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Operatic Mysticisms: Mountains, Deserts, Waterscapes

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Andrew Demczuk

May 2022

Dr. Matthew Holtmeier, Chair

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Keywords: *Sun & Sea*, *Mount Analogue*, *El Mar La Mar*, *Energy Field*, art theory, visualization, ekphrasis, environmental media studies, ambience, emergence, sound, film, opera, invention

ABSTRACT

Operatic Mysticisms: Mountains, Deserts, Waterscapes

by

Andrew Demczuk

Operatic Mysticisms: Mountains, Deserts, Waterscapes examines the ways we encounter environments as readers/viewers of operas, literature, film, and sound recordings, and how each medium requires different detail-gathering techniques. Respective to the previously mentioned mediums, *Sun & Sea* (2017), *Mount Analogue* (1952), *El Mar La Mar* (2017), and *Energy Field* (2010) are analyzed by engaging with environmental media studies and invention. Reflecting the nature of each landscape—summits of mountains, aporias of deserts, and mysteries of waterscapes—an elemental approach is taken in investigating how these spaces may be noticed, internalized, recorded, and traversed by both the artist and viewer. With an emphasis on limitations of mediums, language, and equipment, this thesis argues that artists/readers/viewers in turn inhabit these rendered environments—while a looped response (termed as operatic mysticism) threads ekphrasis and imagination before and during the production, in the art proper, and in our minds during and well-after consumption.

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Sun, sea, air, water, light, atoms, particles, electrons, phonemes, morphemes, fingers, thumbs, wrists, arms, legs, head, brain, eyes, computer, monitor, keyboard, letters, words, syntax, structure, chaos, poetry, wind, rain, soil, seeds, trees, acorns, leaves, trails, wilderness, forests, birds, bugs, streetlamps, windows, blinds, doors, chocolate, coffee, chartreuse, skis, snow, rainbows, sleet, shovels, sand, strawberries, bananas, spinach, tomatoes, potatoes, raviolis, squash, tortillas, fromage, microwave, pistachios, pens, paper, Matrix, shoes, feet, cellphone, art, acrylics, watercolors, pastels, drawing, painting, pizza, galleries, dreams, sleep.

Barbara & Charles Marquez, Sonya, Nick, John, & Kearsten Demczuk, Irene Pajer, Oma, Opa, Richard, John Paul Lasker, Dr. Matthew Holtmeier, Dr. Jesse Graves, Dr. Joshua Reid, Good Naked Gallery, Jaqueline Cedar, René Daumal, Joshua Bonnetta, J.P. Sniadecki, Lina Lapelytė, Vaiva Grainytė, Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Jana Winderen, George Saunders, Daniel Stoll, Mark Harris, Chris Watson, Ashley Ekstrum, Julie Kristeva, Édouard Vuillard, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Black Lives Matter, We Are On Stolen Land.

LEITMOTIV

“A Light Motif in F# minor”
Libretto and chords by Andy Demczuk

Verse

Amaj7 F#m C#min
Oh I'm a trace on a mountain
Bm F#m
Footsteps melt behind all gone.
Amaj7 F#m C#min
For miles around the bend I hear it—
Bm F#m
The peaks of synth organ mind,
Amaj7 F#m C#m
Is this the summit or a waste of time?
Bm F#m
Ooh ahhh ooh ahh

Chorus

Dmaj7 C#min
I'm in a dream — erasing me
Bm A7^ ^ ^ ^
Look at my feet, see them disappear! (2X)

(Instrumental Verse)

Verse

Amaj7 F#m DDD C#m
The ground is over, but this journey never ends
Bm F#m ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ (quick fill)
The further I go, the more I lose my friends
Amaj7 F#m DDD C#m
Oh how the wind blew all my red bottles away
Bm C#m
Oohh ahh ooh aahhh

Bridge

Dmaj7 ^
Watch how this water escapes
C#min ^
Lone-li-est dream of old tapes
Bm
It cleared me out and erased
A A7

And there's nowhere left to go.

Chorus

Dmaj7 C#min
I'm in a dream — erasing me
Bm A7 ^ ^ ^ ^ ^
Look at my feet! See them disappear!

A A D D7 G

Coda

G
Hollow men eat
Em
void and space and souls for treats
G
Magic user
Em
bites the chord with his teeth
C D G
chattering in the cold dark night.

G Em
Bubble silhou- ette will seek me out in death
C D G
And all that I possess

G Em
Got to blow it up inside to get it to the highest cloud
C D G
on a wand with prism light.
C G
Higher and higher until I pop. (repeat)
D G
Into nothing but fear.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“Bottles and red bottle-caps. / O the sea never had so much color!”

“Chanson of Admiration III”
—*Sun & Sea* (2017)

The audience would have heard this epigraphic line sung with vibrato looking down from a pavilion deck onto an artificial beach as if they were eavesdropping. The sunbathing vocalists below lay idle, complaining about the beer-soaked and littered sand in full operatic force. With this kind of evocative imagery, *Sun & Sea* took the world by surprise at the Venice Biennale in 2019, where it found international acclaim and a Golden Lion award, one of the highest honors for film and performance art. *Sun & Sea* shows an innovative way of addressing climate change by combining ekphrasis (an ever-expanding Greek term, originally defined as a literary description of a painting or sculpture), sonic elements, and environmental embodiment. Traditional opera in the twenty-first century has diminished in relevance in both performance and consumption, but *the operatic*, or the dramatization of sound, remains a foundational component of language, artmaking, and interpretation.

This thesis is structured as an environment-text, which mirrors the traversals the artists have endured—we will ultimately succumb to the limitations of our own semiotic systems, while at the same time participate with the artists in a celebration of the very dissonance between original visions and what was actually mediated. The poetic process, according to these sources is an act of reverence and an embodied manifesto to protecting the environments they seek to dwell. Limitations of mediums, like the ocean water that isn't present on the faux beach of *Sun & Sea* will be used as examples of how they explore their own materiality and thus their own inaccessibility. In the spaces of mountains, deserts, and waterscapes a tension between the

boundaries of experience, technology, and psychology is not only present but foregrounded. This thesis will analyze these extreme landscapes embodied through operatic mysticism which I claim plays a key role in world-building, not in just a fantastical way, but by a broader means of creating artistic geographies. With an overall emphasis on the climate crisis and how philosophy and art may attempt to critique and comprehend the grave situation, these works display the dangers of dwelling and passage through these vulnerable locations both literally and symbolically. The primary sources will include the mentioned opera *Sun & Sea* (2017), novel *Mount Analogue* (1952), film *El Mar La Mar* (2017), and soundscape *Energy Field* (2010). The focus will elucidate different techniques of detail gathering and how environments may be noticed, internalized, recorded, and traversed.

Ekphrasis will play a significant part in structuring the theoretical framework for this thesis. I define ekphrasis as a responsive approach to gathering details, in which the artist combines environments (cognitive and real) with the developing media-product-at-hand in both its tangible and conceptual forms. It is both description and process in a spiraling dialogue. To complicate matters, ekphrasis must include the audience, which could be imaginary, real, or in most cases a hybrid of the two. The authors of the pioneering article “A New Look on Ekphrasis—An Eye-Tracking Experiment on a Cinematic Example” (2014) Killander et al. provide a useful definition which expands upon classical ekphrasis, here, the updated version is defined as:

[When] one media product (the source, for example a painting) is represented in a different media product (the target, for example a photograph) with a certain degree of elaboration (energeia), including a repurposing of the source – for instance through a semiotic process – and eliciting energeia in the receiver. (Killander et al. 14)

For ekphrasis to become a productive artist's lens and methodology (and more than remediation or adaptation or effect in the receiver) it needs to fulfill a few requirements. According to Killander et al. ekphrasis needs an elaboration on a source combined with the "lingering of the camera" (Killander 17) in the target medium; either looking-at or developing-from the original source medium. The camera in the case of my source materials range from prose in *Mount Analogue*, to microphones in *Energy Field*, to a combination of oral stories, poetry, an actual camera, and microphones in *El Mar La Mar*. Linging here will be defined as the time spent on developing the ineffable, the long durée vivification and rematerialization of the spaces which are being moved through. Finally, the media product contains the details gathered via pen, computer, camera, and other recording devices. Media products, however, are difficult to define because they may exist in incomplete forms, sketches, or fragments. Media can also solely exist in the imagination of the artist or viewer in a state of *pre-media*, which take the form of thoughts, memories, dreams, or moods that must then be rendered in order to be experienced for a receiver. The transitional space between mere energy and mediation is much like the spaces between consciousness and unconsciousness.

My source materials all fulfill the requirements previously defined for ekphrasis. They each have unique semiotic systems with high levels of *enargeia* or the "visual experience actualized in the receiver," and *energeia*, the vividness or "potentiality of the object" (Killander et al.14). One feels that *Mount Analogue* is a mountain to climb, *Energy Field* is an unknown marine ecosystem to dive into, *El Mar La Mar* is a strange desert to cross. However, these works also create a deceptive illusion of a past proprioception (real world body awareness), due to the creation of memories of a vivid journey. This sense of 'having been there' exponentially heightens the viewer's impression of these landscapes, and due to the lack of a traditional ending

to these works, we can conceive of still visiting them. In other words, our minds linger in these mediascapes over the years far longer than the initial consumption of the experience, just as a real-life memory. In summary, operatic mysticism combines ekphrastic response and imagination as they loop in and out of consciousness and subconsciousness. This happens before and during the production, in the art proper, and in our minds during and well-after consumption.

Attunement

The primary sources in this thesis are built through a self-aware lens which acknowledges the ineffable and the limitations of their respective mediums. Using descriptors, images, sounds, and even song lyrics, the natural world is rendered in a poetic space rather than in spaces of verisimilitude, which could not transfer the natural beauty, power, and complexity of ecosystems contained in the landscapes in which they seem to signify. Each artist displays a different mode of environment/body/mind absorption and compression. Thomas Rickert, author of *Ambient Rhetoric*, explores the notion of how dwelling is “an attunement that can generate various kinds of knowledge, in particular a knowledge of how the world gives back, as it were, or how the world transcendent of human thought and power is integral to how life takes shape” (Rickert 27). The works I discuss here reveal the trouble which artists encounter when they are dwelling in places too extreme to linger. What the world ‘gives back’ and how ‘life takes shape’ becomes part of these artists’ obsession, in which they seem to crave access to a sort of impossible knowledge of their environments.

René Daumal’s *Mount Analogue* is an unfinished novel written in a *conte philosophique* style that explores mountain mythology, pataphores, and symbolic mysticism through a spiritual journey. Daumal’s demi-surrealist prose and content are largely influenced by the experimental

circle of writers he collaborated with in Paris called *le Grand Jeu* (1928-30). Hindu philosophy, Pataphysicist Alan Jeffery, and mystic George Gurdjieff are also key inspirations behind Daumal's universe. *Mount Analogue* begins as the narrator receives a letter from a man named Professor Sogol (palindrome for logos) and an expedition team is assembled. After much discussion and schematic evaluation, they embark out to sea in a ship called "*The Impossible*" in search for an entryway to the mountain. The novel responds to the romanticism of mountain climbing in nineteenth century Western Europe where 'mountain fever' drove many adventurous people to the Alps in search for the satisfaction of reaching the highest summits (McAuliffe 791). Daumal makes a point to show that he is climbing with his narrator (Theodore) and reader while testing the rhetorical situation, limits of language, and image-making in an intentionally transparent landscape where the very idea of the mountain becomes a crystalline path with no ground to walk on. The narrative contains a desire to travel towards some kind of absolute truth, a state of singularity between consciousness and subconsciousness, mortals and gods, which is never fully realized. He emphasizes inaccessibility, extreme conditions, and potential for harm; but also, the motivation obtained when the potential of reaching nirvana might be a possibility in the adventure. Daumal's narratives are like crevices that are often dangerous, ever-changing, and filled with voids, mirages, and ancient stories. A place that inspires and destroys just about any mystic poet who dares stay for too long. He uses the symbol of the mountain shown through all the senses (sounds, smells, touch, etc.) as well as references to past climbers such as Moses, Jesus, and Victor Hugo. Vertigo becomes the only sure sign, where at summit heights, space exists in the form of erasures, and the traces of passage are blown over by indescribable wind and snow. The novel enters a strange realm of unintentional performance art—Daumal's disappearing act—as he stops midsentence to answer the door for a visitor never to write again

before his death of tuberculosis. The white space on the last page mimics the feeling of ascending into fog.

El Mar La Mar (2017) is a sensory ethnographical documentary by Joshua Bonnetta and J.P. Sniadecki which disperses images and sound to unveil elusive legends, the human condition, ghosts, liminal spaces, migration, and traces. In *El Mar La Mar*, we will see an ekphrastic mode that is a hybrid of *Mount Analogue* and *Energy Field*, not only in its landscape embodied (which contains deserts, rivers, water jugs, rain, and small mountainous foothills) but in its soundscapes and narratives. At times the film focuses on its materiality with the analogue film, and at times it feels like a podcast emerging from a cave. This hybridity is present in the film's title: the Spanish word *mar* takes on both masculine and feminine pronouns and both pronouns were chosen to stand alongside each other, creating a tone of variation, repetition, and liminal space. Pertaining to the title, *mar* means sea in Spanish, not desert, an intentional expansion of the signified or an allusion to the undefinable dream of being elsewhere. This film is an ekphrastic response to the experience of traversing the Sonoran Desert, lingering and elaborating on the landscapes and storytellers, which then assembles into a heterogeneous experience that is both artistic and reflective of the difficulty and reality of the situation that many people endure. It is rendered as a struggle of the mind, body, and spirit.

Energy Field (2010) by Jana Winderen is an immersive soundscape that amalgamates the space between ekphrasis, denotation/documentation, and musicality through the art of field recording which is a practice of recording sound in an environment outside the studio. *Energy Field* contains real sounds of environments which normal human perception cannot access. It is structured by elements such as creative orchestral-esque curation of the collected sound recordings that move through a series of long-form meditations in constantly evolving sites and

transitional spaces. Jana Winderen employs hydrophones, or microphones that can be used underwater at various depths as well as substrates such as sand recording vibrations and airflow. She explores the open ocean, glacial caves, fjords, open spaces of Greenland, and other areas of the Barents Sea located North of Norway. The art of field recording is practice-based, where the sound artist must find a way to record and collect ambiances in actual source environments, usually over a long duration of time. Winderen then takes her field recordings another step by layering several tracks as well as natural feedback drones which sound like instruments to create a space that is both narrative and asymbolic, because often we cannot identify what we are hearing but can feel the intensity and mystery develop and change from passage to passage. She regularly puts her life in danger to create her soundscapes and tackles harsh criticism of preestablished and arbitrary rules of what it means to make a soundscape. And she does so while bringing awareness to the gender bias in the audio and art world and the pollution and degradation of our earth's waters, which she presents on a visceral and dramatic aural stage.

Reverence of Space

“*True* mystics are particularly suspicious and critical of what passes for ‘presence.’

They defend the inaccessibility they confront.”

—Michel de Certeau

Operatics are the root to the quality and type of *enargeia* (visual experience received and rendered by a viewer) and *energeia* (potentiality of the object) expressed by the artist. According to Joseph Kerman, “The musician’s ear responds to analogous elements in opera, wherein the imaginative articulation for the drama is provided by music” (Kerman 10). As musicians both respond to the *operatic* elements, they also *are* the operatic element. They compare the drama

unfolding to the instruments playing, just as the writer or painter does with words or marks. The operatic is essentially theatrical and musical at the same time. These works utilize the common effects of the opera including grandiose staging, storms, earthquakes, fires, songs both human and natural, musical sounds of objects, spaces, and animals, and finally, implied protagonists and antagonists.

Going beyond ‘being somewhere’ the state of mind required of a continual vividness and musicality is based on extended observation and listening — taking on a prayer-like or ritualistic role over time in both artist and receiver. Michel de Certeau, author of *Mystic Fable* describes mysticism as a “space” in which speech acts are performed. Instead of being a dogma or “set of practices [or] modes of employing a received language” (Crim qtd. de Certeau 222). We can view mystic techniques as a means of expressing and embodying the hyper-empirical or observing more than what meets-the-eye. This can include intuitive perceptions, atmospheric dynamics, object-to-object relations, moods, interpersonal metaphysics, emotional responses to aesthetics, quality of sounds echoing and dampening upon various materials, nuanced lighting evolutions, figuration of shapes, spiritual impressions, etc. To achieve maximum effect, one must not only be open to inputs from atypical energy sources one must desire them. Deleuze and Guattari might call mysticism a type of Body without Organs where stimuli are threaded with our strong desires to *connect*. The resulting experiences for Deleuze and Guattari exist as different planes of intensities in the mind and body rather than an actual space.

If my primary sources work to create memories of artificial proprioception — of inserting a body in an unlivable place that the artists claim to be very real — then the transient effect is evoked in the viewer by the pleasure and disappointment at attempting to process the experience of ‘having been there.’ Via the defamiliarizing medium (opera, novel, documentary, and

soundscape) of already defamiliarized landscapes (artificial beach, imaginary mountain, real yet mythical desert, layered field recording/instrumental glacial waterscape) readers construct a Body without Organs governed by the limitations and shortcomings directly confronting with the artist in their own mysticism. Art spaces facilitate an occult-like sacred pact of trust, a two-way mindful rendering or connection of space harmonizing with space, in a suspended tension with each person's own experience of movement through details. There seems to be an abandonment of a body or a logical system that offers the reward of true transcendence in the end. In these works, the dismantling of allegory shows the lack of viability of capturing details to tell a story in the first place because there is ultimately no meaning to details other than the objectivity of land conflicting with the subjectivity of humans and the imminent death of both. These shortcomings are what render the artists in these works to seem more human than God-like: René Daumal indirectly prepares his whole adult life for a book like *Mount Analogue* and never finishes it, Jana Winderen's reliance on hydrophones and technology to capture her meditations, and the great lack of understanding and destruction of sea life, and Bonnetta ending *El Mar La Mar* without resolution on a 10-minute scene which has only a few slight image changes of a storm. Melancholically dispersed mystic poetry is recited every few minutes until the film fades to credits.

Operatic mysticisms are noise resisted and amplified. *Energy Field* captures this ineffable dynamic by showing how sounds are at the mercy of the surfaces which they travel through. Wind, water, rock, wood, ice, paper, pixels, etc. can all act as dampeners as well as megaphones to utterances depending on the type of sound, the material and shape of the surface, and the direction the sound travels. The operatic characters are defined by the quality and power of resistance and amplification, combined with their factorial harmony or dissonance as they

traverse an environment. This thesis focuses on the relationships of the dramatized noises in these works while crosshatching between environmental media studies, theories on invention, the artistic process, reader-response theory, and the musicality of language and visualization, to demystify the opera contained within.

CHAPTER 2. OPERATIC MYSTICISMS & AMBIENCE

“Opera allows this total work of art where the music, the visual language, and the text meet together. I kind of romanticize this idea, that it has a lot of possibilities as a format and medium.”

—Lina Lapelytė

Sun & Sea is a tour de force collaboration between music composer Lina Lapelytė, librettist Vaiva Grainytė, and filmmaker/director Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė. It is a modern opera that successfully combines genres of theater, operatic singing, fiction, ecocriticism, literature theory, and more. Perhaps thanks to its quality of mise-en-scène, writing, musical score, play with symbols, and parody of modernity, it remains one of the most memorable performance-concert installations in the last decade. *Sun & Sea* highlights the environmental degradation of the Anthropocene via an overly bright stage full of sand, brash lyrics, terse melodies, and absurd yet realistic depictions of a typical day at the beach. In terms of invention strategies, putting together a contemporary opera with social critique involves several stages of invisible work—merely thinking about a mise-en-scène, which according to a review was the first step, “[The creators of *Sun & Sea*] envisioned the setting, the brilliance, the mood, and the undercurrent of environmental rage long before they came up with a note or a word” (Davidson 2). In this case, the grain of the entire opera began with the sense of place—the composition is not only a response to an environment but an action taking place during the exploration of said locale. This opera is an ekphrastic response to a particular ambience. It simultaneously is a representation of an art form—people-watching and eavesdropping at the beach—and yet in the lingering, it forces the viewer/listener to hear songs where they aren’t used to hearing them. It is both new and faux, a return to the source of inspiration and also the execution of an original idea (the artists’ intent).

Sun & Sea calls forth synesthesia in its experience, but instead of the most common iteration of synesthesia such as music rendered as color, it conveys multiple stimuli (including objects, sand, sun, magazines, towels, and people) and renders those as music and setting. Idle frustration, absent-mindedness, longing, gluttony, sadness, to name a few, become structures of melodic logic for complex yet simple songs which expel modernity's ironic disconnect between progress and pollution. This work provides a more apparent example of how musicality can be used as a vehicle for traversing difficult topics and how the relationship that the actors share with the audience depends on the climate of the stage as well as the poetic content of the text.

Sun & Sea is constructed from emotional reactions to the environment and its creation story begins with a sensorial input from the artist. Whether or not the artist composing a work about the beach has ever seen a beach in their lifetime will affect the result of the composition. Factors such as how long ago the artist spent time at the beach, or the type of books they've read about the beach form meta-images in the mind and are based on the quality of the beach experience and/or assumptions about the place, its associations, and its impression on the world. The ambience *Sun & Sea* chose is simultaneously dream-like and hyper-realistic, where sand covers the ground inside a building, beach chairs and towels are laid out, and our attention is divided between the installation and cues prompted by singers engaging in melody and song. The content ranges from a banal trip to the airport, or a very strange dream about a vegan spokesperson who ate shrimp.

In French and Italian operas of the eighteenth century, there existed fundamentally different approaches to reproducing sounds of nature and especially storms where French sought verisimilitude and the Italians poetics (Cabrini 332). Both styles were striving for a similar goal—to combine theater, emotion or narrative, and music; however, where is the line between

poetics, dream states, and the lifelike? Which is *more* operatic—verisimilitude or pure dream sounds? If people are speaking, and noises happen can we actually hear those in our dreams? If so, could you recall and recreate the sounds of animals, storms, instruments, or people’s voices from a dream? These questions are what make the sources in this essay so interesting side-by-side—they each attempt the impossibility of doing this, while remaining in balance with real sounds in addition to acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of their respective mediums. Winderen makes the life-like seem dreamy and mythical, while Daumal makes the mythical and dreamy seem life-like.

One element that characterizes the amount of ekphrasis which informs the work of an artist is the amount of research that gets put into the creative process. As a thought experiment, take the difference between a plein-air painter, and a still life painter, versus an abstract studio painter or cartoonist. Each is going to have their own level of exposure to their subject on various levels and in various states of mind. The landscape painter could spend all day on-site, then it could rain, and they take the painting home, fall asleep and dream of a change in the scene and wake up and finish the painting at home. If the composer spent weeks at the beach conducting research to inform her chord choices, tonalities, pacing, and rhythm structures the piece would look very different to the composer who lives landlocked in the center of the United States, never traveled to a beach, and merely looked at pictures, paintings, or film of beaches for inspiration—either way, a piece could still be composed. But the latter would be an ekphrastic response to a representation of an environment and not a response to the source subject or setting. This is not to say that Italians have never experienced real storms and the French have, but rather, the media product is a combination of the artist’s lived experience *and* ontological approaches to art-making and cultural reception of such approaches that result in trending tastes. And we can see

this happen in various eras of art where hyper-realism in Holland was popular, versus the 2020s where child-like intuitive styles may be in more vogue. Today, opera as a traditional form, as mentioned in the introduction may be viewed as a pretentious, bourgeois institution, however, opera as a process in invention strategies (without the hindrance of arbitrary customs) could exist as a musical bridge between poetics and lifelike, visual art, fiction, non-fiction, curation, and soundscapes.

Sun & Sea, Mount Analogue, El Mar La Mar, and Energy Field each show an experience where the subject *is* the setting. Without an obtrusive main character, attention to intercharacter relationships, or involved plot lines, facilitates a philosophical reading. A redirection of traditional focuses helps the viewer notice the interplay between the author, the place, and the rhetorical perspective in the vocal, aural, and visual of each piece. These operatic works highlight the drama that takes place when artists emotionally respond to environments within their daily lives, in nature, or in their composed literary/artistic universes.

At first glance an artist responding to nature seems like a straight-forward concept. Where things get complicated is when invisible factors are present in both the memory of the artists and viewers. For example, the sort of books the writer read before sitting down to write or read as a child, teenager, and young adult. The texts the writer has already read in their lifetime will affect the outcome and their approach, but the writer can choose what to focus on, what metonyms will be present, and what types of symbols and colors they want to bring into their work. The media-product is then up for grabs for metonymical reception once it is out in the world (assuming the work finds an audience). It will be consumed based on the canonical foundation of the reader/viewer and the market trends in which it is published or displayed. Academic trends may also affect culture on a wider scale and thus the receptivity of a piece. For

example, readers who haven't studied *Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann will not associate or have their mental images of *Mount Analogue* altered, influenced, or informed by that previous work, which is obviously set in the mountains and plays on similar philosophical tropes. In my case, I had watched the Alexandro Jodorowsky film *The Holy Mountain* (1973), prior to having read *Mount Analogue*, which altered my reading experience, because I noticed conceptual places where the film was inspired by the book and perhaps, more importantly, I associated the novel with 1970s psychedelia aesthetics and counterculture.

While this thesis focuses largely on the creative environments within the sources themselves, it is important to consider the larger landscape of an artists' whole body of work to see where they have already traveled because it can illuminate themes and techniques unique in each artist. For example, the creators of *Sun & Sea*'s previous opera, *HAVE A GOOD DAY* (2013) influenced the stylistic choices of their newer work. Elements such as the large number of actors, the type of humor, and the absurd size of the beach location are instantly recognizable. *HAVE A GOOD DAY* is set in a grocery store and documents the lives of 10 cashiers, its influence is apparent in the way it critiques modernity and the exhausting workplace through an ironic lens while foregrounding the ambient environment of a large grocery store. The stage is presented as if the audience is in line waiting to check out. The beautiful singing creates a great aesthetical juxtaposition to the bleak workplace. An audience member experiencing *Sun & Sea* after *HAVE A GOOD DAY* would be familiar with the aesthetics and tone of this theater group, and a variety of expectations may alter their reception. For example, the audience member would have fewer surprises and have more comparisons than someone who has never encountered their work. On the other hand, familiarity can be of service to an audience member and actually lead to appreciate the work even more. Artists have long been aware of the phenomenon of

expectations, and it is one major reason they feel compelled to always do something new and progress from piece to piece. Too much audience awareness could lead to anxiety, writer's block, and does not necessarily lead to better work, however, no audience awareness could alienate the artist and/or viewer which would ultimately be a less effective art piece if the artist is the only person to 'understand' it or be able to connect with it in a meaningful way. Awareness and expectations on both sides of the creative input-output are relevant because the balance can alter the artist and viewer's production and reception.

Zooming out, the canon becomes a series of imposed expectations in direct relation to institutional biases which have been historically structured around status, race, and gender. To be canonical is to be included in the 'collected memories' rendered via media products and placed into bins and books of what 'should' be remembered and conversely what goes forgotten. The exclusion implies what was not memorable, and these choices, generation after generation, affect the artist's approach to musicality, form, research and ekphrastic response to nature. The seemingly abstract notion of *influence* often becomes taken for granted but it remains a fundamental aspect of the internal landscape between artists, viewers, and works.

In art, a setting's function can be depicted and engineered in ways that highlight or critique specific aspects of culture and consciousness. *Sun & Sea* strips away the normal function of rest, leisure, and relaxation associated with the beach by artificializing it, staging it with its raised location where spectators watch, and by the style of performance on the faux beach itself. *Mount Analogue* takes the mountain and follows symbols based on various mysticisms by showing all the religious figures who climbed mountains to speak with god(s) and even gods who live on and in mountains: Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Shiva, Zeus. The novel then guides the reader to a different understanding of "what is a symbol in the first place"; by implying that the

mountain is fictitious yet real. Daumal insists on its existence and then follows up: once its mythology is juxtaposed with real religions it is redirected into a goal for an over-the-top fiction adventure—the narrator delivers and brings the reader to the mountain, with a question lurking that many mountain climbers ask—*what even is a mountain?*

As will be explored in Chapter 5, “Inaccessible Environments” the purpose of the mountain in the novel then becomes not only a stand-in for spiritual struggle in awakening (as real voyages to mountains often are) but also a means of exploiting the symbolic rhetorical situation of mountain-as-icon. Translator and René Daumal scholar, Roger Shattuck, states in the introduction of *Mount Analogue*, “Daumal senses that the reality and meaning of the world can come to us at every moment without our having to rely wholly on extreme situations to wrench us into awareness” (Daumal 22). I can read *Mount Analogue* from the safety of my home and Daumal plays off this irony in following the first-person narrative to extreme locations and turns the mountain almost comical. *Mount Analogue* is a laughing opera but it’s not laughing at its Zen, Buddhist, Christian, mélange of philosophies, it is laughing at the absurdity of myths themselves, of symbols, of the writer’s own inability to express his story well, even if he has been contemplating it for decades. Roger Shattuck frames Daumal’s *clin d’œil* as an absurdist wink at the paradox of intellectualizing spirituality, “Daumal held these several levels of knowledge in place not only by a keen sensibility and intelligence, but also by a sense of ironic perspective on them all—the simple need to laugh finally at the enormous disparity between the particular and the universal, between illusion and truth” (22). By including both the enlightening aspects of a spiritual practice as well as the doubts one may acquire throughout a lifetime, a more complete picture of humanity is painted, and the adventure story becomes a grounding element useful in continuing philosophical ponderances even when the setting dissolves the further the

reader (and author) continues onward. The irony is that the journey becomes a parody of itself, and the lessons learned can seem laughable because the answers were present from the departure.

In this light, the world has seldom seen a parodist more sincere than Daumal because he knowingly goes through this process with the reader in an instructive yet non-egotistical and ‘I’m-as-lost-just-as-you-are’ manner. This intimacy is present in the way the narrator becomes close with Professor Sogol, and Daumal clearly makes their relationship a parallel to himself as an author and to us as readers. Sogol says to the narrator,

“You and I have such grave decisions to make, with such far-reaching consequences for our lives, that we can’t start by taking shots in the dark. We’ll have to get to know each other. Today we can walk around together, talk, eat, and be silent together. Later I believe we’ll have the opportunity to act and suffer together. All that is necessary to ‘make someone’s acquaintance,’ as they say.” (Daumal 48)

Daumal is not only linking art, viewers, and life in this passage, he has his sights set on making a connection between sensorial experiences, agency, and levels of intimacy. For Daumal, to make effective choices, we should be making conscious decisions in how we attend to the details of life between human to human, human to self (or spirit), and human to text (or object). These dynamic levels required to get to know each other are results of lingering. If living is an art, this concise, responsive effort is in my view an ekphrastic approach to making acquaintances evolve into more intimate relationships.

From a different perspective, portals may be open to conceptual spaces via the aural realm and the experience will largely depend on the relationship between the recording quality, the content in the sonic scape, and the listening environment. *Energy Field* repurposes the environment of the sea and arctic from a dwelling of animals and ice, water, and rocks, to an

open-ended listening stage which can be moved through in an array of listening modes. One could listen to *Energy Field* on a small battery powered speaker or earbuds in one's bedroom, or one could listen with high-quality Sonus Faber surround sound speakers in a concert hall and the experience will be drastically different—even though the recording remains the same. *Energy Field* is a space created to dwell upon unfamiliar sounds which are brought to us in hopes that we can recognize not only our role as neighbors, but as stewards to protect the mysterious places of the world yet she does so without being on-the-nose. And while her work is mostly serious, it is not without the comical either—the opening minutes of the soundscape include seals that seem to be laughing at the listener for stopping by.

Jana Winderen channels operatic mysticism in her work not just by merely capturing sounds directly from the source environment, she engages directly with her own patience and motivation as each sound becomes a gift from the spaces in which she derives the pleasure or pain from dwelling. While she is traveling, she is listening, moving, and experimenting with her equipment to see if something interesting happens, a lot like fishing. She must then respond to these collections of moments to assemble a dream-like, psychedelic collage which will then function as a sonic digital portal. Listeners become viewers as they imagine the worlds she has created. After listening to Winderen's artist talks, one can see her process unfolding in real-time—imagining the expansive spaces she recorded in, the large collection of captured sounds and unused hours, and thinking about how she develops all that audio into a vision that then becomes a vehicle for a profound time-based experience. When one listens to *Energy Field*, they are not given labels of what the sounds are from moment to moment, so the feeling of wonder and newborn-like excitement is largely at play. One may imagine an implied narrative or not. She assembles sound in such a way that feels as curated as it does natural. By accenting certain

aesthetically charged moments she shows how an environment contains emotionally intense events constantly, which humans are mostly unaware of. The mysterious and foreboding feel to her recordings gives light to the fact that we know so little as to what is happening in waterscapes—the sounds can be seen as frightening, alien-sounding, warbled, storm-like, or antagonistic or they can be equally the opposite—calming, peaceful, wonderful. For the listener, the process of reimagining a whole linguistic iconography is in the subtext, in how each sequence feels separate and together and is influenced by the long-durée of the piece with a total runtime of 50 minutes and 16 seconds. Her opera is one of transformation and transference of human emotion to landscapes.

In the opening minutes of *Energy Field* the stage is set with an array of characters ranging from dogs, seals, birds, ravens who bark like dogs, and various sea life. We can hear the wind and water sounds brushing up against the icy surfaces, the swirls of currents, and can practically smell the air. The narrative of this opera is within the world-building itself. The zoomed out, open air feeling is only temporary however, at the second minute and twenty seconds, the listener is slowly pulled into a ‘tunnel’ engrossed in a haunting feedback drone as if they are on a boat passing through a glacial cave with Winderen. The sounds of animals disappear, and the environment evokes chilling changes as representation spirals into abstraction.

The experience of traveling as a listener via a soundscape relies on the media-product’s remediation from a real source to a defamiliarized compression (i.e .wav files, mp3s, cassettes). Winderen’s art takes nature and produces a new digital ecology and language system and utilizes the compression to her advantage, where the compression becomes a lens to view the portal of the real. The summation of her own aesthetic choices (alternate universe ‘based’ on the Barents Sea and Greenland) and perhaps tastes preferred within the soundscape community, are a

balancing act between how representation is achieved via remediation and the ekphrastic response to the vision she had after she documented. She creates without doubt a hybrid of the two—both a poetic version of a voyage she had *and* the essence of the real-world place. This is deceptively difficult to achieve as an artist, and this responsive looking up and looking down, so to speak, is where operatic mysticism can be invaluable as a cyclic approach that checks back in with both environments and works constantly and elaborates each time this occurs in the creative process.

Winderen seems to frame the Barents Sea in a similar ambience to Homer's Troy from the *Iliad* giving it a kind of mythic status, where the mere existence of the Trojan Wars has been a debated subject for centuries despite us having archeological evidence. Mythicizing reality and spaces via depiction, description, interpretation, or ekphrasis could become problematic conceptually in cases where one creates a media-product via 'exotic' content for the awe factor. The difference between ornamentation and elaboration for conceptual purposes here is important to distinguish. W.J.T. Mitchell, author of *Picture Theory* (1994), gives an insightful description of ekphrasis in relation to viewers and décors within stories that are assumed to be there for pure ornamentation. These descriptions are often asides to narratives and atemporal, as their painting function unravels at a different pace than dialogue or exposition. Described by scholars as one of the earliest canonical examples of classic ekphrasis is Homer's depiction of Achille's shield in the *Iliad Book 18*, which contains a myriad of Homeric universe imagery and narratives; rather than frightening the enemy, the shield "overawes them with the impression of divine artifice" (Mitchell 178). Mechanically, this serves to the reader as ornamentation, completely repurposed from the original object within the fiction itself.

The shield is an imagetext that displays rather than concealing its own suturing of space and time, description and narration, materiality and illusionistic representation. . . We are stationed at the origin of the work of art, at the side of the working Hephaestos [God of fire and a blacksmith], in a position of perceptual and interpretive freedom. This is a utopian site that is both a space within the narrative, and an ornamented frame around it, a threshold across which the reader may enter and withdraw from the text at will.

(Mitchell 178)

Ekphrasis in traditional literature has been criticized for creating an otherness within the cohesion of an epic, a distracting pull-out of continuity in the storytelling, as if someone pressed pause on a film to allow the viewer to ‘take a look around’ or further describe the details of an object in the corner of the frame. However, at the close of the chapter “Ekphrasis and the Other” W.J.T Mitchell emphasizes, “it is also clear that the otherness of the ekphrastic image is not just defined by the subject matter of the visual representation, but also by the kind of visual representation it is” (Mitchell 181). Thus, as poetic mediums expand and evolve to film, video games, AR, or other new ‘non-literary’ forms, the products of the ekphrastic moment will continue to diversify beyond mere elaborations within representations or mimesis of an already created object. The phenomenon of relaying visuals, creating universes within universes, pictures within pictures, poetry living in paintings, etc. is not limited to the literary or the artistic expression, but it is a vast, complicated series of relations, combinations of perspectives and viewpoints, and above all—a linguistic gift that humans possess. W.J.T Mitchell states that he doesn’t see ekphrasis as “the difference between literary and ordinary language,” but he defends its relevance as something even more surprising, “I do think ekphrasis is one of the keys to difference *within* language (both ordinary and literary) and that it focuses the interarticulation of

perceptual, semiotic, and social contradictions within verbal representation” (180). Ekphrasis in other media beyond literature—is increasingly complicated in terms of pictures-within-pictures, the multiplicity of gazes, or auto-generated visuals. The dynamics of these referential images seem limitless. One could conceive of a film that contains a videogame within it, which in the corner has a little GPS map, which shows an avatar driving a car who is wearing a pin on their shirt, which contains Homer Simpson, who is holding Achilles’ shield from the *Iliad*, but instead of Homeric universes on the shield there is a hyperlink to Jana Winderen’s soundscape *Energy Field*, a bit-torrent PDF version of René Daumal’s *Mount Analogue* (which unknowingly to the user contains malware), a link to a Google Play account which has access to *El Mar la Mar*, and finally a YouTube link to clips of trailers and artist talks of *Sun & Sea*. Descriptions and ornamentations capture the multiplicity of how we interact with the world, a place where environments are permeating natural and digital realms, ekphrasis slows down the attention of the viewer and artist to notice details that otherwise get glossed over in storytelling.

Operatic mysticism is a combination of emergence, ambient rhetoric, and poetics. Each source in this thesis emphasizes a different possibility in *how* the environment is felt in relation to their philosophical structure (whether they admit to having one or not). *Mount Analogue* focuses on a personal mysticism, the topography of the spirit and consciousness, bridging the gap between subconscious inhibitions and conscious desires for enlightenment. *Energy Field* focuses on the wonders of the unknown and hidden places—conveying the mysterious of the deep and uncharted lands. It shows us ‘what’s-at-stake to be lost if humans continue to pollute and degrade natural spaces, and it carries with it spiritual overtones, like a hiker trying to respectfully pay a visit to a sacred location. *Sun & Sea* uses emergence, in this case, by implicating ‘higher’ concepts stemming from ‘grounded’ real-world issues to highlight pollution and critique

humanities' lack of urgency to the climate crises and also to allow a voyeuristic vantage point to reveal the absurdity of human behavior as the actors relax on a beach. In addition, it philosophically contains metaphors of overexposure to the sun (references to Plato's cave) and shows how the Anthropocene is a complicated era and sutures those emotions with the weight of globalization and modernity.

These three works focus on ecological, spiritual, and mythological matters and their implications in society and culture. But what does emergence and operatic mysticism look like with the emphasis on a humanitarian crisis such as migrants crossing extreme terrains? Can all of these issues be foregrounded at the same time?

El Mar La Mar attempts this feat with its pioneering use of *sensory ethnography* filmed in both a poetic and representational style. The political message is conveyed by showing the struggles of migrants attempting to cross the Sonoran Desert at the U.S-Mexico border. The film however elucidates its subject not by following genre conventions of the documentary, but by revealing via the traces and erasures (in the Derridean sense)—the emotional, spiritual, and ecological feel of the environment, including all animals, land, and weather. The *mise-en-scène* mirrors the wind which blows dirt over the tracks of travelers on the trails. Disintegrating film strips mirror the dissolving plastic water jugs, the language of cinema becomes part of the storytelling. Aesthetics and image matches are vehicles for deeper, uncanny messages. The film, atypical of documentaries on this topic, does not shy away from the mythology of the desert, the local legends, the relationship humans have with the animals, plants, rocks, sun, light, caves, trees, powerlines, etc. While avoiding any label such as Fake-News, or Auto-Fiction, *El Mar La Mar* shows how myths, philosophy, fiction, artistic renderings of places, and local storytelling, are all part of the human story. The operatic sometimes appears with greater intensity in silent

moments such as this recount of traversing the desert in the film, “It’s a terrifying silence, you only hear your footsteps in the sand, but they sound muted and hollow. The other sounds are from things you’re carrying. If people speak to you, they tell you not to talk or else you’ll get more tired” (*El Mar La Mar*). The symbolism of the weary traveler conserving energy is as ancient as the first stories humans have been telling.

Metaphysical Harmonics

Silence and music play a strong role in the works of this thesis. Silence happens in moments of reflection, hiding, and face-offs with the void. Music whether played or heard seems to be the embodied effects of traversing or lingering in an environment. In *Mount Analogue*, Daumal claims that mountain songs are a type of expenditure of energy, his narrator says with sarcasm in response to the idea of music at high altitude, “As if mountain climbers ever sing while they walk!” (Daumal 138). Daumal suggests that if the climbers ever sang, they would just make absurd noises in rhythm with their footsteps. He writes the sounds the climbers would make using onomatopoeia formations, “‘tyak, tyak, tyak,’ for every step or ‘tyak, chee, tyak, chee’ or ‘stoom, dee dee, stoom. Or ‘Gee...pouf. Gee...pouf.’ That’s the only kind of mountain climbing song I know” (138). It is curious then, that Daumal would choose to include pages of lyrics of a mountain climbing song from the narrator’s friend named Alphonse Camard titled “The Lay of the Luckless Mountaineers.” Why did Daumal feel compelled to include an entire absurdist song in the middle of his narrative and then go on to say that there are no mountain climbing songs forty pages later even though he already read one to us? What significance does this song have and why did it need to be in song lyric form? The song is anything but cheerful

and includes imagery of mountaineers “breathing air like razor blades” and clouds tasting “like nitric acid,” or backpacks beating “instead of my heart” (87-88). The lyrics are poetic, wrenching, and somehow comical. The final stanza of this song begins with the line that agrees with Daumal’s philosophy that the summit is accessible yet inaccessible at the same time: “We never did see the summit— / Except on the sardine can.” (87-8). This song was the narrator’s favorite. It was one of many. He mentions Alphonse had a whole collection for the team, “written in various moods and for all stages of mountain climbing” (86). These are lyrics written in a dramatic yet parodic style similar in tone to *Sun & Sea*. The lyrics are an intertext that feels intimate because they were sent as a letter to the narrator, one can hear an almost diegetic piece of imagined music playing in the memory of the narrator. In a way, it is strange how the narrator reads them to his audience as if he and his team are in the process of acting out the collection of songs themselves. As if they don’t even know that they are mere characters within “The Wayfaring Songs of Mountaineers” by Alphonse Camard. Is *Mount Analogue* thus, an ekphrastic response to Camard? The narrator thinks Camard has written these songs as a musical response to their journey but how can he be sure, only Daumal knows.

Songs and stories may not weigh anything physically, but they can either act as levity or burdens for the traveler to carry. Accessing stored memories proves to be more and more difficult as time elapses. For the travelers on these long journeys as in *El Mar La Mar* and *Mount Analogue*, rations and possessions dwindle every day. Daumal shows this shedding of objects for the characters in *Mount Analogue*, “Each one of us kept making his personal inventory, and each one of us felt poorer as the days went on. For no one saw anything around him or in him which really belonged to him. It reached the point where we were just eight beggars, possessing nothing, who each night watched the sun sink toward the horizon” (Daumal 110). The opera

composer must travel light, so they can walk, experience an environment, traverse the dangers, and listen over a long durée. It is an endeavor of noticing the musicality of the world and being conscious of how the sounds relate to the artist. One listens to seek, to know what's there but often the most beautiful and the most troubling are in silence.

In the metaphysical sphere, when one of the storytellers in *El Mar La Mar* calls the silence 'terrifying' he is not only referring to the reality that a patrol might find his group and send them back, but by the façon the director contextualizes this story teller's voice in the film, one can assume he is referring to the silence within, affirming Daumal's sentiment: "To face it [the big question: *what do you seek?*] directly is to strike against the deepest layer of being which sleeps within us, and then one must listen painfully and lucidly to the sound it sends back" (Daumal 150). Often, the sound *it* relays, whether the aural source is from the environment, subconscious, universe, void, etc. all seems to be mere *noise*. Sensory inputs that we as seekers do not know how to process or categorize, which if not addressed can impede recognition of the noise's significance within an environment or text. By decentering the human as the sole species capable of creating music, we can begin to search for meaning in what we hear in nature, as well as meaning within ourselves; because even the subterranean 'caves' of our mind are, in fact part of nature. The opera around us is both organized chaotic noise and musical (containing rhythm, melody, and structure). This becomes more apparent once we recognize that structures and languages are not always what we imagine on the surface, but after long periods of intentional listening, as seen in *El Mar La Mar* the artist and viewer can hear songs of disintegration and melting from the sun's rays, or songs of destruction and rebirth from fire and also the relationships within these natural phenomena: fire and rain, wind and electric cables, dead grass

next to live grass, radio signals and coyotes, or even sunsets and the unseen camera and sound crew.

By foregrounding and even characterizing features which are normally set as background the narrative becomes more dynamic. *Mount Analogue*'s translator Roger Shattuck writes in the introduction that Daumal did not view artistic motivation as “art for art’s sake” or as a set philosophy under a veil of symbols and academicized mythmaking, but rather “a number of paths leading to the same goal: a higher form of life” (Daumal 28). According to Daumal, it is not in one way that a climber can reach the summit, he looks everywhere for answers: Math, Science, Religion, Pataphysics, Pseudoscience, Painters, Mystics, History, Geography, Illustration, Nature, and Fantasy.

Daumal and the other artists in this thesis understand that melodies are everywhere, and they present their works as guides-to-seekers; to not only help in the listening process, but to help us traverse these spaces. Art in this lens becomes less of a symbolic extraction activity and more like walking, field recording, or energy-journalism. Barry Blesser, a pioneer in digital audio and the inventor of the first digitized reverberation system—the EMT-250 in 1976, writes that our perception of the world takes cues from the auditory cortex, which we use to synthesize information. He explains that we can hear an echo as an “additional sound” similarly to how we hear the original hand clap or source sound. But he argues, we can also *reexamine* what an echo actually is. He elucidates this thought, “The echo is the aural means by which we become aware of the wall [the surface that the original sound bounces off] and its properties, such as size, location, and surface materials” (Blesser 2). In other words, we can actually hear the quality of the surface as a “manifestation” even without it actually being the source sound or energy. This realization helps us see how *ambience* can quite literally be part of the DNA of a text, idea,

thought, artwork. “When our ability to decode spatial attributes is sufficiently developed using a wide range of acoustic cues, we can readily visualize objects and spatial geometry: we can “see” with our ears” (Blessner 2). The implications of allowing for ambience in invention and making room for chōric writing are wide reaching. It is the equivalent of recording field audio with a portable recorder, being outside and hearing the background sounds of cars and birds and passing people talking. This is of course not meant to replace a writer-in-a-room, so to speak. Or be a mere passive medium that relays information. Recording in a controlled studio setting has its advantages, but we should not forget that it is possible to interact our inspiration with our environment and develop the skill of attunement. Mallarmé, Joyce, Woolf, Proust, and so many other writers in the early twentieth century captured music with their pens. Writing has a lot in common with music, but that does not mean it is purely aural (nothing is purely aural)—there is tactility within the imagination and with this element of tactility involved, concepts need not be removed from hands-on, sculpture-like altering. Sound is a type of immaterial material, an energetic force like thoughts. One can hear a sound, think of a sound, produce the sound, then remember the sound, and produce the remembrance, all are energetic waves, appearing, leaving, and returning to the body. No art is created without some noisy element of tactility or bodily interaction with an environment whether that be digital or analogue.

Ambience and Monsters

In this section, I will be discussing ways in which non-human agents shape human thought and influence our opinions, emotions, politics, and mythologies. In *El Mar La Mar*’s second scene, a prolonged cut-to-black screen is accompanied by a voice recounting a story. The

voice is that of a man who doesn't present himself or where he is, he just begins with the tale of when he saw a monster. Our imagined proprioception becomes internal as if we are standing in and listening to a voice in a void, the boundaries of the salient are immediately tested:

“The Indians told me, hey be careful there's a monster out here.”

“A monster? Are you guys fuckin high?”

“No seriously, he lives in this area right here.”

“You're trippin' dude.”

“All of a sudden I'm in the wash, and it's like a meteor came and hit the ground right in front of me. Sand is flying everywhere, sand is comin down. I see a huge dark figure, one arm shorter than the other. Like fifteen feet tall. He picks his arm up and slams the ground then flies up in the air like 60 feet. Then he climbs up a hundred-foot cliff in a couple seconds. I told my dad, I just saw a kangaroo! It's a beast, that's what I think, and that's what the Indians think, it's unexplainable.” (*El Mar La Mar*)

While this story may seem like mere folklore, whether it actually happened or not—it was imagined and felt by both the speaker and the people who told the speaker about the monster in the first place, thus playing a part in *ambience*—the Indigenous story has an actual effect on the man who perceived it to be real and will have an effect on the viewers of the film, the film crew, and people who read this thesis differently. As Thomas Rickert said so well in analysis of Julia Kristeva's work on *ambience* and *chōra*, “Life cannot be reduced to the idea, to logics, to the salient” (Rickert 59). It's not only the idea or logic of a monster that provokes fear, but also a monster's essence and energy combined with its environment which make them terrifying. Another example of a type of anthropomorphized monster that is also part ambient and part myth are the Hollow-Men in *Mount Analogue*:

The Hollow-Men live in solid rock and move about in it in the form of mobile caves or recesses. In ice they appear as bubbles in the shape of men. . . They eat only the void, such as the form of corpses; they get drunk on empty words and all the meaningless expressions we utter. . . every living man has in the mountain his Hollow-Man, which he will seek out in death. (Daumal 105)

The inclusion of monsters, beasts, or cryptids (hidden or unproven to exist creatures) in stories is an ancient practice and adds a profound dimension to a world. These usually antagonistic creatures, whether they are monsters, tricksters, landscapes, or personified emotions such as fear or anger are a reflection on nature itself, as not only beautiful, but also complex, multi-faceted, and dangerous. In *El Mar La Mar*, the land goes through various waves of wildfires and storms, which seem to be reacting to each other in a dynamic chess match or relationship on a grandiose scale. There are the lone travelers whose relationship to these landscape events seems out of their control. The traveler must endure the storm or evade the fire. But at the macro level, humans (via climate change and/or arson or accident) also create fires that spread at that scale, which in turn could affect the local storm patterns. The patrolmen in *El Mar La Mar* are portrayed almost as storm troopers or angels of God from *Paradise Lost*, heavily armed, full of camouflage and equipment, and constantly on guard. The Sonoran Desert is portrayed as extraterrestrial, an elsewhere. The fire, perhaps as Milton's version of Satan, a misunderstood essence that is both dangerous and regenerative and free.

The environs in which texts are created are not only inherently present but make up the structure of any given message—how complex it is then, that the media-product and ecological terrain interact and permeate with one another to varying degrees. In *Ambient Rhetoric*, Thomas Rickert describes how wine only exists because it grew out of a specific *terroir*, the French term

for region, consisting of the root word terre, meaning earth. Without earth, there would be no land for the grapes to grow, without specific terroirs or regions, there would be no spatial, topographical, and thus ambient diversity. Each year the conditions are different, based on many factors including sunshine, rain, soil quality, composition, animals passing by, the attentiveness of the grape growers, and so on. Those external factors are the obvious signs of *ambience* but they also have a direct impact on the internal, imaginative, and metaphysical factors of the product as well and this point should be stressed. For example, in *Sun & Sea*, “Song of Exhaustion, Workaholic’s Song II” the incessant need to hide weakness is embedded in the workplace culture, which fuels a toxic ambience of suppressing human needs and directly affects pollution and climate not only the real world but in the landscape of the modern psyche.

And at work there are unwritten rules, we could call them etiquette:
Don’t complain when things get difficult,
When you are lacking sleep,
When you are under the weather.
Even if you run out of gas – just keep smiling...
But suppressed emotions, I noticed, don’t disappear so easily,
They get knotted up in your psyche:
Suppressed negativity finds a way out unexpectedly,
Like lava.

LIKE LAVA, LIKE LAVA, LIKE LAVA, LIKE LAVA...
EXHAUSTION, EXHAUSTION, EXHAUSTION, EXHAUSTION,
IT’S LIKE A MAMMOTH –
A NON-EXISTENT CREATURE GONE EXTINCT:
ENCYCLOPEDIAS, THE ANNALS OF HISTORY – HAVE IT,
BUT IN LIFE – A THING YOU’LL NEVER MEET
YOU’LL NEVER MEET
YOU’LL NEVER MEET...

VACATION IS WHAT KILLED THE MAMMOTH –
OFFICIALLY, THE CREATURE DOES NOT EXIST, BUT ACTUALLY,
IT’S A SPECIES THAT BREEDS AT THE HIGHEST RATE.
AFTER VACATION,
YOUR HAIR SHINES,
YOUR EYES GLITTER,
EVERYTHING IS FINE. (*Sun & Sea*)

The symbol of lava is central to *Sun & Sea* which drives its bridge-like personification of human attitudes to Earth's ecology. The content suggests that the Earth needs to "take a break" from all the pollution, overconsumption, and absurd human behavior. The unexpected eruptions signify as if the earth is "bottling up and imploding" from its interior because of suppressed desires. What makes this message so strong is in its delivery method, medium of choice (opera), and in its hyper-awareness of the poetic and natural landscape in which it was written. It says things that are difficult to put into words both explicitly and implicitly. Thomas Rickert suggests, "Rhetoric may give priority to the expressly salient, but the salient must take part in and emerge from the ambient" (Rickert x). Rhetoric does not only attempt to communicate the material sum of what constitutes reality, messages when assembled into media-products become a patchwork of the ineffable and the empirical. In a world that seems to be ending, this may feel like a futile endeavor, to create something ephemeral for enjoyment or reflection. In the "Vacationer's Chorus II" an announcement is made to the public which conveys a dangerous shoreline and yet the advice of the speaker is to create and collect. The only visible reason—occupy the mind and distract the children.

YOU ARE STRONGLY ADVISED TO STAY ON SHORE,
YOU SHOULD NOT LEAVE YOUR CHILDREN UNOBSERVED!
JUST BUILD CASTLES IN THE SAND,
WALK THE BEACH COLLECTING STONES, SHELLS, AMBER, AND BABY
TEETH! (*Sun & Sea*)

The spatial awareness in the topography both in the pulse of human apathy towards climate change, and the historical context of the industrial revolution which is causing these grotesque global crises puts *Sun & Sea* in a special category of art that is equally coherent, sublime, absurd,

artificial, and real. It mimics human's reliance on real proprioception to navigate their bodies and the need to go on vacation and forget that we even have bodies. It juxtaposes this desire to forget and relish in relaxation, but the "beer-soaked sand," dog feces, bottle caps, plastic bags, acid in the waves, planes in the air, are constant reminders that the crises are unavoidable even in a place culturally curated to escape. A vacation get-away becomes a stage for all of these issues to rise to the surface—meant to provoke a spectrum of responses from *épater la bourgeoisie* to tears of sadness in the realization that perhaps we have already gone too far and it may be too late to change what is about to happen—with a mixture of petty annoyances, absurd stories of children who have traveled all over the world, a metaphorical volcano erupting and a story of a man telling how an actual volcano ruined one of his last vacations.

These examples show how ambience brings along with it a vast response in the real and imaginative world which are in conversation with each other. Rickert draws on Martin Heidegger's concept of "World" thought, in which we are constantly compositing meaning and matter through what we do, say, and make. Going beyond the *techne*, or art and artistry, and going beyond embedding of coherent messages and symbol making (i.e Ideas), Rickert takes an interesting stance that lies heavily in posthumanist theory (in line with Bruno Latour's network-actor theory and especially Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*) in which he designates that the mind is simultaneously embodied and dispersed into the environment itself (43). At the same time, Rickert leaves room for the mystery of ambience through *chōra* and expresses how an expansion in the studies of rhetoric could further the playing field for how people think about communication and invention. Here he states the thesis of his book which I think is important in the discourse between the works in this thesis:

The project suggests we take as provisional starting points the dissolution of the subject-object relation, the abandonment of representationalism theories of language, an appreciation of nonlinear dynamics and the process of emergence, and the incorporation of the material world as integral to human action and interaction, including the rhetorical arts. (Rickert xii)

Thomas Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric* is based on the Platonic concept of *chōra*, found in the work *Timaeus*. *Chōra* is the bridge between Body, Mind and World. In essence, it is a pre-verbal site where signifying happens, it is, in the words of Herman Tamminen, both “physical as well as psychical sense, generating and being generated in and as a semantic micro-universe that is co-extensive with the given individual” (Tamminen 374). Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian French theorist and philosopher writes in *Revolutionary Poetics* that *chōra* is “part of the discourse of representation that offers it as evidence, the *chōra*, as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality” (Kristeva 26). Thus, according to Kristeva, *chōra* is paradoxically a timeless site that both refuses definition and axiomatic form—while providing us the topology to create or write which *is* involved with our surroundings. Herman Tamminen in “Body Ground Red” states that “albeit pre-verbal, the *chōra* does not disappear upon acquisition of language, but continues to exert and regulate the body's energies and pulsions, thus intruding the semiotiK [note: the capital K is used by Tamminen to address Kristeva's meaning of the pre-processed semiotic] to the articulation(s) of the symboliK (symbol pre-generated) and by that guaranteeing the heterogeneity of the signifying process” (Tamminen ref. Kristeva 376). One could compare the *chōra* to a type of data collecting site where information from the outside internalizes and sputters a ‘pulp’ of pre-concepts into concepts. Writing in this way can manifest as a sense of urgency in the rhetor's voice because the process

involves a high level of attunement to the earth, weather, and organisms—politics and ecology then are going to be present in some form, yet, attuning to *chōra* allows one to stay true to their unique role as an individual within such a complex world. In my view, *chōric* artists convey spatial awareness and allow their message to be generated by the environment and generate a message themselves (see: “Listen and Play”). This creative reciprocity includes both deeply personal-vacuous states of mind and the vast, relief-filled ambient states of world. The sources in this thesis have been selected to analyze for this very reason.

If artistic symbols and relied upon metaphors, and the traditional view of the artist-artwork-viewer are not bound by strict rhetorical moves and grounding settings, how do we find meaning in any of these works, how do they not end up being just weird experiments or mere playtime for the avant-garde? Kristeva explains that meaning is not always *a given* and proposes a more nuanced epistemological model. She employs what she calls “significance” (or *signifiance*) accentuating the suffix *-ance*, which is a term used by medieval linguists to describe dynamic processes (Kristeva on “Pre-Oedipal Language”). It may seem like splitting hairs to discuss the difference between *meaning* and *signifiance*, but when taking that suffix-*ance* as a dynamic mode for an artist and viewer to be constantly engaged in, it allows for more than a reductive ah-ha moment of ‘I found the meaning of this piece and now I can move on to the next’ but rather an epistemological approach that could theoretically take an infinite amount of time to ponder a piece, because from moment to moment the *signifiance* is changing and shifting gears in relation to the artist, the viewer, and the artist’s imagined viewer, and the landscape and time in which it was produced and viewed. *Signifiance* and dwelling go hand in hand. In this way, “Operatic Mysticisms” does not rely on plot or meaning even if the illusion of a symbolically sound narrative appears. Daumal argues there are no sound metaphors or narratives,

no closing in on signifieds, no summit to the mountain. The operative is in the drama of sound and noise, in its amplitude and echoes interacting with relief and space, the mysticism part lies in its signifi- cance of *existing at all* and in its input-output dynamic of that existence—whether or not that means something. The truth is, most of what happens on earth goes unnoticed or is beyond our recognition of meaningful events. Sogol, the man who wrote the letter to the narrator in *Mount Analogue* which prompted the novel’s journey, implies at their preparatory meeting that Mount Analogue could be anywhere, “I mean that it could perfectly well exist, theoretically, in the middle of this table, without our having the least suspicion it was there” (Daumal 75).

In some respects, *chōra* may seem like archaic and outdated theoretical tool (even Aristotle found little use of it) that has no pragmatic access in today’s rhetorical climate; however, in the Anthropocene, life and rhetoric are becoming more and more complex with the addition of new technological tools that are quite literally altering the way we view and experience the world. Our minds are extended outside of our bodies, and our physical presences are becoming more “plastic” as our intellect becomes more digitalized. *Chōra* is not simply a theoretical concept however, it also has practical implications regarding rhetoric and persuasion. Derrida and Ulmer, for example, acclimate the way they approach invention strategies to nonhuman agents and environments (Rickert 46). What this suggests is a mode in which to work that implies a non-binary sensory spatiality, not with the intention to represent the world via symbols, but to accompany the world via interconnected content and fragments which are then curated to aesthetic taste. Tamminen remarks that *chōra* invites “the plurality of subjects [and] guarantees the plurality of worldviews and the stereoscopic nature of culture(s), and by extension the plurality of cultural universes” (374). Understanding how to harness plurality in the rhetorical arts is difficult even if you are aware of the complicated relations the subject matter of a media-

product or message could contain. A brief look into the history of invention could help guide us through.

Elsewhere Headfirst: Brief Notes on Invention

Studying rhetoric helps explain some of the phenomena involved in turning vague ideas or impressions into tangible media. It is an entire field devoted to making sense of how messages are created, sent, and delivered. Operatic mysticism, as a responsive and mindful approach to listening to and playing off spaces, is a type of invention strategy. Aristotle coined invention as one of five terms used to differentiate the pieces of the rhetorical process—other parts are, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery (Laurer 6). In certain theories, invention may be seen merely as an exploratory activity—finding an argument, brainstorming, researching to support an idea of writing. In other circles, invention can include thinking, asking questions to other people about various topics, perhaps even about unrelated issues, focusing context, and the rhetorical mode: reader-writer relationships and social structures and environments, as we have seen with Rickert's idea of ambience (3).

Literature and art respond to how the senses filter outside experiences into memories and feelings. The process of outside things traversing our bodies and minds and being stored and evaluated is constant and cyclical. However, this is a dynamically changing process based on our own perceptions in relation to our age and personal collection of experiences. Once something substantial becomes internalized or sensed, that is known as stimuli. We make sense of this interactive matter, to recall, retell, reproduce, or respond to, either immediately or long after the initial source has passed. The way we intuit the outside will dictate how our media products are in turn produced, which could be something as simple as a gesture or an utterance (to make the

distinction: a *pre-media* would be simply *thinking* of making the gesture). To further break this down, in faculty psychology, our mental geography is divided into six categories: understanding, reason, imagination, memory, appetite, and will (Crowley 17). Even though our minds are capable of experiencing memories from the past, senses from present, and anticipations about the future, everything outside of in-the-moment sensation is unpacked through mental or body memory combined with cognitive activity interpreting those memories. George Campbell, author of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) states, “[memory] becomes the sole repository of the knowledge received from sense.” For Campbell, without a brain or body to store memory, all our sensations would be lost instantly (Crowley Qtd Campbell 21). He wrote this of course before computers, photography, microphones, and other technology. We now have ways to remember things through numeric digitization. However, since stored sensorial memories are only accessible via technology, by the nature of passage through an apparatus these memories become something different than memories of our own, they become extended into a digital network¹.

To summarize, rhetoric can stem from any of the six categories of the stated mental geographies (though there are certainly more), and part of an artist’s endeavor is to combine understanding, reason, imagination, memory, appetite, and will, in various ways to structure a world. Daumal attempts a dense combination with *Mount Analogue*, an environment which engages the senses via language using rhetoric to create an experience in a landscape that does a vertiginous amount of cognitive work for the viewer. The settings in the sources of this thesis are amalgaming all the influences that have been introduced in this chapter, audience, research, ambience, and ekphrasis. But to make a case and point, there are limits to human language, and

¹ In the next chapter, I will elaborate on Jana Winderen’s use of microphones, which allow for complex nuances to be rendered and replicated digitally. Microphones act as mirrors of spaces. Ambience is picked up and stored on computers which then allow the artist to alter and shape the collected sounds. Spatial remediation is at the heart of this thesis because it is an artistic endeavor which combines real-world stimuli, work, play, and imagination.

our ekphrastic responses will inevitably disappoint us if we focus on only the quality of the reception of a message. In the introduction to *Mount Analogue*, Daumal argues that while language (and thus art) may be insufficient, it is a necessary and humble part of the meditative journey of being in the present. Daumal's 'elsewhere' is not a space for escapism, but rather to confront his problems and desires head on.

In the process of putting so much pressure on language, thought ceases to be satisfied with the support of words; it bursts away from them in order to seek its resolution elsewhere. This 'elsewhere' should not be understood as a transcendent realm, a mysterious metaphysical domain. This 'elsewhere' is 'here,' in the immediacy of real life. It is from *right here* that our thoughts rise up, and it is here that they must come back. But after what travels! Live first; then turn to philosophy; but, in the third place, live again. The man in Plato's cave has to go out and contemplate the light of the sun; then, strengthened by this light which he keeps in his memory, he has to return to the cave. (Daumal 28-9)

It seems clear that Daumal follows the traditional method of invention that I have explored in the previous paragraphs: outside goes inside, inside goes outside. And in that process, he finds the value of returning to a state of living and listening rather than always speaking and analyzing. How oxymoronic his italicized *right here* is, because while writing those words, he uses the very modes of philosophical language he is critiquing, yet somehow, I as a reader believe him that it is possible, and desire to be in the moment regardless of that *impossible* paradox.

In this chapter, I examined ways in which rendering environments is a dramatic, musical, and cognitive process and I make a case for what I call *operatic mysticism* (intuitive approach to art making that foregrounds musicality, theatrics, and sense of place). Within artist rendered spaces thanks to operatic mysticism—influence, ambience, and nonhuman agents will affect the style of expression, details in content, and dynamics of a work. To respond accordingly, the focus shifts to finding significance rather than meaning, which implies openness and acceptance of resisting making assumptions. Patience in lingering is ultimately rewarded with appreciation

of environments as both an artist and viewer. As Daumal said, not by transcending, but by being present, regardless of technique or eloquence one may view limitations of language as opportunities for growth, and above all, nothing to fear.

CHAPTER 3. FIELD RECORDINGS OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

This chapter will focus on field recordings as a concept and practice to highlight how art can originate both from an idea and an environment, and how the connection between the two is in sustained exchange during the creative process. Examples will be drawn from sound artists Jana Winderen, Chris Watson, and Hildegard Westerkamp who use their knowledge of landscapes to engage their conceptual ideas via soundscapes, a general term that can describe any type of audio space where the listener encounters sonic elements. Often, these artists portray the fragile state of ecosystems in relation to climate change, which is having a direct impact on the lives of not only our environments, but our viewers, content, and thus art.

Theory from Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter* is included to discuss Henri Bergson's term *élan vital* to elucidate on how captured sounds relay specific essences of life as transformed energy. Once remediated, a soundscape has the power to evoke new emotions in the listener. These sonic renderings, however, can be applied to other mediums and even writing. The title "Field Recordings of the Subconscious" has been in my artist statement for years and I employ the phrase to describe my music, writings, and paintings because it has been my observation that soundscapes are occurring all the time, even while we dream and while we eat and the artist is one who captures, arranges, and connects all these moments into *compositions*.

In the second part of this chapter, I will investigate the ephemeral nature of sound in relation to compositions, listeners, and artists. Elaborations on Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author* are extended to *Death of the Reader* and how the future will consist of more inventions such as 3D printers to transcend mortality. Cybernetics' role in preserving mankind and our artforms are also touched on. I claim that dissipation is one of humanity's most intense longings

and trepidations and is the inevitable effect of sound traveling from source to receiver and beyond. Operatic mysticisms acknowledge the entire span of the artistic process which mirrors life from birth to death and the work we do together in this world is one large field recording.

Listen and Play

The soundscape is a medium that requires both an imagination and a practical mindset. Since its conceptual formation in the 1960s, artists, scientists, and sound enthusiasts have attempted to capture environments, animals, and people, all over the world. To create a soundscape, one must be familiar with equipment and have microphones and some sort of recording device to capture sounds. In recent years, technology has greatly made things more affordable and easier to make quality recordings with lighter equipment.

The microphone is the sound artist's paintbrush, pen, and magic wand of sorts. It is a tool that both receives sonic data and nuances via frequencies. The microphone allows a documentation of the ethereal and ephemera of noise as it passes through the air or absorbs into surfaces or substrates. It is a tool that allows for scientific research and creative use. It tells a story that would be impossible to relay via words alone. Microphones allow one to revisit a place again and again without ever having been there. They keep record of spaces and creatures like a time capsule. On the other hand, one could argue that it merely gives us the illusion of access. This is what pioneering sound artist Hildegard Westerkamp calls "the seduction of the microphone." In her essay titled, "Speaking From Inside The Soundscape" she suggests, "It feels like access, like closer contact, but it is in fact a separation, a schizophrenic situation. Soundscape recordists exist in their own sound bubble and hear the place in which they are, completely differently from everyone else in the same place. They are like foreigners or outsiders, no matter

whether the place is their home or foreign territory” (Westerkamp). The sound bubble within a bubble is better however, than complete ignorance, which is a truer separation from reality. The problem doesn’t lie in the fundamentals of soundscapes as a legitimate teleportation device, or art medium, it is, however, a strong portal to aural records and whether the artist wants to use field sounds for creative purposes or not should be examined on a case-by-case basis (just as it is in painting) and not in a generalized statement.

Upon hearing a sound, without proper context, one could be led to believe that that sound still exists. It can allow us to believe a place is not destroyed or a certain animal species is not extinct. A recording of a deforested part of the Amazon Rainforest from thirty years ago could give a false sense of diversity and lushness.

There exist inevitable disturbances involved in the process of actually going to locations in the name of art and science. Logistics and considerations of the ecosystem’s sensitivity to human presence are important when considering a trip to a remote place to record. Artists in the field should be aware of the noise they make and be careful not to add to the sound pollution in both the real environment and in the composition afterwards (Harris ref. Westerkamp 124). Some also suggest that noise and intent are not only applicable to when the sound artist is physically on location, but that there is an ethical duty to preserving and labeling the original source sound—the debate is similar to the blurring lines between non-fiction and fiction writing and the range of opinions is highly variable. In addition, how the sound artist approaches their material during the mixing and composing process is equally concerned in the idea of making *noise*. Westerkamp states, “Our noise adds to the acoustic delineation of the location and it is our responsibility to maintain the balance between the sounds we bring to the place with those we receive there” (Harris ref. Westerkamp 124). This brings to attention also, the concept of

listening and playing and how a good soundscape artist composes an environmental space where one can feel like they are immersed via a respectful balance of watching and wandering, guiding the mind of the listener to some level of reflection. If the soundscape is done with respect to its audience, the people and environment it was captured in, *and* it is interesting, then that is a successful soundscape.

While this thesis focuses on big scale journeys in extreme environments, traveling to locations is by no means a prerequisite for a quality composition. As *Mount Analogue* teaches, one can find a holy mountain on their dining room table. In a sense, the artist brings their experience to the ‘table’ and to the mountain. I have chosen to discuss *Energy Field* for its paradox of relative difficulty of access (for the artist) and rare source sounds, combined with the internet accessibility (for listeners), which mirrors the experience of reading *Mount Analogue*: it is something both easy and difficult. In an interview, Winderen gives details to what she attempted with *Energy Field*:

“My fieldtrip to Greenland was mind blowing; the vast beauty and enormous scale of the icebergs, also being so vulnerable and at the same time so dangerous when they calve and turn into the fjord. I was sitting far too close to the ice fjord, not realizing that.

Afterwards, on my way back, I saw a sign saying “Do not enter, extreme danger to life” the sounds inside the icebergs were amazing when putting the hydrophones right inside the ice, the compressed oxygen from extremely old ice melting was very powerful.” (Winderen 5)

Winderen’s process involves seeking out specific moments in specific places. She gets help from local scientists and people who know the area she is adventuring in. Her hydrophones (in the 2010s) were attached to 90-meter-long cables to record at different depths. The act of capturing

these creatures, she says, reveals the complexity and intelligence of the life forms which we know so little about. When asked in the interview, *So what are your criteria to this journey you are creating?* She responded, “I bring the journey from the actual place, all the physical and emotional experiences in addition to the sounds into the mix” (Winderen 6). Part of Winderen’s travels involve extremely rough seas, or unpredictably shifting glaciers which have on several occasions put herself in danger. She mentions her equipment breaking on one occasion due to strong waves.

Why go through so much trouble to get these obscure places on record? There remain other interests for an audience of such curated sounds of nature. Chris Watson, one of the pioneering sound artists of the twentieth century and member of the iconic experimental group Cabaret Voltaire, eludes that ocean recordings, “take us back to something maybe we are familiar with—prenatal—we start to hear at 24 weeks while we are still in our mother’s womb” (Watson). The oceanic or aquatic qualities including ebb-and-flow, pulse, and waves which Watson describes, have also been observed by many who listen to music and soundscapes. In sonic environments, descriptors like ‘dry’ and ‘wet’ have long been used by sound technicians and musicians. Each new song or soundscape one hears is like becoming a newly born infant and seeing the world for the first time (because the track exists both in this world and in its own world), just as one feels subconsciously a return to a womb-state when diving into the ocean. We are both the same, and different. Here again, Westerkamp provides an interesting correlation between newborns and active listening, she says, “[As babies] Listening and sound making (input and output, impression and expression) were ongoing activities, like breathing, happening simultaneously, always in relation to each other, as an ongoing feedback process. . .And in this balance we never questioned how our time passed. It simply passed by virtue of our being active

inside of each moment” (Westerkamp). Sensory input and output become more complex as we get older perhaps due to the slowing down of biological processes and weathering of neural receptors, but there is maybe something more culturally or even literary that is stopping us from listening like newborns. Daumal seems to be concerned with this very matter. The associations, metaphors, and allegories we carry with symbols of the real lead us on steep paths in which our expectations carry us away towards distraction and apathy.

A finished soundscape is an assemblage of sounds that were produced from separate sources. The possibilities of how one creates a soundscape are many, but in the twenty-first century it is probable that it was mixed and mastered on a computer or some sort of analogue mixer or hybrid of the digital and analogue. The individual tracks (if the artist is multi-tracking) are arranged on a screen (or mixer) one-by-one, and their levels are often regulated and manipulated to accommodate the most listeners possible. This often includes cutting out low- and high-end frequencies which could pain listeners and damage speakers. Once the tracks are mixed to the artist’s liking, they are then compressed into one single file, most commonly .wav or .aif. Or, depending on the project and how the soundscape will be exhibited, each separate track could be mixed and mastered on its own for location specific performances. For example, in 2014 Jana Winderen was invited by the New York Department of Transportation to do an installation in Park Avenue Tunnel in New York City, where the soundscape spanned the 7 blocks length of the tunnel and each of her chosen tracks was playing in a different speaker. The entrance of the tunnel mimicked the surface of the ocean with wave sounds crashing, and as the listeners walked it mimicked the action of diving deeper into water. Operatic mysticisms here are evident from conception to curation to audience interaction, the latter being one of the most important considerations for the sound artist.

Soundscapes have an advantage of being movable, they can adapt to many environments to be shown. And while it is not typical that one can create an extended surround sound experience in a 7-block tunnel, one can get an idea of the artist's vision by listening with their own method of preference. To be playable online, the track must be mixed down, compressed, and uploaded, a process that unfortunately reduces original quality but nonetheless makes it possible for wide distribution. It then exists on a new storage database, platforms such as Bandcamp or Spotify, directly on the artist's website, and let us not forget CDs, vinyl, and cassettes. Finally (and hopefully), the track renders out of the state of inertia when listeners press 'play.' For the digital media, from the void of a storage device, it is uncompressed and loaded from the internet or read via laser on a CD, where 1s and 0s are unpacked and analyzed into the proper wave lengths producing vibrations which are then dispersed linearly. The dormant DNA-like mix unwinds and mirrors what happens in nature, a sea of oneness of sound divides into distinct coherent units that coexist and are thrust into a temporal space. A soundscape becomes an ekphrastic response to *élan vital* to use Henri Bergson's term, an "inner directing principle." It is that which drives the universe to be creative and innovative to keep changing. Bergson defines *élan vital* as:

Impulse which thrusts life into the world, which made it divide into vegetables and animals, which shunted the animal on to suppleness of form, and which at a certain moment, in the animal kingdom threatened with torpor, secured that, on some points at least it should rouse itself up and move forward. (Bennett qtd. Bergson 78)

However, even though a soundscape is a record of *élan vital*, once it is created it becomes sort of the exact opposite, an experienceable but loop-able image of such energy forces at work. A ghost of the "new events [which *élan vital* brings] into existence and makes each form overflow its

present” (Bennett qtd. Bergson 79). An image of the once constant and chaotic dynamics of creation distilled and organized and ‘on command’ so-to-speak. According to Jane Bennet, *élan vital* is not mere “prefigured responses to stimuli” it has “generative power to produce, organize, and enliven matter” (Bennett 80). Part of the mystery of Winderen’s sounds lies in the marriage between the ‘goallessness’ of non-vital matter with organic assemblages and their individual willpower—and how it is shown on display in a suspended state of tension under aurora borealis -esque sonic light. One could argue, however, that *élan vital* is actually still present in a soundscape even if the ‘spatial environment which is depicted’ no longer exists in its original form. The sounds themselves, the recordings of the sounds, now have agency removed from the source—traces of *élan vital* which never really die—which is why storytelling and art should be cautious of what direction that energy is taking. In this case, it is positive and gears listeners towards wonder (an act of love?) and for example, compelled me to write about it in this thesis. And I can imagine *Energy Field* prompted many other listeners to go outside and listen for themselves the soundscapes that are happening all around us every day. Perhaps this is what Chris Watson is getting at when he says ocean sounds remind us of the prenatal, maybe we can hear *élan vital* in action.

In this section, so far, I have focused on *recorded* soundscapes and discussed ways which aural content is located, collected, arranged, and compressed into a track (or multiple tracks) and then presented to an audience. But what I call Field Recordings of the Subconscious can also be hybrids of recorded audio and live performance, purely live performance, or even as I mentioned a drawing on paper, where the energetic waves or ‘noise’ of thoughts are mediated onto a flat surface via hand (or mouth or foot) gestures and drawing tools. I will now pivot back to the opera to show how the term soundscape can conceptually include performance art because

informing ourselves with a variety of experimental methods of curating mediums will inform the artist and viewer in their own operatic mysticisms. Essentially a performed soundscape—*Sun & Sea* provides music and actions played out by actors in a sonic-meets-visual exhibition where a listener/observer can be physically present at the source of the art while it is executing its content over a *durée* of time. In the anticipation, a real-life mirroring of the *play button* occurs, where the audience's journey from their home attempts to make the start time of the show—the audience once they arrive and are settled in their viewing location expects something to happen, and the performers anticipate this. The performers and creative team have worked for that moment where the ideas on paper and stored clouds on computers can finally come to life. The opera is a shared sonic vision beginning with the artist's concepts, theories, and experiences, which are relayed to its actors in the form of sheet music, librettos, stage directions, cues, meetings, and rehearsals. The vision depends on the collaboration not only between each singer and their voice, taste, and attitude but also their interactions with the directors and also each specific audience. The *élan vital* proliferates into the families and friends of the performers as they rehearse; excitement builds and promotions for the show add to the 'hype.' Then the audience is given options for dates, and they buy tickets for a reserved spot to engage in this collective effort, and once they see and hear the execution of the amalgamation of energies—*then* the soundscape reaches its potential—forming into a significant moment in the lives of those who wish to receive and play a part in the vision firsthand. While recorded soundscapes have a different set of obstacles for the artists (I am thinking of the rough seas Winderen sailed to capture her sounds) and ways in which the experience could be hindered for the listener (i.e. bad speakers, poor Wi-Fi connection, etc.) the opera's effect depends on a vertiginous set of factors each time it is performed. Scenarios such as food with bacteria on it could affect the entire performance for a

singer or impede them to show up at all. There are so many what-ifs in theater. For a thought experiment, say on a key night of the Venice Biennale 2019 shows, a storm passed through and caused the audience to be flustered or not attend, it could have changed the outcome of winning the award for best pavilion, and perhaps the subsequent world tours and recognition and popularity of this opera wouldn't have happened. Unimaginable circumstances, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, can halt public performances for long periods of time. Regardless, operas are soundscapes that permeate the stage and the personal lives of everyone involved. It remains in my view a powerful medium because of its ability to musically connect concepts to emotions in a communal interaction with both people and spaces in which it is performed in.

Soundscapes then, in whichever way they are exhibited—opera, ambient tracks, film, painting, writing, become field recordings of cognitive topography, a document of *élan vital*—the propulsion of what is intuitive, dynamic, and constant. In other words, the artist composes out of chaos and noise, a syntagma of moments which live on in the mind of the viewer and artist once they are heard and visualized. They become a part of the very landscape they emerge from and are always there waiting to be heard.

Dissipate

“I want to call but my phone has no signal.”

—El Mar La Mar

Part of the geographies encountered in this thesis are a result of the hyperawareness of our own mortality within the spaces we live. What we listen to and what we play are both subject to dissipate into the unknown and thus the ineffable. Dissipation, as mentioned, is the result of

sound traveling from a source to ever increasing entropy. The memory of people existing and the works that people create behave in a similar way over time, from invention to reception to obscurity, art reflects the sounds, echoes, and voids—embodied efforts that show both our ultimate desires and fears. We want to exist in multitudes, to be seen and understood, connect with people and places, fall in love a thousand times over, to explore and learn as much as we can while we are on Earth. And the function of art allows people to do all these things, in what is referred to as symbolic immortality. However, the other side of dissipation involves complete anonymity when a loss of self occurs because of such scattering. One of the great motivators to being creative is finding a way to cope with the fear of death. These coping mechanisms are studied in psychology under what is known as “terror management theory.” Until recently, the connection between anxiety and awareness of one’s imminent death has been doubted and criticized for lack of empirical evidence, but new studies have given this theory credibility (Juhl, Routledge 102). By sharing our artwork and publishing literature, we both accomplish and avoid complete decay by participating in culture and larger belief systems that value our art giving us a sense of connection. The works in this thesis explore death in ways that would align with terror management theory, the journey becomes a means to cope psychologically with the potentiality of the void. Daumal sees this concept from a slightly different angle, in which one must *let go* of the comforts and rewards that belief systems and culture provide us. He says it well in one of his last letters to his wife, “Seeing you are nothing, you desire to become; In desiring to become, you begin to live” (Daumal 151). Part of Daumal’s journey involves the death of the ego, the withdrawal of the image one has of oneself, and the foregrounding of solace in the creative processes of life despite the possibility of there being no ultimate remembrance. *In desiring to*

become, you begin to live sounds like a description for *élan vital*, which is perhaps the very opposite of nothing—it is always becoming something.

Daumal explores the art of the disappearing act, which is an important part of dissipation because it is the moment the media product is passed on to the viewer and the artist tries to let the work speak for itself. In *Mount Analogue*, Daumal writes in a distanced first person, a narrator that sounds like Daumal's personal voice, but is actually speaking through the voice filter of fiction. So where is the author? Hopefully, not shouting next to your ear explaining every word (if this is the case, you may have a bigger problem to deal with than authorial intent). Some would argue the author once dead in real life, is nowhere except inside the mind of the reader. On the other hand, the author can be extremely present, depending on how much biographical information one may be aware of. The same notion applies to other mediums as well besides literature, it applies even in works where the creative team attends the performance or stars in the show. The audience-to-artist feedback just becomes more direct.

Roland Barthes' death of the author happens at the distribution of the art so that readers do not rely too much on what they know about the life of the creator to analyze or enjoy a work as unbiased as possible. The true death of the author happens multiple times over in an endless dissipation from the moment the author sits down to write to the last person to ever remember their name. And each new generation of readers experiences their own deaths as readers, their opinions and critiques fade into history until the last reader or memory of a book dies and the Anthropocene ends. Probably, machines will be the last readers, and it is in this light that technology is being developed to avoid this from happening. Television shows such as *Upload* (2020), and *Black Mirror* (2011), are inspired by this concept, exploring what was once a Sci-Fi

theme; the possibility of uploading consciousness to gamified spaces that create an afterlife for users is perhaps not so far away.

One of the most powerful moments of *Sun & Sea*, occurs in the number titled “3D Sister’s Song,” sung by real life twin sisters. The lyrics conceptually challenges the role technology has in ‘preserving’ us and the environment beginning with an emotionally charged lament and ending with a parodic gleeful exclamation with the notion that a 3D printer will save everything.

– I cried so much when I learned that corals will be gone.
And together with the Great Barrier Reef the fish would go extinct –
From sharks to the smallest fry.
– I cried so much when I learned bees are massively falling from the sky,
And with them all the world’s plant life will die.
– I cried so much when I understood that I am mortal,
That my body will one day get old and wither.
And I won’t see, or feel, or smell ever again...
(*Sun & Sea*)

This first half of the song laments what it feels like as a young person to realize the state of earth within which we are born. Part of the existential dread comes out of the knowledge of imminent destruction of habitats which seems out of our control—as if we never had a chance to change things. We merely come to understand the gravity of situations. At the same time, it shows the chain reaction of losses, from coral to reef to shark to fish; then it shifts from bees to all plant life; then finally our bodies to our senses. Interconnectivity is a difficult notion to process because it shows us how actions in one area can affect that of another dramatically. It is beneficial for humans to see how we are connected to bees, but many people would perhaps prefer not to think about it—such a vulnerable feeling when so much depends on a species we recklessly ignore and destroy in the name of progress.

In Figure 1 shown below, the twin sisters are singing a melancholic tune about the future, and prompting cybernetic questions in the viewer: *which of us is real and which is the copy?*

And once technology arrives to a certain level of verisimilitude *how will we know the difference?*



Figure 1. “3D Sister’s Song” featuring the twin sisters, *Sun & Sea*

– My mother left a 3D printer turned on.
And the machine began to print me out.

When my body dies, I will remain,
In an empty planet without birds, animals and corals.
Yet with the press of a single button,
I will remake this world again:
– 3D corals never fade away!
– 3D animals never lose their horns!
– 3D food doesn’t have a price!
– 3D me lives forever!
(*Sun & Sea*)

Obviously, these are both human actors, but this song is interrogating future technology, and what will happen to the non-3D printed us, what will happen to these creations once the generations that have consumed them are gone from this world? Here lies another seduction act that a microphone performs: the illusion of spatial immortality. The 3D printer is like a

microphone, it is an apparatus designed to capture and replicate, to remediate one source in-creation of another. “3D me lives forever!” but the planet will be empty.

In *Mount Analogue*, Daumal makes a similar move when a man named Bernard tells a story of how the entire environment collapses after he killed a single rat. He begins by suggesting remorse for what had happened to the narrator and his team, “The guides up above know what they’re doing when they forbid hunting beyond Meadowbrook. . . For a rat I killed fifty paces from here I lost the four paradams I’d gone through hell to find and hold on to” (Daumal 143). He goes on to say he was called to a tribunal to make reparations for the murder of the rat. As he was travelling, a side of the mountain “collapsed and crashed down in an avalanche of rocks and mud.” Playing off interconnectivity, he says without the rat, diseases spread throughout the wasp community and “there was scarcely a wasp left in the region.” And finally, here is the final, unfinished sentence of the novel: “Without the wasps, a large number of plants which play an important part in holding the terrain in place ” (Daumal 147). Just like that the reader is left to finish the dissolving sentence, the blank space feels ominous, and I can’t help but fill that final phrase with the dramatic words: will die. Fitting, however, that the final word of the novel be *place*—maybe Daumal ‘answering that door’ was also a refusal to let the book and his death say that *le Grand Jeu* is over.

This chapter began with a conceptual and practical overview of field recordings and how a sound artist gathers sonic data via microphones and then produces *compositions*, or assemblages of connections. I examined the different production stages necessary for creating a soundscape—from shaping an idea to the adventure of going out in the field, to the art of listening and waiting for sounds, and what it means to play. I proposed that a field recording captures immanence, the essence of what Bergson calls *élan vital*, a creative driving force that

propels matter and life to keep making and evolving. I discussed the literary implications that equipment such as a microphone or 3D printers possess, their attempt at realism, preservation, and mimesis and their power of connecting a listener to an environment. A self-awareness of technologies' limitations can play a large part in the aesthetics of a composition, which artists can use to their advantage to render scenes via the filter of the equipment, which can both extract and distort specific details. This concept will be further explored in the next chapter.

Finally, I unpacked the term *dissipation* and the concept of symbolic immortality, which involves the proliferating nature of showing and remembering artworks perceived through the lens of both the artist and viewer. The aim of this chapter in relation to the overall thesis is to highlight how art can be a means of coping, documenting, and adventuring, and how creative approaches to mediums such as soundscapes can provide epistemological model-structures for other mediums. There is a phrase I once saw on a sticker that read, *draw like you are painting, paint like you are drawing*.

CHAPTER 4. UNACCOMPLISHED MOVEMENTS

This brief chapter is about framing, zooming, focusing, staging and other cinematic techniques that are utilized to tell a story. By zooming in we see much more details and feel closer to the subject. When zoomed out we get a larger picture of the scene but also feel more detached from the action or setting. At first, I had the idea to create a chapter about movement, how one traverses the extreme places of mountains, deserts, and waterscapes. After investigating these works, I realized the movements which are often allegories for spiritual journeys are, in the end, unaccomplished, as Daumal says, “We never did see the summit— / Except on the sardine can” (Daumal 87-8). This chapter, in part, shows the journey and movement via the lens of the storyteller, and the vehicles through which their stories are told. To say that the camera, the microphone, the pen, the stage, are futile tools for futile efforts, is not my intention, however, this title acknowledges the reality that art alone is not accomplishing its creator’s implied wishes—whether that be to fully depict a life, preserve a culture, show an interesting insight, inspire, connect, dismantle, revolutionize, etc.—art must be accompanied by social and individual efforts to evoke change. And even the most advanced spiritual quest can feel unresolved.

The second part of this chapter titled “Limited Time Only” explores how the promise of reaching a destination in a philosophical journey, living in a perfect world, or in some cases, escaping to a paradisaical vacation spot—are often unfulfilled expectations. The traveler is left to wander endlessly, or the portal to enlightenment only remains open for a small amount of time. The summit on the sardine can in *Mount Analogue* is a perfect example of this, and for such a powerful concept, it is referenced only in the lyrics in the song of a side character.

Finally, I discuss how *Sun & Sea* does not contain movement, so to speak, as the entire opera stays on the long durée mode of the same scene and setting. It festers like a wound, wallowing in idleness as it pokes at the sales pitch, “GOLDEN HOT SAND EXISTS ONLY ON THE BROCHURE.” The rest of the section focuses on the restraints of human bodies, such as lung strength in swimming, or limits of knowledge, science, and technology. I borrow one example from *Sun & Sea*, which observes that despite scientific tools, unexpected catastrophic events occur in nature which often leave people powerless and scrambling. I also discuss how *Mount Analogue*, makes the case for the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote, which is now a rather good cliché *life is a journey, not a destination*. In the novel, summiting is never realized, however, a plethora of adventures are had, and both the reader and author seem to glean valuable wisdom from the experience. The closest we get to the summit is that ekphrastic description of the sardine can—not exactly what we came for but a summit, nonetheless.

Zoom in Zoom Out

An interesting bridge between *El Mar La Mar* and *Energy Field* is in their approach to zooming in and zooming out to build scenes in ways that highlight and utilize to the full effect their respective mediums. *El Mar La Mar* begins its first shot by employing this zoom technique as the camera shakes quickly, displaying flashes of greenery and large black strips, as if we enter a new world, disoriented and chaotic, running through an unknown forest. The number of strips on the film multiplies as the camera moves, and the strips’ effect intensifies as the shot develops, they seem to tower over the camera. To help visualize this motif, Figure 2 depicts a series of still-frames from the first scene of *El Mar la Mar*:

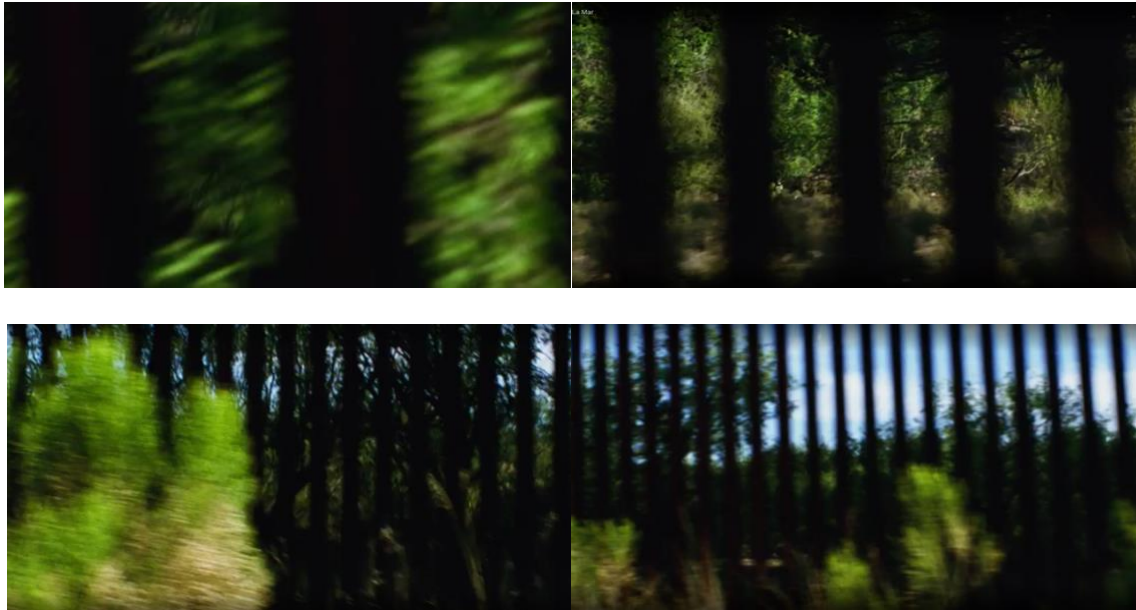


Figure 2. Opening scene of *El Mar La Mar*

Keep in mind, the camera during this scene is shaking. It is shot from the first-person viewpoint as if the viewer is looking through the eyes of someone running or riding on the bed of a truck. The blurring run feels human-like, even though it is an analogue film and production technique which is leaning into noise. Apparitions of color, the occasional red or green squiggly line, mimics our own optics of seeing shapes when we open and close our eyes. The emotional weight of the top left image is perhaps the most abstract and heavy in terms of composition and framing. Once the viewer has been immersed in the closeup, the initial feeling and impression linger in the mind's eye. As the number of strips increases and as the camera widens the shot to expose more of the tree line, the emotions also compound. By beginning a frame with a certain feel, then allowing the duration to expand and zoom, the sequence builds momentum, like in a symphonic movement. After the zoomed in moment has fulfilled its role, the shot developing outward allows the viewer to multiply that same initial intensity to the entire tree line. The strips appear to advance smoothly like ghosts and then disappear off screen. This introductory scene titled "Rio," reflects the scope and anxiety of the societal issue underlying the thesis of *El Mar*

La Mar, and also sets the expectations for the rest of the film, as if the director is saying from the beginning: ‘this is going to be an experimental take on the matter, pay attention to the camera shots, sound, and the environmental language as we navigate this landscape.’

Now going the opposite direction, zooming in, the same technique is especially effective in the sequence showing a wildfire. *El Mar La Mar* masterfully begins the scene at a great distance from the inferno, which appears as merely a line of orange and red light glowing amongst a dark landscape, and then slowly, shot by shot, the camera gets closer to the flames. The audio rises in volume, mirroring the camera effect, spatially foregrounding the loudness and power of a roaring fire. The crackling sounds of dry grass, the wind blowing all sync with the smoke and intense yellow and red burning in the film. The scene then abruptly cuts to a calm landscape shot at night, with a pinkish-orange dim light above a mountain ridge with a tiny moving lamp in the distance. This passage, which could have been merely a transition piece, actually reveals again, the scale, and magnitude of a fire in the dry environment, it gives the viewer a sense of what it is like to be there in person, which was riskier (for the production team) than just showing the wildfire from afar. Changing scale is often key to effective world building for a piece with a large environmental scope, without it, a sense of proprioception within that landscape could become vague, and the viewer will have to imagine the missing details of scale on their own.

For *Energy Field*, Jana Winderen describes her process of layering soundscapes in a similar method, borrowing cinematic techniques is a common practice in sound art due to the visual quality and temporal framework within which they operate. Jana Winderen elaborates in an interview:

“I’m not just using the recordings as they are. I always work on three levels, where I have first the atmosphere of the place—this whole kind of open space. And then the second level where I’m going closer to the habitat of the area. And then the detailed sounds that will be more like the individual fish. And that layer I very often leave much as it is, though it needs to be tidied.” (Harris Qtd. Winderen)

For movement Winderen uses this shift in focus by raising the volume of the drone sound which is often present throughout the soundscape to varying degrees. The feedback drone combined with bubbles and surface sounds are shaped sonically to mimic caves which offer tunnel-like portals to meeting new creatures. By spending more time intently listening, Winderen hopes to understand more of what is going on in these strange worlds, yet also acknowledges the beauty in simply wondering what could be happening and acceptance of the possibility that we may never know.

As explored with the zooming sequences of shaky tree lines and wildfires, *El Mar La Mar* provides other lucid methods of movement throughout the film via object-functions and their signals. For example, one scene starts with a shot of a person working on an antennae pole and it stays focused on them for a long time, birds pass through the shot. The next cut is a closer version from a slightly different angle. Then via the soundtrack, a cacophony of radio signals become audible. Static voices appear in Spanish, accompanied by wind sounds and a music-like pulse. Some new voices enter the airwaves speaking in English. Both languages permeate one another. The camera alters between sunset colors and signal towers and cables, as if we the viewers are one-with-the-signals. Static continues as the camera shifts focus onto a field of dead grass blowing in the wind and a cut to a purple flower that looks as if it is reaching at something

with its petal. The mental geography of the piece permeates the senses and moves fluidly between aural and visual, concrete and conceptual, and human and environment.

In live performances, *staging* will accomplish similar ventures. Theatre *mise-en-scène* encompasses not only the elements on set but also the performance space surrounding the actors and audience. *Sun & Sea* accomplishes a zoom out move through its overhead view of the stage, where the audience watches from above. This distancing from the beach/stage embodies a key aspect of climate change: humanity's disconnect with its environment. The creative team could have staged the piece in a small black box theater, where the audience could have their feet touching the sand, but this was not the choice. In a most extreme display of distancing the viewer in one home country performance in Lithuania, *Sun & Sea* was staged in an immense, several-stories-high parking garage. Viewers from the top story looking down were very far away from the action, like at a baseball game, and by the mere height from the stage—a feeling of helplessness is implied. In addition to viewer placement, the picturesque perspective of the sandy beach is juxtaposed by the bleak feel of concrete and the hollowness of the carpark (Figure 3).

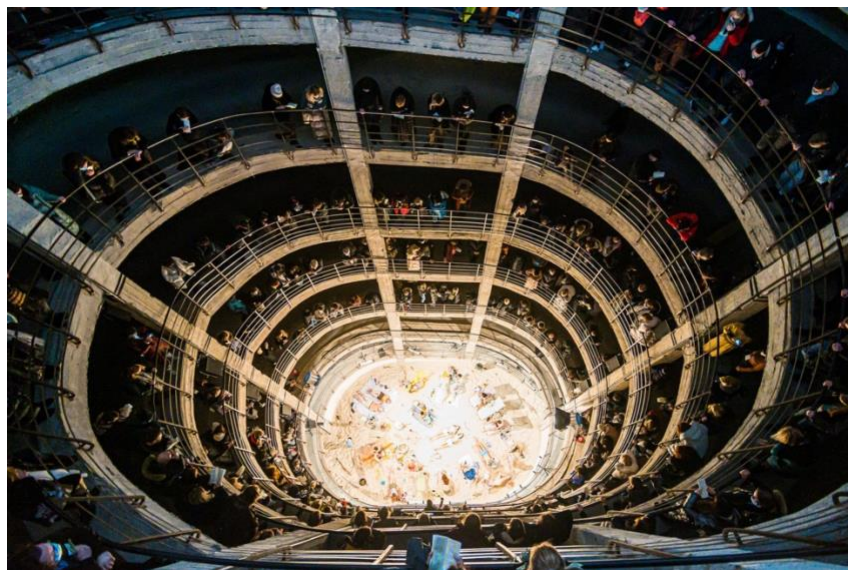


Figure 3. Parking garage staging, *Sun & Sea*, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2021 (Činga)

The songs in *Sun & Sea* feel like dirges or medieval church hymns, so when combined with such a cathedral-like, narrow space, the juxtaposition creates an ambience that is foregrounding modernity and at the same time touching on religious/spiritual connotations. The ethereal meets 70s concrete in a poetic display of a struggling, exhausted Earth. There is a sentiment of encroachment, as if progress has finally come to claim its last square inch of nature—and what is perhaps the most poignant commentary—the intimacy amongst audience members via a shared disconnect, they are almost forced to look at each other from across the spiral. In other words, we are all voyeurs to the demise of the planet, but it is easy to forget because the problems may seem abstract.

Limited Time Only

To show the tension between the idea of the perfect beach, or the highest summit and the impossibility of arriving to such places, *Sun & Sea* and *Mount Analogue* use sales-like pitches with distant images of places to try to sell the characters in the narratives—to inspire them to travel to each respective destination. The catalyst of the story in *Mount Analogue* is the narrator's article written about the mountain, which, in turn, inspires Professor Sogol to write a motivating letter back, pleading to meet and discuss an expedition. The meeting happens, and they are compelled to assemble a team. More letters are written to people that they think would be a good fit for the expedition. The idea proliferates to these other people, who are either persuaded or not interested. To employ words used in the last chapter, the idea dissipates and spreads after it is composed and formed. Connections are made and the possible existence of Mount Analogue becomes reasonable, regardless of the absurdity due to the convincing words of Professor Sogol and the narrator. Art is very much the business of making people fall in love with ideas.

In *Sun & Sea*, the song “Volcano Story” displays the concept of the vacation dream being sold by some travel company. The brochure offers false promises of golden hot sand; the reality of nature’s unpredictability sets in. Here the librettist plays with travel brochure imagery, scientific knowledge, and the limits of predicting volcanic eruptions.

GOLDEN HOT SAND EXISTS ONLY IN THE BROCHURE.

THE VOLCANO ERUPTED UNEXPECTEDLY,

CONTRARY TO ALL THE DIAGRAMS AND TIME TABLES –

NOT A SINGLE CLIMATOLOGIST PREDICTED A SCENARIO LIKE THIS.

(*Sun & Sea*)

The story of the volcano is cautionary, regardless of what we know, not even the best scientists can predict every eruption. The vacation is framed as a distraction, a distancing of one’s mind from the problems that await them once they return to their normal life. A central theme to *Sun & Sea* dissolves the illusion that we can escape these issues when they are lurking in the water just next to us as we lounge on the sandy shore. On the set, as mentioned, there is notably no water present, it is imagined by the audience and the actors, and thus the issues facing the water are also seen as abstractions. All parties involved are forced to use their imaginations, just as in real life when some areas of the world are affected less than others, statistics can feel like distant numbers that signify future problems, but not present-day reality. However, by pointing out the mechanics of said abstractions, and how these problems feel to each member of the cast, the attitude of our times is revealed. Nothing is concrete, and again the ground of the beach allegory, like the crystal trails of *Mount Analogue* dissolves leaving the audience to only ponder the words they are hearing in the space they have been given.

Sun & Sea suggests that humans use technology and food to become more powerful to explore inaccessible places. In “Siren’s Aria I,” the libretto interrelates those desires and compulsions with greed as the singer tells a story about how her ex-husband died while swimming too far away from the shore. The cause of death is not attributed to the power of the ocean, she goes on to provide the humorous yet deadpan serious line, “Others, knowing him better / Claim he had suffered a cramp due to a magnesium deficiency” (*Sun & Sea*). The redirection of the song to go from the cause of the husband’s death related to the limits of humans, to the notion that he was deficient in magnesium shows a line of thinking that many people have about climate change and philosophy where the obvious truth becomes obstructed by a seemingly minute detail which could be in part truth and in part false. However, it goes beside the point that humans cannot swim forever.

In “Siren’s Aria II” which continues the same story of the ex-husband drowning, it further extracts the concept of humans trying to expand their own limitations in search of more knowledge and power, and it also ties that desire to the expansion of global transportation in modernity. The singer speaks of her drowned ex, but then zooms the focus out:

This mammal with limited lung power,
Still tries so hard to go into the sea,
To dive down deep:
He wants to conquer and control what is not his to own...
Acidic waves,
Ivory foam,
Rocking the boats full of canned goods, tourists, fruits, and weapons
(*Sun & Sea*)

The focus of this stanza moves from the specific man who drowned, to the acidic waves which call to mind a polluted ocean finally supply lines, airplanes, and war. The sweeping focus goes from the personal to the social throughout. “Philosopher’s Commentary II” critiques how bananas are shipped from Ecuador to people from around the world to supply them with

serotonin for “For any time of day or time of year.” The inclusion of these products which travel the world, are a response to modernity’s demand for goods that are not in season or have an ‘exotic’ appeal. Thus, keeping the bourgeois at higher productivity and higher consumption.

While the sources of this thesis simultaneously take part in a grand adventure narrative rooted in philosophical structures, they do so in a nuanced and self-criticizing way. René Daumal seems like his interest lies in wild and oversaturated imaginative worlds full of magic as a key to obtaining a form of enlightenment, similar to the drowning ex-husband who swam too far out in “Siren’s Arias I & II.” However, to reemploy Shattuck’s quote again from the introduction to *Mount Analogue*, this assumption would be a limited view of Daumal’s work, “Daumal senses that the reality and meaning of the world can come to us at every moment without our having to rely wholly on extreme situations to wrench us into awareness” (Daumal 22). For the artist and viewer, the ability to stay present and appreciative of small moments as well as the large moments are part of what constitute the so-called higher form of being that is craved in *Mount Analogue*. The ex-husband in *Sun & Sea*, simply wanted to fly too close to the sun, so to speak, and that urge to acquire more and to go everywhere is used as a precautionary metaphor for humans in the Anthropocene.

In summary, zooming in and zooming out, framing, and foregrounding limitations of mediums provide unique movement and aesthetical language to works. Meaning can be made via the movement itself, starting with an initial ambiance or glimpse of a subject, and elaborating on the context in which it develops, revealing an environment slowly. The way an environment is unveiled to the viewer helps develop a language and inner logic within the universe of a piece. The director, writer, or artist has the power to link successive images, words, sounds, colors together to wring out different emotions, as a musician can play a vibrato note pianissimo and

strike the note again piano, and slowly crescendo with each strike until a blaring fortissimo, adding unexpected harmonies one by one, as if leading the listener to the heavens. If the summit of the mountain, the golden sands, the end of the desert, or the other side of the glacial tunnel is the destination, then all these works confirm in a self-aware way that these journeys are not accomplished, which let's be clear, does not make them unsuccessful, it just means that the work is never finished.

CHAPTER 5. INACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENTS

The environments described throughout this thesis are changed from their original point of departure. Source visuals, sounds, and inspirations undergo the artistic process of operative mysticism in the mind, body, or technology, in order to be mediated. While accessibility to the original location (time and place), vision, or intended destination, may be impossible, an artist still finds significance through the action of traversing these spaces, and we in turn as viewers search for significance by experiencing the rendering of the voyage.

Whether we travel through an ocean, ridgeline, valley, gorge, or fjord, will matter to us as we attempt to locate our minds and bodies within a work. If a painting embodies the feeling of a summit, the viewer will be tempted to stand in front of the piece, to linger in the valor of such a feat, to try and let that inspiring moment rub off on them so to speak. If an opera exudes the impression of a falling descent off a cliff, the listener will feel the maddening, dizzy tumble, and along with that metaphysical motion, anxiety, sadness, or excitement will settle in.

The artist guides us through these topographies via details, form, metaphors, symbols, associations, narratives, and expressions. And each environment will facilitate or limit certain actions and moods both in the artwork and in the contemplation depending on the terrain and ecology of the space. The greater message of the works in this thesis emphasizes the importance of revering and protecting these powerful landscapes which offer us life and inspiration.

The Mountain



Figure 4. *The Ascent of Mont Blanc—the Glacier du Tacconay*, ca.1855, Sketches by John MacGregor, Printed in oil colours by George Baxter

The mountain terrain archetype signifies an intense struggle and ascension away from the world. It symbolizes “purity” and “holiness.” It has often been a symbol used to both enlighten and manipulate the masses. Mountains require effort to scale, and weed people out, in a sense they can be quite fascist or involve elements of Nietzsche’s concept *Übermensch* simply due the extreme terrain and weather conditions. During the French Revolution for example, ‘the holy mountain’ became a widely used term in political rhetoric during the Terror. It was summoned by the revolutionaries to further justify causes as acts of God’s will (Schechter 78).

Daumal’s narrator discusses how various mountains appear in sacred texts. He connects Mount Sinai and Nebo with Moses, Mount of Olives and Golgotha with Jesus, symbols of Egyptian pyramids, Shiva dwelling in the mountains of the Himalayas, and the Greek God Zeus

living in Mount Olympus (Daumal 41). The mountain acts as a sanctuary for one to speak to high powers, climb to enlightenment, and obtain immortality. It is where Jesus often went for refuge to go away from the crowds. Daumal continues with connections to the ascent of Mount Meru, a mythical place in Hinduism which has no geographical location. He mentions this point right before stating one of the key statements of *Mount Analogue*—as a place that one could theoretically *and* (even if it sounds outrageous) physically have access to. Daumal’s narrator asserts, “For a mountain to play the role of Mount Analogue, I concluded, its summit must be inaccessible but its base accessible to human beings as nature has made them. It must be unique and it must exist geographically. The door to the invisible must be visible” (Daumal 43). Portals appear in *Mount Analogue* but the doorway opens only during a brief moment when the setting sun glows a bright orange strip across the sky, and it offers only seconds for the sailing group to enter.

The mystic undertone of the novel is set in the opening passages, “The mountain is the bond between Earth and Sky. Its solitary summit reaches the sphere of eternity, and its base spreads out in the manifold foothills into the world of mortals” (Daumal 41). Daumal’s mountain is full of personified impressions of landscape. Glaciers are like prehistoric creatures, “Perhaps nature made them in a first attempt to create living beings by exclusively physical processes” (Daumal 103). There are of course the Hollow-Men as previously mentioned, bubble-like silhouette shapes of men who live in caves and crevices only coming out at night to eat void and spirits. Or take for example, the list of magical creatures who exist on the slopes of the mountain including blue squirrels, red-eyed ermine, and herds of unicorns. At one point, Daumal also personifies a torrent “which muttered and chuckled like an animated crowd” (139). The significance of doing such rhetorically pivoting images of the mountain provides a feeling of

wonder and excitement as if we were there with him, having hallucinations at high altitude due to a lack of oxygen. These psychedelic passages reflect that metaphysical mountains do not allow for meaning or logic to solidify. McAuliffe explains in an essay, “The moment that alpinism tentatively codifies a rule of sorts, the mountain discloses the part of itself that proves to be this rule’s exception, rendering the rule inoperative” (McAuliffe 801). *Mount Analogue* is a philosopher’s pataphorical tale with touches of reality, it “transposes into fiction [Daumal’s] own spiritual autobiography” (Daumal 29) and Daumal shows us the challenges faced in the level of alpinism required for accessing *Mount Analogue*; that even with an oxygen tank apparatus, one cannot truly ascend, the mountain dissolves on the very base of its foundational allegory when one succumbs to (in his words) ‘frostbite.’ In one regard, climbing higher is comparable in language to following meta-structures of associations made possible by these ‘pataphors.’ Pataphors expand the notion of metaphor by creating a two (or more) step metonymical distance from comparisons or associations and focuses on exceptions and odd occurrences in which traditional science and poetics cannot explain or utilize. They also tend to use “in-world logic” and diegetic sensory input which can make it difficult for an outside viewer to relate or comprehend the significance. Daumal in this sense is challenging his readers to attempt to ascend via language/imagination input-output.

The mountain is a labyrinth that reveals change in both the eye-of-the-beholder and the landscape. Each mountain has its own traits and characteristics, but they all provide a significant challenge to anyone who traverses them due to unexpected topography, cliffs, crevasses, edges, rocks, and uncertain weather. Trails that seem to be calculated tried and true, may erode over time. Mountains are places where courage and endurance are tested. In a journey like the one in *Mount Analogue*, the characters are put up against the power of the environment, and the limits

of their bodies. The goal is inaccessible, yet not unseen. While mountains are opaque at times, they also can be crystal clear. To quote McAuliffe, “The summit is inaccessible but this doesn’t mean it isn’t available in its own way. Far from this casting it into seclusion, it is seen at all times and from all perspectives—that is to say, it is never not seen” (McAuliffe 794-5). But is seeing the summit and actually arriving at the summit on foot after days of hiking the same thing? The physical exertion of climbing up is the part that becomes gratified because one feels accomplished once they reach the top. Philosophically speaking, it is perhaps irrelevant, because why spend the energy if one can, (if they are looking) behold the same summit from base camp. However, even if one arrives at what is believed to be the summit, one cannot dwell there. After a short moment of fulfillment, they will need to find a safe passage back down. The mountain reveals a cycle between desire-to-satisfaction and the impossibility of breaking free from that demanding loop.

The Desert

“You don’t get lost because you can’t see, you get lost because you don’t know where you are.”

—*El Mar La Mar*

The desert is often characterized as a “non-place,” or a void. It is a large vacuous space that is freed from the structures of societal constraints. Storytellers for centuries have intuitively described the veil between the physical and spiritual world to be thinner in deserts. While spiritual access is facilitated so is the possibility of death. Heat exhaustion and dehydration are a constant threat to life. Oftentimes travelers make their passage in groups for a better chance of survival. Communication and orientation are achieved via tracking, locating of signs, sending

signals, and listening for sounds that can travel for miles. The stories told in *El Mar La Mar* show that traveling through deserts requires a rationing of energy, shade, knowledge of routes and water sources, and an immense amount of luck, “If you walk without water you die.” But water here is also meant in the poetic sense. Not only do they have the elements to endure, but they also have their minds and bodies to maintain and adapt to overcome their limitations. There is never a sense that the travelers can rely on empiricism alone or let down their guard.

Traveling at night is sometimes the best option to avoid the heat. One interviewee in *El Mar La Mar* suggest, “The desert at night is just like the day, and your sky is like a roof of light. At night you can see the reflection of the moon and stars on the sand. It’s an illuminated room.” Traveling under the cover of the night sky also is way to remain unseen by those who are out to capture them. The same interviewee tells a story of how he and his group came upon a patrol. He waited in silence for hours and fell asleep, and when he awoke the group was nowhere to be seen. He kept walking into the night, “I find a patrol loading 15-20 people into trucks. I’m only one person, they don’t see me in the dark, But I see them because I’ve spent so much time in the darkness. My eyes are adjusted” (*El Mar La Mar*) This scene shows an instance where the desert traveler was safer alone to evade being caught by the patrol. Border patrols in literature and language studies are also known as a symbol for the threshold between author and reader, where the exported images of an author get stopped at the border of the reader’s mind to be checked out and analyzed in order to be imported. Julien Barnes uses this analogy in his famous novel *Flaubert’s Parrot (1984)* where the narrator is at the customs line at the checkpoint after crossing the English Channel or La Manche as the French call it, addressing his reader (who is embodied into the story) as he tries to pass some cheese from France to take home.

Mirages can deceive desert travelers, they can run out of water and become delirious and lost, they can fall asleep and lose their group, or be captured by the patrol and banished. At the same time, the desert is also characterized as a beautiful, constantly changing place, where no two valley or ridge is the same. There are oaks in one area, shrubs in the next, then nothing but rocks. The desert is the ultimate peripheral zone that also maintains a mysterious site with its own irreducible identity, history, and character that go beyond void and loss of self. The final chapter of the film titled “III Tormenta” features a slowly read poem over a long-durée shot of a greyed storm coming in, the film grainy and low-lit, reflecting the linguistic content like meta-image matches marrying sound, film, noise, and poetry.

A landscape still unknown, yet certain. Where night may fall while day is at the noon. In the quietude of this silent kingdom only muted voices can be heard. These two artificial mountains, sorrowful signs of today. The many tongues that weaken the peace between people. The magic lantern paints feigned figures on a white wall in thrall to shadow as much as to light a superstitious sign to the augurer, alone they composed a dreadful chapel, a non-song intoning long black notes. The ghost fled as if composed of misty vapors in calm smoke, into wind transformed. The sun-worn traveler dazed and footsore unable to rest not even a little, nor sign of shade. Ships could be observed clearly as if near full sails and heavy kneels. An affirmation of light that left the world illuminated. And me awake. (*El Mar La Mar* [1:28:00])

This poem which is read in a serious and meditative manner over storm sounds is one of the most poignant examples displaying operatic mysticism described in this thesis. It combines metaphysical image matches with the film’s journey, musical qualities, and aesthetics which perfectly mirror that of the visual style, the words themselves feel like grainy analogue film in low light, cutting in and out of view and black flashes. The melody of the voice is almost droning a wind tone with moments of flame and illumination. A cross between Rilke, Tagore, and Chopin.

Deserts manifest uncanny, ineffable features of perception. Light is different, dark is different, and distances are unfathomable. With its own language, logic, and time, moments are

counted by hours and days, told via the sun and moon and the moving shadows they cast. For the lonely traveler, it reveals their ability to adapt, learn new languages, track one's steps, and locate water and shelter, it is a space of altered definitions of productivity, where a productive day is one where energy was conserved, or ground was gained while remaining alive.

The stakes are high, and the landscape and animals reflect a sense of calm urgency in every movement. A wrong guess in what direction to take could be life or death. The dangers of getting lost or injured are great if one is not prepared. A storyteller in *El Mar La Mar* describes the difficulty in his traversing and provides some words of caution to the viewer,

The part we came from was very steep. I almost rolled downhill. But I could balance myself and grab ahold. But it's so steep if you're not ready. You'll fall and break something. And there you will stay. A coyote will eat you. Or the patrol will throw you in a ravine. (*El Mar La Mar*)

With such high consequences of making mistakes, one may be wondering, why is it worth the effort? Well, sometimes, there is no choice. The option of staying home may not be possible. In today's climate crisis, more and more climate refugees are forced into making immensely difficult moves in order to find better land, water, and weather, to achieve even a minimal quality of life. The actual journey through the desert in mythology most often unfolds in one of two ways: the person gets lost, or they find clarity and revelation. As with any allegory, one must be careful not to assume that the United States is the ultimate symbol of the promised land. In fact, the film hardly mentions the United States except when referring to 'the patrol.' This is because *El Mar La Mar* isn't just telling the story of the travelers in the Sonoran Desert, but it is providing a voice and storytelling platform for all marginalized seekers who may be traversing

any desert seeking whatever they may. In the end, a hopeful yet nuanced message is given as a storyteller in *El Mar La Mar* says, “The tiredness *will* pass.”

Waterscape 1: The Beach

Sun & Sea explores the symbolism of the beach which is both a point of departure and static space of leisure. Upon seeing the first visual of the cast on stage, a striking image metonymically conveys laziness, vices, idleness, stupidity, and lust. And in some sense an oversaturation of the sublime. The *mise-en-scène* questions what is beauty? Is this beautiful, grotesque, or both? Are we having a good time? The audience is put in the viewpoint of a seagull flying overhead, forced to bend over a railing to look down on the actors, creating a place of voyeurism, contemplation, and frustration.

The social critiques conveyed in *Sun & Sea* are done so in a comic, parodic manner that is both serious yet funny, and subtle yet blunt. One of the more pointed associations that rises is beaches-to-colonial conquests. Most European campaigns departed from some shore or harbor and landed on distant beaches. Included in some performances are two globe balls and a painting titled “The Battle of the Pyramids” (1798) by Louis-François Lejeune (who has his name engraved in the Arch de Triumph in Paris, France) which alludes to the Napoleonic wars in Egypt, connecting European conquest, greed, and spiritual imagery associating beaches to pyramids. When asked in the artist talk with BarbART—Are these prop additions intentional? Director Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė explains, “These [props] relate to the characters of course, there are some accidents, because sometimes the actors bring their own books and sometimes it works, [but] sometimes we ask them to bring other books which would work better. Like *Financial Times*, or *Vogue*, or *Garden Magazine*. . . it’s thoughtful and intentional things of particular characters” (BarbART). The intertextual elements such as prop magazines and books were

initially chosen by the director team. The singers also just brought along books that they were reading or felt would be good to include in the show, but those props had to be approved by the directors, who knew that leaving certain intertextual elements up to chance on a performance-by-performance basis, would create an effect that mimics the feeling of showing up on the beach on different days. This also highlights how interconnected meaning is between individuals and cultural institutions. A copy of *Vogue* would relate well to the symbol of the silk road as mentioned in “Philosopher’s Commentary I.” Here, the opera shows the absurdity of the modern beachgoer as a consumer; and foregrounds the historical significance beaches played in trade and European domination of other parts of the world, and points out how these places of relaxation, temptation, and transition continue to play a major part in the global economy and colonization.

Is it not a comical even grotesque situation:
Ancient Persia, China, India –
Some of the oldest civilizations in the world.
A thousand years went by and we are
Lying here on the beach,
Snacking on super sweet dates imported from Iran,
Playing a game of chess invented by Indian Brahmins,
Wearing swimming suits made in the factories of China –
Is this not a parody of the Silk Road? (*Sun & Sea*)

Sun & Sea carries these weighted symbols as it tours the world to perform in front of thousands of people, like a movable point of departure that keeps resetting—stuck in the loop of vice for itself, its performers, its spectators, as it sets out to conquer. Of course, that is exactly the point—it is self-aware in the desire to spread a message and in the artificiality of itself as a reproduction (and how addressing these issues in the delivery of the actors and mise-en-place in turn makes it authentic) and also the implications the opera has within the realm of the art world. An interesting element to note about *Sun & Sea* is that in every city it travels, they use the majority

of people and dogs from that specific city to star in the show. Apart from a few key singers, each new “beach” becomes local.

Music composer for *Sun & Sea* Lina Lapelytè states that the idea of having the visuals of many performers on the beach was something deeply reflected on, and it needed to juxtapose between form and content. Lina mentions in the interview, “we held several meetings with people trying to understand how to form an ecosystem out of the people we met, [taking into account their] range of voices.” The aesthetics between characters, props, setting, and location of the audience were equally important and had to reflect the experience of what it’s like being at the beach in the Anthropocene. Rugile explains that beaches are sites where it doesn’t matter what your status is in society, one could be a doctor or a child and yet, they are all “just wearing swimwear.” In her words, the beach is an “equalizer no matter what you do in real life” (BarbART). While at the same time, the opera zooms in and out between inner monologue, calls-and-responses between characters, and large swelling choruses where nearly the entire cast sings along in refrain.

The beach is a location of constant creation and erasure. Coastal sands are always shifting, their myriad patterns of designs and forms react to incessant flow of waves. Affected by the change in proximity of one another, their very shape is smoothed out and chiseled by the tidal movements. Footprints can disappear within minutes. Each beach contains its own signature sand—some have a dazzling variety to their oceanic compositions. When zoomed in at the microscopic level, sand becomes visible to the naked eye in all its nuances. This image labelled Figure 5 depicts a sample of sand from Maui, Hawaii, revealing crystalline and star-like shapes.



Figure 5. Maui Sand Grains Arrangement #2 (Greenberg)

This image reminds us that even though beaches are places of reflection, relaxation, and simple natural beauty, they are also extremely complex and dynamic ecosystems at work, and the closer you examine each element, the more intricate they become.

While *Sun & Sea* transports the audience to an unnamed beach, it collects real sand from beaches that are close to its performance site, a factor which mimics the constant movement of beach sand. The result seems artificial because the space is not where the sand would exist naturally, however, the very effort involved in relocating 20 tons of sand is a conceptual performance in itself, like creating a sandcastle that will be moved yet again, back to the sea, once the opera is over.

Waterscape 2: The Ocean

“In the beginning, darkness was hidden by darkness;
all this world was an unrecognizable salty ocean”

—Vedic Sanskrit Text: Rigveda

Flavit et Dissipati Sunt

—Latin Phrase (Spanish Armada)

Humans have an interesting relationship with the ocean. Throughout mythology, the ocean has been both a protagonist and antagonist. Poseidon gives and takes. The Barents Sea, for example is known by sailors as “Devil’s Jaw” or “the Devils Dance Floor” because of the rough waves which has taken the lives of many travelers. Because of oceanic storms occurring at specific moments in time, history both for humans and non-humans has been drastically altered from Homer’s accounts of the storm in the Trojan Wars to the Spanish Armada to Hurricane Katrina.

Oceans are the origin of all life on this planet and cover around 70% of the Earth’s surface yet they remain nearly 80% still unexplored—less of its surface has been mapped than Mars or the Moon. But not only have we not seen much of the ocean; we haven’t heard it either. *Energy Field* reflects this mystery that remains in these aqueous spaces, even if it is only scratching the surface of the sonic world. As Chris Watson points out, in the Ocean, sound travels more efficiently and through vast distances and each sea contains its own signature or iconic sound. He says during an on-site interview while recording from a shoreline, “All the time is that *low–deep–note–of the sea,*” with his headphones around his neck, pointing out towards the

water, “no two oceans or seas sound the same” (Colour of Sound). Whether its air pockets in the sand, wave patterns, howls, rumbles, fizzing, wisping, plopping, sizzling, the sounds of the ocean environment reflect its power, its repetitious yet dynamic quality, and its beauty.

Water is a threshold that has its own biome and set of physical laws which our bodies are not very well adapted to linger in. It is one of the great hidden places that will undoubtedly remain difficult and expensive to explore, due to the immense pressure that depths have on materials. Winderen has a whole list of Hidden Places and describes them as “those which are not easily available to your ears.” She continues,

“25 meters down in a crevasse of a glacier, deep into a river, ocean or lake; inside an ants’ nest, or between the bark and the wood of a tree; listening to worms, beetles or other insects; or the sound of a caterpillar eating a leaf, the sound of cod or haddock communicating with each other, a sea snail dragging itself along a rock... It can be places where I cannot see the origin of the sound, so it becomes like blind field recording.”

(Winderen Interview by Fischer 2)

The concept of blind field recording resembles that of fishing, where the seeker of sound must rely on intuition and patience to get what they are after. They remain blind to Winderen, “unless the fish swim up to the surface to look at me, which happened once!” (Winderen Interview by Fischer 2). This simple anecdote from her oceanic recording experience reminds us of the glimpses of truth in the form of peradams, the extremely rare and translucent monetary currency in *Mount Analogue* which is gained only based on “intrinsic values” and without which one cannot obtain a guide to the summit. McAuliffe explains further, “*Peradam* is the name given to this scarce and enigmatic stone. Scattered across the mountain’s landscape—although not entirely arbitrarily, its incidence is greater the higher one climbs—transparency is its

distinguishing property, and this makes the search for these stones “difficult and even dangerous,” again increasingly so the higher up the terrain one progresses” (McAuliffe 803). What values are rewarded, then, according to the Winderen’s story of the fish, and Daumal’s conceptual currency of the peradam? Two obvious traits: patience to wait, watch, and listen for gifts of inspiration and connection—as well as stubbornness to stay aware while traveling and creating in a constantly changing environment. There is much to learn from water’s very state of existence, how it can physically morph, or phase transition, from liquid to solid when frozen or to vapor when boiling—because this sort of involuntary change to environmental conditions is an unavoidable aspect to being an organism. While we may not be vaporized or frozen alive, our memories, liquid-like, perform similarly to water as they traverse the vacuous spaces of time.

The Sun / Erasures & Traces



Figure 6. *Rising Sun*, Artist Unknown, Russo-Japanese War Era Postcard, ca. 1905

The Sun is an elemental personage in both *El Mar La Mar* and *Sun & Sea*. It is portrayed as overwhelming, deadly, strong, and omnipotent, but also that which paradoxically gives warmth and life. In the desert or on the beach, the exposure to the sun becomes too much to bear for both the humans and objects which lay in the direct light. In *El Mar La Mar*, one storyteller describes how objects exposed to the sun not only fade, they can disintegrate upon touch, he says, “The plastic water jugs last about a month, they look like they’re fresh, but you touch em and then *chhh* they shatter.” The object, designed to hold water, is a main symbol throughout the film, often shown hanging by strings in caves with phrases written on them such as: *¡podrán cortar las flores pero no podrán detener la primavera!* (You can cut the flowers, but you can’t stop Spring). They hang like poems both in their textuality and in their presence, and they provide a vital substance to people who are in desperate need of hydration. Figure 7 exhibited below is an image of this pertinent example—how poetics, environment, and *élan vital* (desire-to-will) are as important to life as the triad Spirit, Body, and Mind. This scene seems to suspend temporality amongst timeless philosophical questions.



Figure 7. Gallons of Water, *El Mar La Mar*

Without water people can become disoriented and eventually will die. In *El Mar La Mar* water is foregrounded as a vital necessity to keep moving and keep from going delusional. In *Sun & Sea*, it feels more absurd because the beachgoers are willfully exposing themselves for long periods of time simply for their own leisure. In reality on stage, the actors perhaps don't have a store to get more water (perhaps they forgot their water bottle at home) and they are left with all that they had brought to the show. But in the universe of the opera, they are close to a busy street with shops and ice-cream trucks and could easily find a water fountain, but they are unable to do anything as if stuck in a dream state without control of their bodies. The song titled "Chanson of Too Much Sun" discusses the lack of water and oversaturation of sunlight: "MY EYELIDS ARE HEAVY / MY HEAD IS DIZZY / LIGHT AND EMPTY BODY / THERE'S NO WATER LEFT IN THE BOTTLE" (*Sun & Sea*). In the Anthropocene, fresh drinkable water is extremely valuable and will continue to be as pollution increases, and irregular rain and flooding cause problems for humans to process, filter, and collect water from reliable sources.

Sun & Sea bookends with actors applying sunscreen. The opera's first song "Sunscreen Bosa Nova" begins with the line "Hand it here, I need to rub my legs..." and the final song "Sunscreen Bosa Nova II" begins "Will you cover my back with it please?" The sunscreen acts as a sign to show how vulnerable humans are but also how stubborn we are, that we have devised a piece of technology to enable vacationers to maximize their amount of time sunbathing—during the last song, one singer reads the label of the bottle which reads, "Protection for hypersensitive skin..." in four languages. Solar radiation transcends languages and cultures. The imagery of sunburns, chapped skin, and weary vacationers becoming obliterated or transformed into red lobsters, makes one think about why the characters are getting burned in the first place.

El Mar La Mar shows how the ground, trees, shade, and caves are essential places both philosophically and physically. The following quote is a scene described by a humanitarian worker stumbling upon an eerie situation that relates objects, people, and spaces:

We found a campsite. . . used a long time ago. . . everything was old and sun bleached and worn over time. We were doing a sight inventory and to do that I crawled under the bushes under the maskeet tree, and I found a woven blanket that was hidden under dirt and a plastic tarp that was just as vibrant as the day it was made, this crazy vibrant blue which you don't usually see in the desert. . . we covered her with it. (*El Mar La Mar*)

The objects found in the desert are not only traces, but they are emerging from the earth. In this way, the vibrant blue woven blanket found in a place where nothing exposed keeps its color for long carries a great and open-ended signifiacnce as it is placed on a woman who has passed away. Blue, the color of the sky and ocean, associated with wisdom and royalty. In Latin American Catholic communities, blue is a sign of hope, and in Mexico it is a sign of mourning.

Another object from *El Mar La Mar* that displays the sun's effects is included in Figure 8 which depicts Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. This moment in the film uses layered and contextualized symbolism.



Figure 8. Ekphrasis of found objects, Camera on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *El Mar La Mar*

This shot highlights the power of the sun as its rays are seen in-action, fading a cultural icon which was discarded into the environment. On this rolled-up poster paper, the viewer sees the face of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695), whose eyes seem to be looking directly at the camera, as if emitting its own sun rays in the form of shadows. Juana was one of the last poets of the Hispanic Baroque, and first exemplary poets in Mexico City, and her material was wide-ranging: “She drew on a vast stock of Classical, biblical, philosophical, and mythological sources. She wrote moral, satiric, and religious lyrics, along with many poems of praise to court figures” (Merrim). This ekphrastic double-take where the camera is looking directly at the eye, which is almost perfectly center in the frame while the shadow lines of the figure standing over it cast right over the center of the pupil that is exposed to the sun creating a sense of drawing-guidelines for the face. The poster paper looks as if half-buried in a hole in the ground. This image is tying in several associations of thought at the same time: Juana’s historical and colonial connotations tied with the New World, literary history, poetics, the plurality of the gaze, and the ecological impact of human things being left behind in nature, and finally the illumination of the sun juxtaposed by the vanishing power it has on things over time.



Figure 9. *Sun & Sea* afterhours (BarbART)

If the sun is always setting somewhere, then every word I've ever written was during a sun set, and I find it fitting to conclude where we began, with the image of the viewer on the balcony, looking down on the set of *Sun & Sea* only this time no one is singing, the air of the building is stagnant, no calming womb sounds of waves no wind. Director Rugile mentions in an interview how their beach environment doubles as an art installation when the actors have gone home, "It's interesting" Rugile says, "what remains when the body disappears, but all the things are there." The sand, magazines, baskets, towels, beach chairs, clothes, all still exist after the spectacle, but the performance is never over. The footprints are there, a trace yet to be erased, and that cratered sand has no place to go but back to the real beach where it can keep reforming and shaping and conversing with the waves, and maybe that its story is, in its own way, an operatic mysticism.

CODA

The effects of studying creative methods in relation to environments are wide reaching. As literature, art, and music expand into multi-modal forms, developing interdisciplinary tools to understand nuanced similarities and differences within and across several mediums can diversify techniques for creation and viewing to fuller experience the potential of what art has to offer us. Operatic mysticism, when the combination of words came to my mind, seemed like a reminder that the elaboration and poetic nature of observing and mediating our world is an intense and melodic experience that is constantly rising and falling. It mimics the oceanic waves as our energy rises and falls from day to day like tides, depending on factors as unapparent as what food we ate or what phase the moon was that week. It is to the benefit of the worlds we build with language and the world we live in that cross media and cross theoretical approaches be developed and nourished to analyze art as something not removed from nature or our way of living. The blooming potential one gains by exploring these dynamics via theory will help continue to elevate the stature and importance of poetics and musicality as a means of traversing life in a philosophical yet active way, to linger and exist—*right here*.

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Professional Experience	East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2020-2022. Graduate Assistant, Courses taught: English 1010, 1020 CRLA Certified tutor. Fall 2020-Spring 2021 Research Assistant: Dr. Joshua Reid. 2020-2021 Teaching Assistant: Dr. Matthew Holtmeier. Spring 2021 University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, 2020-2022 Student Disability Services Senior Clerk Typist, Auditor Music Motive, San Luis Obispo, CA, 2018 Guitar, bass, ukulele instructor Village des Jeunes, Vaunières, France, 2011-2017 EVS volunteer. Art festival organizer, gardener, experimental music animator
Honors and Awards	Jack Higgs Graduate Research Award, 2022 <i>The Mockingbird</i> Fiction Prize judged by Aimee Bender, 2022

Publications *The Mockingbird* Spring 2022 Issue “AR for the Ears”
The Ekphrastic Review, September 2021, “Ekphrasis at le Swamp”
Good Naked Gallery, September 2021, “Hang Ten”
Cobra Milk, Issue 2, Spring 2021, “Mole People”

Conferences Medieval-Renaissance Conference XXXIV, “The Role of the
Crowd in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*,” University of
Virginia’s College at Wise—September 16-18, 2021
Tennessee Philological Association, “The Magic Map Effect: Early
Modern to Posthuman Spatial Reckoning,” Middle
Tennessee State University—February 18–20, 2020

Exhibitions Good Naked Gallery, Rockaway Beach NY *Hang Ten*, 2021
Flat Rate Contemporary, Online *FRC 10*, 2021
Le Swamp, Knoxville TN *Coloratura*, Duo with Briana Bass, 2021
Gallery 1010, Knoxville TN *Loop* with Ashley Ekstrum, 2021
Gallery 1010, Knoxville, TN *Squirm* (sound installation), 2020
apARTment, Atlanta, GA Group Show, 2020
Gallery 1010, Knoxville TN, *Worse Artists Better Spreads*, 2020
L’Abeille Beugle, Vaunières, France, art festival, 2017-18

Artist Representation Good Naked Gallery, Brooklyn, NY