Silence. Soft duet with Voice:

Fluttery splutters

Love above all

Everything could be worked out so well

Poulenc

Paris is a big village

Move to FSC

Voice surprises you and plays keys with her hands (keep air constant)

Watch out for

The fire that covers

Silent

The prayer

Of fair weather

A brief chirpy memory
The ultraviolet rays
have finished their task

Tell the spectators a story with hand gestures

THE FIRST WHITE PAPER
OF CHANCE

Red will be

In (self-)confrontation… move off the stand

The wandering singer

WHERE IS HE?

Sing
in memory
in his house
AT THE SUITORS' BALL

Pause: suddenly anxious

I do
as I dance

What people did, what they're going to do
Know that

The ultraviolet rays

have finished their task

short and sweet

Go back to Stand
Play irregularly. Leave gaps.

tongue-stopped row

THE FIRST WHITE PAPER

OF CHANCE

Red will be

The wandering singer

WHERE IS HE?

in memory

in his house

AT THE SUITORS' BALL

brash multiphonic waltz

I do

as I dance

What people did, what they’re going to do

from florid...... become stuck – try to play! – multiphonic... noise – (stop) freeze